“Why do you always have to be so stubborn with me?” Jaclyn’s father demands.

Jaclyn was in her father’s basement, an eyebrow raised with her long arms folded against her chest, while she stares at her father. She was dragged down there when her mother went to the store for some cheap groceries, whilst her father saw the opportunity. Jaclyn was a polite girl, but when it comes to her lunatic dad—well, she doesn’t get so nice from there.

Teeth bared in a wicked snarl, she shouts back, “I was never stubborn with you! I let you have your way and now look at me! I’m somebody I don’t want to be!” He clenches his fists tightly and folds his arms across his broad chest, mimicking his daughter’s tall, brave stance. Jaclyn stares straight in his dark, pitted eyes, not daring to look away. He narrows his eyes to slits too, not letting his daughter win the silent argument crackling in the air like electricity.

“Why? Just, why?” Jaclyn’s voice changes from fiery to stone cold sincerity, making her show weakness, which she didn’t like. But all she wanted was to know the truth, why her father made her the way she was, why he wanted her to become the monster she didn’t want to be, let alone fear it too.

*But he was just trying to help,* a loud voice in her head argues. Jaclyn keeps staring into her father’s eyes as she tries to multitask between the two arguments. Finally, after what seemed like a never-endless staring contest that made Jaclyn squirm inside, her father broke the frigid ice.

Turning away from her and throwing his arms in the air, he swipes at his desk, causing all of his work to clatter to the floor. “Because. You can’t go out there without being armed and—”

“What to be armed for? Huh, dad? What for?” Jaclyn snarls, rage taking control once again. “For the supposed virus? The virus that *you* said—not anyone else—that would start judgment day?” She pokes a finger in his chest, “The one, where everyone was supposed to be sick and die.” Jaclyn throws her hands in the air, trying to shake off the rage that boiled inside of her like magma.

Her father, Ian, sits in his chair and rubs his eyes open-handed. “Why don’t you listen to me for once?! The world *will* be plagued by the sky above, and you *will* have to be armed for it. It will happen, someday.” And with that, Ian storms out of the basement room, his heavy footsteps giving off the vibe that he wasn’t going to let this go. Ian always held grudges; and it made Jaclyn sick inside.

Jaclyn contains herself with a deep breath and tries to shut off her mind. But she found that it was spinning 3 times faster and gave up when her brain resisted her weak attempt. She rubs her temples and looks at her hands while taking a seat in her dad’s worn office chair. Her long, bony fingers flex as she commands, as she wishes, but she still doesn’t know how her father did it. How he added those long, sharp fingernails, the ones that sliced like daggers. How they grow at her command like it was as simple as moving her hand. How Ian changed her eye color, ensuring they promised death and bloodbaths. She hated it all, but she also hated how, deep, deep down, she liked the sharp daggers. How she loved the fear she was promised she *will* bring, and how she will become someone strong. Someone that doesn’t get pushed around, where no one would mess with her, because they know better.

Because all Jaclyn wanted was respect. The thing came when you wanted it most, but she never really got the sweet filling she yearned. All she got was a substitute of hatred and self-doubt. And she hated both the way she was treated, how she *knew* it was not her fault but still hated herself for believing it was true, and how she hated herself for liking Ian’s creations of her. Jaclyn knew she looked like a monster, and she hated *almost* every bit of it. Except the revengeful voice that loved the look on her like it was a cute shirt.

Jaclyn twitches her fingers and looks at her shockingly growing nails. They grow in a sword-shaped way, thinning out as they emerge further until they went sharply tipped at the end. She watches in both horror and amazement as her daggers finally come to a halt.

Jaclyn could also feel something shift in her eyes, a light shaking to them as if they were having mini-earthquakes. She knew how they look, how they functioned like a second coat of eyes, but better. The blood red swirls and orange flames encircled her irises so that the black stands out like death itself. What her father had promised. And she hated him most when it came to times like these that she was about ready to die than rather be stuck with him in the cramped office space.

Ian was never a kind father to her, Jaclyn misbehaving unintentionally when she was young could give her a black eye or two. But no doubt she loved her father when he switched off to be a nicer man, the one her mother always had seen him as. And Jaclyn hated him for doing that dirty switch, being someone he wasn’t. But her love for him was somewhat like any other dad because she knew deep down he loved her. If not, why would he spend weeks on end to create the monster he wanted her to be? When Jaclyn was a kid Ian had always been kind to her, imprinting her on his appreciation and love. But as she got to be a little older, he changed completely. He started to beat her senseless, but she still saw that loving man, even with his dirty ways. Jaclyn just couldn’t bring herself to say the truth.

He was brainwashing his own daughter. Don’t get Ian wrong though, he was a smart man. And when he saw something coming his way, he would always diverge a plan to avoid it. Or at least warn everyone, and so he did. But, Ian was no messenger up above. In fact, he got so scared he wanted to make implants on his daughter so that she could survive the so-called coming virus.

Jaclyn stares at her thin, but strong nails. They would cut about *anything*, and the thought sent chills down Jaclyn’s spine. The world bathes in a red glow from her eyesight as Jaclyn lets tears flow down her. She didn’t know what she was anymore. But she knew what she was, ignoring her denial. *Fear* was what she was.

  She feared she would end up like this when her dad warned her about the virus that would end the world. He said she needed to survive this plague and *needed* her to get implants to help her live, but when she refused, he smacked her and insisted she succumb. She refused, to Ian’s dismay. And the next time Jaclyn awoke, she found herself strapped to a surgery table in her dad’s darkening basement.

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The light dimmed low, Jaclyn tries to sit up but finds she can’t even do that. Strapped at her wrists, ankles, and neck, were leather straps that looked like they could hold down a bear. Thoughts and emotions surge through her mind as she tries to find a reasonable explanation about why she was there. Jaclyn tries once more to sit up, but the leather strap at her neck digs into her skin, burning it raw. She could feel warm blood trickle down her neck but is immobilized to only see the dimmed light swaying gently above her. She uses every ounce of her strength to break the restraints, thrashing her neck from side to side, causing her blood to trickle down her neck furiously. She screams in frustration, balling her fists in tiny balls but all of her emotions are lost in a heartbeat when she yelps in pain. She couldn’t look at her hands but knew they were spewing blood onto the surgery table. When she balled her fists, something sharp tore through her palms causing a searing pain that brought tears to her eyes. Jaclyn curses and lets tears flow onto her unusually cold cheeks. Then through the layer of foggy pain, it dawns on her. Her *nails* were no longer nails, but sharp objects, like daggers. She could feel the extra weight on her nails like they were really big acrylic nails. She rubs her fingers over one another and finds that her nails never end to her reach. Clanking them together, her long dagger-like nails feeling thicker than normal.

Jaclyn still lets tears flow down her cold cheeks as she moans in pain at her hands. Blood still spraying out of her hands, Jaclyn feels her teeth broaden in her mouth. Running her tongue over her teeth, each tooth has been turned into a monster version of a K-9 tooth. Each point as sharp as her nails. Then she feels something switch in her eyes, like a dirty shift mixed with a blink. Jaclyn watches in awe as her vision slowly turns to a reddish glow. Bathing everything in its wake. She looks around in her new vision, her mind racing and recollecting its thoughts. Then it hits her like a blow to her gut, knocking the imaginary wind out of her. Her father, Ian. Ian did this to her when they were eating dinner. He made a light dinner, no figure, and he gave her sparkling water for a drink. He must have put it in the drink, and suddenly Jaclyn was filled with terror. Coursing through every vein in her body, she cries out loud in spiteful revenge. Every muscle in her body tenses and she uses new fueled strength to try to break free. It was her left ankle that broke first. Then everything tore away like cotton candy and she was free of her dad’s grip. She sits up as a triumphal spirit comes across her soul like a spreading wildfire, but is quickly extinguished by her next thoughts. She hadn’t won, Ian already did the damage. And suddenly it was like Jaclyn was on a mood swing roller coaster. Riding along with sadness, fear, and revenge was the only things that participated in her mind. Everything she knew and loved would be destroyed by *her*. Her. What her father said was true. She was a monster even before she literally became one. And still, she thought she was the bad guy. But Jaclyn didn’t want to deal with her emotional state right now. All she wanted was to see her dad and let him pay for his felonies. She looks around in her new vision. Everything was bathed in an orangey-glow, and from what she could tell, she had night vision. The whole basement was lit by her new light, and the only light coming from the ceiling was the one that was hanging in her face. Jaclyn looks at the surgery table and the blood. It sends shivers down her spine as she looks at her hands. Her full hands.

Everything comes crashing down at that moment. Her long daggers that exist where her normal nails should be are thin, clean (Except for her own blood), and long, almost 8 centimeters. She couldn’t help but gasp at what her father had in mind as a daughter after he had done the damage. Her mouth, now that she takes notice, is pushed out in a weird way, which only makes her more frustrated. Blood still runs down her hands and drips onto the cemented bare floor. Jaclyn inspects the wound like it would suddenly speak. The wound was a deep gash in the center of her palm. Blood was still streaming out, but much less. She flexed her palms straight, hoping the pain would subside a little, but it didn’t. She sucks in air through gritted canine teeth. They were clean as well, neatly straight and lined up with the top row. Jaclyn hated every bone in her body for secretly having admiration for her father about his work. But it scared the hell out of her, and she wasn’t one person to be messed with when she was in a bad mood.

When Jaclyn had mood swings, they often led to outcomes like these, where she argued to herself and legitimately got nowhere in progress. Jaclyn couldn’t argue with herself now, let alone piss herself off even more. So she ripped her shirt into strips with her newly daggers and tied her hands, the blood already seeping through. She looks around once more when she was done, her hands a blazing fire, but ignoring the pain. Jaclyn didn’t see a trace of her father, so she heads for the door. The basic wooden door almost tempts her, and Jaclyn didn’t like the vibe it was giving out. She looks at it intently, and her guts told her something was wrong. *But everything else was wrong, why should this be too? You can’t find him, he’ll be hiding, drunk probably. Why can’t I just open the door? Is it that hard, is it something I can’t handle? Because I know Ian would get there first.*

Jaclyn fumes but doesn’t say anything to herself, knowing everything was true. Every word. And if she was going to handle simple-minded tasks like how she just did, she might as well be retarded. It annoyed her. Her personality, her trash talking, her pain, her childhood, it annoyed her so much. But that was life, wasn’t it? Just got to cope with it, and only the strong survive. She knew something in her life would make the pain subside or even stop once she found something that made her feel worth something more. She knew the time would come, but it felt *so* long in the future. And with her mind playing tricks on her, she knew she couldn’t last long enough, even with her new abilities. Her father would also get in her mind, but she knew the consequences, she wasn’t that stupid. Jaclyn reaches for the door and finds it to be locked. Of course. But why would her father want to keep her locked in the basement like a lab rat? Didn’t he want these new enhancements anyway? Ian was a hard man to crack, and she couldn’t put her finger on it. Was he testing her new abilities? If so, was he watching her, or waiting in the dark to find a reason to take her down? She didn’t know, but one thing she knew was that he would turn on his daughter so quickly it hurt. He had issues, sure, but to turn away his own flesh and blood? It was soul crushing for Jaclyn. She never knew it could get so bad until the wave came crashing down. Jaclyn turns her back to the door and sits down slowly. Her hands throbbed with a fiery burn, but it didn’t match her pain from thinking about her father like that. She was weak. She was stupid. Summed it up pretty good. Jaclyn knew she shouldn’t be giving up so easily, so she fights the layer of pain and weakness and rises to her feet, careful for her daggers not to touch her palms. The basement door was a thick, heavy door. She didn’t know how she could unlock it. She first tries to kick the lock, taking a sweeping stance. The lock nor the door doesn’t budge. She tries again with much more force, this time the handle falling off and hanging on a thread. She grabs it by the dangling handle and yanks it free. Then she kicks open the door, swinging wildly in its threshold. She enters the stairway and hears a yelp and footsteps up above. “What have you done Ian?” She yells up from the bottom of the stairs, looking at the closed door at the top. The thunderous footsteps stop, then she hears Ian breathe heavy breaths. He was scared. *How can I hear this?* Jaclyn asks, and blames it all on Ian, ignoring the fact she could hear Ian gathering papers from his office desk and dumping them somewhere. “Ian!” She strains to hear his next move. Something crashes to the floor, and he stops once again in his tracks. What was he doing? And at this moment, she knew she would never forgive him. But that was a lie she told herself.

Jaclyn clomps up the stairs exaggerating every move so that she could relish her father’s panicked footsteps. His office was just down the hall from this door, and she knew he was powerless. “Ian! Answer me or I swear I will rip you apart with my new *gifts*!” She practically hurls the word at him, mimicking his lunatic behavior. She stops clomping up the stairs like a child and waits for a reply. When she knows he won’t answer, she takes the stairs two at a time, reaching the door and flinging it open. The kitchen was empty. Blind fury boils her volcanic blood as she turns and walks to his office. When she sees it has no sign of him in there, she runs up the stairs to see him in his bedroom. They share stares for a moment before Jaclyn lashes out at him. She clocks him on the face open-palmed, as she feels her daggers tearing cheek. He cries out in pain at the unexpected attack, but what would he expect? A hug and a thank you? Jaclyn wasn’t sure. Blood seeps out of four shallow gashes as Ian stares at her dumbfounded. “I told you no, and you don’t take that for an answer. Instead, you, drug your own daughter and use her as a science experi-“

“You aren’t an experiment, you were being armed—“ Jaclyn kicks him this time in the shin to shut him up. He stops talking but doesn’t react to the pain, given she kicked him only for him to shut up. “Don’t make me do this.” He growls at her, turning defensive. So, she was the bad guy now? It pissed her off even more, and that made her blood scream. “I was never the bad guy. You. Were. And will always. Will. Be.” She emphasis every word to let him have it. His eyes narrow as usual, but his mouth starts to foam as he yells back at her, losing his cool. “I am not the person you would want to blame. I am the one you would want to thank. Everything I gave you was a gift, but you rejected it like some piece. Why don’t you just see that for once?” Jaclyn lashes out again at him, but he dodges it with a parry. “Just tell me how to undo this,” Jaclyn says, her voice in a deep growl. Ian smiles for once, a sinister smile that should belong to a madhouse. “You can’t.” But Jaclyn doesn’t buy it, knowing that if she gave up so quickly. “Yes, you can. Now, I want you to undo this or so be it I will kill you myself.” No reaction, just Ian smiling a smile that made Jaclyn want to tear his face off. Then she screams and lashes out at him again, which he tries to dodge but she was too quick. Catching him at his side, he yelps in pain followed with a curse. Jaclyn turns tail, and runs into her bedroom and slams the door shut so hard it broke the lock.

Jaclyn still lets the salty tears run down her cheeks in the basement. After that argument, she never talked to Ian until two days ago. And when she had gotten enhanced, that was a week and a half ago. It was summer, and it was a good thing she didn’t have to worry about school. But Ian said the end was near, and, oh no, he stopped paying for her college funds. Like it didn’t matter. College wasn’t important to her anymore, but before when he stopped helping she was pissed. But he had a right, right? It was his money after all, but he had abused his daughter her whole life, so was it something she would get in return? Probably not. Ian wasn’t a man of promise, though he knew he reigned truth when he spoke it. But he only told lies, and that was something about his ego. You could never trust him, even *if* he were telling the truth, which was unlikely.

It was hell for Jaclyn this past month. After the first argument, she didn’t know how to reverse the effect. Ian said it can’t be undone permanently, but it could disappear from view. So she tried to make the effect disappear, but it didn’t work, no matter how hard she concentrated, nothing would change. And that prevented her from going out in public. From being cooped up in the house for a long time. And from not being able to see her mom. Ian had found a way to keep her occupied from not seeing her daughter, telling her friends to organize a party in California. They agreed, renting out an office block off of the cheapest neighborhood they could find. Ian also offered to buy their plane tickets, which came out to be what he wasn’t hoping for, but he was doing this for his wife to get away. Somehow. So she got the invite and decided to leave without another trace.

Jaclyn was glad her mother couldn’t see her as this disgusting monster, though she knew she wasn’t *that* disgusting. But as always she was self-conscience of herself, even though that her emotions didn’t matter with situations like this. Jaclyn barely came out of her room, and when she did it was to eat and to go to the bathroom. Eating was hard for her. Her daggers always cut open the cereal box or scratched the fridge door. It was also hard to eat like a human when her hunger got in the way. She was always hungry since the surgery. She guessed it was a side effect of the enhancement, even though she tried not to think about it much. And when on trips out of her room, she sometimes saw Ian. He would be in the office, or in the kitchen, maybe sometimes occupying the bathroom when she needed it. And when they made eye contact, she would just stare intently into his eyes, trying to intimidate him with her new eyes. He was always the first one to break eye contact, and each stare down didn’t last long. One time she even snarled at him when he broke away, saying ‘*Fight me!*’ without words. He looked at her like he was a naughty child and simply strode out of the room, his eyes not making contact like they were bouncing off of her gaze before they could interlock. Jaclyn hated him, all that fury and rage took over her other emotions for him. Each day before they had exchanged sentences to each other, she could tell Ian wanted to say something to her. When they interlocked sometimes, he would open up his mouth, but nothing came out. She walked away before he had the chance when that happened. Three days before the argument, Jaclyn cried herself to sleep. Only to wake up to see her dad looming over her. His arms were crossed, and he stared into her eyes for once. She sits up in her bed, rubbing her eyes open-palmed. When she was finished, Ian was looking away. *Has he been here for a long time?* She didn’t think so, but why would he have a choice? There was nothing else to do here, but she realized that only applied to her. Jaclyn looks up at Ian and stares daggers into him, wanting to know what he wanted of her again. “Look, Jacl— “

“Don’t start with that, you know as well as I do that I don’t buy that stuff. Get to the point, *Ian*” Ian’s jaw clamps shut and tightens. Then he opens his mouth once more. “Do you know how to retract them?” He gestures to the daggers and teeth. “Hmmm, I’m not sure.” She says sarcastically. Ian doesn’t react and simply moves on. “Concentrate.”

“Not like I haven’t tried that yet.” Jaclyn manages to roll her eyes. Ian starts to breathe heavily. “Just, try to like, try to… how do I put it?” Ian seems to lose his train of thought as he tries to put it in words. Jaclyn waits patiently, fumes still rising out of her head.

After what seems like minutes of silence as Ian tries to put the solution in words, Jaclyn gets up and picks up the clock that was buzzing on her bedroom wall. Ian stops from his train of thought and stares at her intently, waiting to know what her next move is. With a quick jerk she yanks it from the wall and hurls it at Ian, just missing his head narrowly as the clock smashes into the wall shattering into pieces. Glass glittering down in a million pieces.

“What the hell Jaclyn!?” Ian shouts. “That nearly took my head off!”

“Dad, you’re running on borrowed time! Hurry up or the next time I’m not missing.” She snaps. Ian avoids her gaze. “By the way, don’t watch me sleep like a creep, ok? Because next time, or *any* time you watch a girl sleep like how you just were, you’re not going to live any longer than you are with me.” Ian still avoids her gaze, finding something to toy with on her bed stand. “Look, how you do this is going to be hard, so please don’t just in cause’ it’s not going to get you anywhere.” Jaclyn looks at her nails, wanting to annoy him more. She still didn’t think she deserved this, after he abused her, and brainwashed her. Her love for him was chased away in a heartbeat. “Why don’t you just die somewhere else?” Jaclyn says, still looking at her nails as if they were a fresh pedicure.

“That’s it!” Ian grabs Jaclyn by her wrist and rips her out of bed. Her daggers claw at his forearms, digging into muscle and tendons, blood already flowing out. Jaclyn’s eyes widen as she hits the floor with a thud. She lays there in disbelief that her father would dare lay another hand on her, after all knowing what she was capable of. Was her father really that ignorant? Her mind was spinning with thoughts. Taking her back to when she was locked in the basement, radio blaring and Ian standing in the middle of the room taking off his belt and snapping it with both hands, whistling in a soft tune that would despise the actions he was doing to her. Her screams were desperate, hoping someone would hear her screams 6 feet below.

Jaclyn sweeps her leg over Ian’s ankle, knocking him to his knees. With cat-like agility, Jaclyn jumps up and spins onto his back, locking her arm around his neck. Now it was Ian’s eye’s that widen. The rage he had inside him instantly turns into a gut-wrenching fear. “Now what have I done here?” Jaclyn teases as her arm tightens around his neck. Ian coughs and struggles to say something, but all he manages was a grunt of pain for his forearms that were still pumping life out of him. He claws and slaps at Jaclyn’s arm, but he was too weak at that point. He starts to inhale, but he comes up empty-handed.“Jac...lyn. Ssstopp.” He hisses, using precious air. Jaclyn loosens her grip a little, enough for him to get a few gulps of air.

Jaclyn, now with the upper hand, pushes off Ian.Ian falls to his hands and knees while Jaclyn springs to her feet.Satisfied of her control, she walks to her nightstand and straps on her iWatch to press the timer.“You have 20 seconds to get up and vacate my room,”Jaclyn whispers in Ian’s ear as she bends down to meet his gaze.“I will be going back to school soon, which you will fund as promised. You will also help me get rid of the enhancements. Now get out!”Pointing to her bedroom door, Ian scrambles to his feet. Taking one glance at his forearm, then at her, he gets out of her room, clutching his forearm as he slams the door shut. *That’ll teach him,* she thinks to herself. And with a satisfied nod to herself, she plops down on her bed, straining to hear what Ian was doing. Silence. Jaclyn looks down at her bloody daggers. She would have to go clean them, not because of the blood, but because it was *Ian’s* blood. Feeling it was a burden to her.

Ian quickly moves down the hall to his study and picks up a black cell phone.He scrolls to Drake Freeman and pushes the name to dial. Two rings late, a low, deep voice says: “Doctor.” Ian stares out the study window, watching the heavy rainfall, his arm bandaged up, and blood already seeping through the bandage. Ian speaks in a straight, low tone, almost like a growl. “She’s ready.”

The line goes dead.

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**Chapter Two: Resistance**

Jaclyn wakes up, her arms outstretched from the bed, not taking chances with her daggers while she was sleeping. She itches her nose with the back of her hand and climbs out of bed. Last night, there was no activity from Ian, but she knew he wouldn’t give up so easily. He was planning something, trying to get plans for the virus, trying to prepare Jaclyn, but that wasn’t going to happen. College was going to get paid for, so she was glad she didn’t need to worry about it. For now, though, Jaclyn needed to focus on how to retract her enhancements. She stretches then walks downstairs. Her whole body tenses when she hears Ian down in the basement talking on a phone. “…Yes, she will be ready.” Pause. “No, I assure you, Yates, that she won’t need anything else. She’s very capable, but she doesn’t know yet.” Another pause. “She’s still upstairs, sleeping.” Pause. “Yates, I’ll see you at my place, four, alright?” Jaclyn absorbs the information like a sponge, already chewing on it to find the toy inside. Who was her dad talking to, and what does she not know? Apart from him acting strangely, there was nothing Jaclyn could figure out from Ian. She decides to keep this to herself instead of confronting Ian. God knows what he is capable of. She creeps up to her room, trying to be as silent as she can. When she reaches her room, she closes her door and plops down on her bed. *Now to retract these things.* Jaclyn looks at her daggers, washed from Ian’s blood. She concentrates, thinking about how she wants them to retract, but nothing happens. She concentrates harder, focusing on how she could vividly see the results if they retracted, but nothing happens again. She tries again, watching in her mind’s eye how she could see them retract cleanly and smoothly. But nothing happens. Frustrated, she lashes out at her bed sheet, tearing the mattress with it. It shreds like soft butter, giving some satisfaction. She just wishes, just needs, just, wants for her to become normal again. She needs that, but how would she achieve that? She didn’t know. Jaclyn then gets up and looks in the mirror. Her blood-orange swirled eyes move as if it were an existing universe. She now notices her mouth is pushed out a little because of her large teeth. It was strange how they didn’t affect her speaking. She bares her lips and stares at her nightmarish teeth.Instead of having flat bottoms, the fronts of her teeth had a pointed tip and were shaped like her canines. They also had grown a centimeter, which made it look even more werewolf. Her bottoms were the exact same as if they were duplicates. But what scared her, even more, was how her lower row of teeth was pushed out, matching the same length as the tops. And when she smiled, her pointed teeth would line up together, each tooth fit in the exact spot where two tops should be. And to make that happen she noticed that there were fewer bottom teeth and the tops were evenly spaced out. When she smiled, it didn’t look genuine, it looked devilish. There was no space or blackness of her mouth, just the lines of where every sharp tooth was located. It scared her. Her mouth completely white and demonic wasn’t what she planned for, but she guessed Ian had other plans for them.

She takes a peek at her daggers more closely. They came from her regular nails, protruding longer than when she first saw them. She guessed they were growing at a slow rate after she commanded them to grow somehow. How did she do that? Was she like that when she woke? No, she felt her teeth widen and grow, her mouth expanding to its content. So, how did she do it? Her mind wanders to the emotion she felt for Ian when she awoke. Anger. Hatred. Was that it? An emotion that caused it? She doubted it, but what else could it be? But if it was, how could she get angry? Of course, Ian always pissed her off somehow, and she knew she got angry enough. So what was it? Frustration? No, it couldn’t be it. It must be something else that she couldn’t grasp. Jaclyn turns away from the mirror and sits on the torn up bed. She thinks about how that day made her feel so angry, so pissed off that she couldn’t control herself. Jaclyn hypes herself up for one last try, hoping it could be it. She closes her eyes and clears her mind, focusing on the one thing and only. Her hand twitches as she focuses and sees at the same time how the results are, not watching the motion, but at the same time watching it. It was strange for Jaclyn but she pushes forward, hope creating a tear in her. It was done in a few seconds, she opens her eyes. Her hearing of the AC downstairs was still there, so she knew it didn’t work. She sighs, but it was cut off abruptly when she feels a strange feeling in her mouth. A tingling sensation, then she feels her mouth begin to shrink. Running her tongue over her shrinking teeth, she feels how they mold back to normal. A tsunami of relief and hope flood through her. That was it, she had to find what to do, and it was that easy.

Her daggers start to shrink too, but at an alarming rate. And in seconds her fingers were *normal* again. Then her eyesight goes back to the normal shade, flooding every bone in Jaclyn’s body with relief. She was normal again. She runs to the mirror and looks at herself. Her eyes were emerald green again. Her raised cheekbones give meaning to her now, somehow she notices and appreciates every inch of her face again. She wasn’t pretty in her own thoughts, but everyone said she was. She turns her face to the side, looking at the scar that ran from the edge of her left eyebrow the tip of her ear. Ian said she was born with it, but she knew that was a lie. It resurfaces a memory to Jaclyn’s eyes.

“Dad? Where are you?” Jaclyn comes out from her seeking spot and races upstairs to find Ian. Her little feet stomp as she races downstairs empty-handed. She checks his office, the kitchen, and the living room but he wasn’t in sight. The last thing she didn’t check was the basement. She races down the steps, her little feet clomping. She grasps the door in her small hands and pulls with a mighty heave. What she sees was Ian standing before her. He towers over her, leaning in a little too much. A very thin rope with a handle on the on the end is what he holds. “I found you, daddy!” Jaclyn cries. She smiles, oblivious to his intentions. “Come in sweetie, ok?” Ian asks. Her little feet clomp heavily as she stomps playfully inside the basement. Ian shuts the door and locks it before he turns on a radio blaring heavy metal music. Jaclyn never had a taste for his music. She turns around for him as always and shuts her eyes tight. Waiting for the pain to happen. Ian always told her what he was doing was a good thing, and she believed him. Tough love was what he would call it. He had whipped her the first time when she was 4 after she spilled a drink on him on accident. Jaclyn was five when she had gotten whipped by a real whip. She had cried out in pain unexpectedly and had turned to face Ian as he was in mid-strike. She had got caught on the face, and Ian had told her that was enough for that day. He had left her in the locked basement bleeding everywhere and crying so loudly you could hear it over the screaming music. Jaclyn didn’t know how she lived with that, let alone all the dozen of scars and scabs she has on her back and arms. She always wore long sleeved shirts out in public. The beatings had stopped when she was about 13. That was when she had started realizing what he was doing was wrong, and that she could defend herself. Ian had stopped slowly, then all together stopped. She didn’t know why, but she didn’t complain. She learned that a long time ago.

Now realizing her father’s actions was devastating, especially when Jaclyn always explored new memories of her past life. It was like reliving the day she was whipped by his belt, or the real whip when she actually did something to make Ian angry. Jaclyn turns away from the mirror, disgusted. She runs her hands through her long, wavy brown hair and runs her tongue over her teeth. She licks her lips as her stomach starts to growl.

Jaclyn starts down the stairs intent on some breakfast. She looks at her watch. It was 10:34. She must have been in her room for too long as she sees Ian sitting at the kitchen counter. He was scrolling on his phone, but she knew he was just waiting for her. She takes a quick glance at his forearm before he looks up at her presence. It was bandaged, but dried, crusty blood stains it. Must be old. She turns away from him and opens up the fridge to grab milk. Her mother was due to come tomorrow, and maybe go shopping for milk as she pours the rest of it into a glass. She feels Ian’s gaze averted from his phone and has shifted on her. Jaclyn found that she didn’t care.

She takes a swig from the glass and sets it down with a *clunk*. She turns to face him and smiles as he sees her normal looking. His dark brown eyes lighten in surprise, she could see it on his face as he tries to conceal it. But he doesn’t say a word with her. Jaclyn guessed that her internal abilities, like the super hearing, and strength still existed without her enhancements out. But she could sense other things about it. Like how she could feel Ian’s gaze avert her and go back to scrolling through his text messages. *What is this?* She could feel him reading a text. Jaclyn knew there was more potential to the ability, so she plunges deeper. She looks onto his awareness and it was like she attached her mind to his like a leech. She could *feel* his thoughts, but they were fuzzy and clouded, like looking at a page full of words without glasses. She couldn’t grasp onto his own thoughts and be precise, but she sensed his emotions. Scared, surprised, frantic, stressed. It was like she was feeling the emotions strongly at the same time, feeling what he was feeling. Jaclyn knew that wasn’t it, so she plunges even deeper. She felt curiosity course through Ian. *Why did he have a sudden change of emotion?* She didn’t know but then felt his eyes averted from his phone and onto her. She didn’t see through her own eyes now but in his. He was staring at Jaclyn, and it felt weird for Jaclyn to see herself in someone else’s eyes. Like it wasn’t her. Suspicion now mixes with the curiosity as Ian looks at her. Then she sees her dead eyes staring dully at Ian. No wonder.

“Yes?” She hears Ian say, but she only takes it like it was spit underwater, dull. She disconnects from his mind and shakes her head. “Nothing, I was just staring at your shirt, it had some crumbs on it. It was bothering me.” He nods and looks back at his phone, reading a text that labeled “Chris Yates.” That was the guy on the phone that was coming over at four. She nods to herself and quickly scurries to her room. She shuts the door and lets her mind flow free, latching onto Ian as it does. He stares at the text, and his phone was no phone, but a burner. *What the hell has he been up to?* Jaclyn reads the text:

*Yates: She ready?*

*Ian: Yea. Did the BW work?*

*Yates: Yep, she’s ready to go, Doc.*

*Ian: Are you sure she’s safe. She beat me up pretty hard yesterday, and her levels of emotions seem to be getting out of hand.*

*Yates: That was all part of the plan, but idk. She’s just a prototype, so I’d be careful no matter what the scientists say Doc.*

*Ian: I hope you’re right. Do you know all of her enhancements?*

*Yates: No, but the scientists back at the lab must know, right?*

*Ian: Don’t know, and that worries me. She’s acting strange, but she retracted her enhancements without my help, so I take that for a good sign she’s getting a grip.*

*Yates: That’s good. Let’s hope she doesn’t get too out of hand.*

Jaclyn was shocked. They were using her as what, a prototype? She disconnects by simply pulling the plug and shakes her head. What were they going to be using her for? She hoped whoever this, including Ian, would pay for what they did to her.

That day, Jaclyn went out. She got dressed, avoiding her gaze at the scars that covered almost every inch of her legs, back, and arms. She puts on jean shorts and a clean, white tank top that hugs her curves. By now, Jaclyn couldn’t care less if anybody saw her scars now. If they had a problem, she would take care of it. Everything she has gone through should make her stronger, and her daring action made her feel more confident in herself. She combs her hair and brushes her teeth, setting out to get away from the house she’s been cooped up in. She takes the stairs two at a time, almost knocking Ian over as he steps in front of her, phone in hand. It wasn’t the same phone he had, the burner, so he must have gotten rid of the other one. He leaps out of the way before they can collide and gives her a skeptical look as she strides past him to the kitchen counter, grabbing her keys. “Stop!” He shouts as she disappears out of the door. *He was probably thinking about her scars showing*. Jaclyn barges outside and unlocks her car, taking a moment to taste and breathe the fresh air. Ian shows up at the front door not long after she came out, red-faced. “Jaclyn! Get in here!”He shouts dramatically, knowing there were neighbors outside minding their own business. “No, you can’t control me anymore.” She says over her shoulder, swinging her keys on her index finger. She could feel Ian’s anger behind her come alive like a plug pulled. “But I have a meeting today with one of my colleagues. He wants to see you.” Jaclyn stops and turns around to face Ian. His face looks exhausted. Jaclyn cocks an eyebrow. “Why does he want to see me?” She asks, playing dumb. He looks across the street and over his shoulder before saying: “Come inside and I’ll explain *everything*.”

Jaclyn looks at her watch: 3:26. *Shit, I don’t have any time anymore. Where did it all go?* She lets go of an internal groan and lets her shoulders sag dramatically. “Why does he want to see me?” She asks again, wanting to find any way to not go inside. Ian crosses his arms. “I’ll tell you in-“

“No, you either tell me now, or I’m leaving to go see my friends.” Truth was, Jaclyn didn’t have many friends, and she really didn’t like people when it came to a choice, but she told herself it was healthy to interact with people. Jaclyn had a few close friends, but that was it. And to let them into her personal life was hard at first, but once she did, she actually *liked* them. They grew up together for years and till this day they are still considered family to her.

Ian sighs and says: “John Yates, he’s in business with me back at the corporation. Few people know about your enhancements. He wants to know more about you and why you got them.” Jaclyn’s gut was hit with a punch of surprise. She knew that Yates already knew, but for Ian to *admit* it to her was something else. She tries to hide the emotion on her face as she growls: “I never chose to get them, you got that choice. I wouldn’t want this for me.” She points at herself, doing a wild sweep. “Please, Jaclyn.” Ian pleads. But Jaclyn knew him *too* well, she turns around and, obviously in a caught mood, strides the last few steps to her brown Sedan and yanks the door open with a little too much force. She could feel the handle creak under the force. She gets in hastily and starts the car. Ian doesn’t take a second glance back at her as he vanishes into the house. She could hear the door slam as she pulls out of the driveway, blaring music out of her car.

Jaclyn honestly didn’t know where to go. She makes a loop around her neighborhood before she decides to go into the city. She looks in the mirror, flipping it towards her as she stops at a red light. Her face was covered with a thin sheet of sweat, and her eyes were bloodshot. From what? She didn’t know, but she figured it must have to be some side effect to the enhancements. Her face and body start to create small droplets of sweat as she gets deeper in the city. Jaclyn doesn’t know why she was sweating so much, but she turns on the AC to full blast.

The city was buzzing with people. Everyone bustling around since it was Friday. As she drove past, Jaclyn saw a couple holding hands, laughing. She also saw a family running across the street, apparently in a hurry. She could feel their stress for what seemed as they were late for a bus stop to get somewhere important. She looks at her watch. 3:54. Yates was going to arrive soon, and she was going to be home for that, but for now, Yates could wait. Jaclyn pulls into the parking lot near the local mall. Plenty of teenagers were buzzing around too, with friends or loved ones, their mood was gleeful and stress-free. Jaclyn gets out of her car and locks it, walking down an alley as a shortcut. Just as she passes a few trash bags aligned against the wall, Jaclyn’s gut gets a bad feeling that comes over her like a rain cloud. *Something’s not right*. She stops walking and looks around at all angles, but only finds the musty smell of molding apartments and the dumpster can. A few rats scatter past as she continues to move forward. But now, the feeling pulses inside her head like a flashing red light. What is it? Up ahead of her was another large dumpster can and even farther was the sidewalk lit up like Christmas. Cars zip by in the road ahead, oblivious to Jaclyn’s strange behavior. She takes another step forwards but was quickly cut short when a raspy voice calls out, “Jaclyn.” Her heart flutters in her throat as she backs up a step. She takes a defensive stance, looking straight ahead, knowing that something was there in front. She reaches her mind’s awareness out to see if there was anyone there, but the lie was cut dead. “Jaclyn.” The voice calls out again. *Male*.

“Where are you?” Jaclyn calls out, but no response was given. Inside her head, lights were flashing everywhere, causing her spine to trickle with chills. “Who are you?” She calls out again. There was a slight moan, but no words followed it. Jaclyn debates over if she should arm herself, but it would risk exposing herself. God knows what outcome that would cause, she could even be hunted down.

“Go back home.” The voice hissed. This time it came from behind her. She whips around, expecting to find a burly man, but nothing was there except trash flying in the slight breeze. “Show yourself!”

“Go home.” It hisses again, followed by a soft moan*. What the hell?* She looks above her, and finds a void of soft darkness and shut windows. She looks at all angles but finds she’s alone. It gave her the chills. Something inside of her strongly wanted to go home, but she resisted the feeling. Jaclyn inhales slowly, closing her eyes as she does. She reaches out to find any mind, but there was nothing. Nobody was around or close enough to say that. “Where are you?” Jaclyn says, the wind snatching her voice away into the strong breeze.

“Where might you think I am?” It rumbles. The voice was like a siren in her head, coming from all directions. She clutches her ears and lets out a loud moan. The voice chuckles like thunder cracking inside her very head, causing her to cry out in pain. “Sleep.” It calls out. Like a moth drawn to a flame, Jaclyn could feel a wave of black come across her. The last thing Jaclyn felt was her head cracking on the cement with a wet slap, making the darkness feel welcomed.

Jaclyn could sense Ian’s mind before she opened her eyes. There was also another one there too. She reaches her mind out as easy as flipping a switch and looks into Ian’s eyes. He was talking to a young man. He had summer brown hair and light blue eyes. His face was etched with laughing lines that accompanied several small freckles across his face. Jaclyn found that she found him attractive. But she quickly shakes off the feeling as her mind registers its Yates. She was at home, sitting in an uncomfortable chair in the basement. Ian and Yates were upstairs, talking lowly. Jaclyn cracks her eyes open, light pouring into the room and lighting every feature. The room was dusty and musty smelling, making her cough several times. She tries to suppress the cough, but it only made it worse for her. She winces as she hears the kitchen stool scrape against the floor as Ian gets up, obviously hearing her awake. Jaclyn quickly gets up and swiftly locks the basement door. She looks at her scabbed hands, the palms still healing. She sighs heavily and looks around frantically for anything that would use as a weapon, but quickly shuts the idea off when she mentally kicks herself in the gut. She exhales slowly and shuts her eyes, clearing her mind and focusing intensely, she twitches her fingers and unearths her own demon. Her fingernails start to grow at a pacing rate and she could feel her mouth broaden with her teeth. Her eyesight goes to a pumpkin orange shade, bathing everything with a Halloween vibe. She lets out a deep, guttural growl as Ian tries the handle, Yates not far behind him. “Jaclyn, *sweetie,* please open this door,” Ian grumbles. Jaclyn lets out a chuckle that matched her growl. She could sense Ian’s irritation and Yate’s wariness. Their emotions try to wrestle with Jaclyn’s feelings, but she quickly pushes it away. She needed to stay strong. Something tickles Jaclyn’s eyes as she stares at the door, Ian’s mind whizzing thoughts about how to get in. She does a motion in which to try to swat at her hair, but it wasn’t hair. It was a bandage that was wrapped around her head. Then everything comes crashing down on her, pushing her thoughts out and focusing on one thing. Her gut warned her something was wrong, then this man’s voice plunges into her head and says ‘go home.’ She felt herself falling to sleep and hitting her head on the cement. So, how did she get home? Was it Ian’s work? A geyser of anger explodes in her mind, seemingly guessing Ian was behind all of this. Jaclyn goes to the door and unlocks it. Immediately, Ian and Yates barge in, causing Jaclyn to sidestep before the door caught her. It swings on broken hinges and creaks as it hits the wall. Ian makes eye contact with her before he makes room for Yates to come in. She *wanted* to kill him on the spot, but both of them knew that Yates was there. She just couldn’t bring herself to do it when someone was watching her as this monstrosity. She catches a glimpse at Yates and breaks the eye contact first. She didn’t know why she was being obedient. Yates looks her up and down thoroughly, his eyes lingering too long on her breasts. She scowls at him and turns around to go sit down. She could feel his eyes burning holes in her as he stares at her full backside. Ian crosses his arms and stares at Yates staring at Jaclyn. He seemed to not like that action. Jaclyn suddenly blurts out, “What the hell do you want?” Ian’s gaze shifts back to her. Before he could speak, Yates clears his throat. “Miss Forerb, what a pleasure to meet you. I’m Chris Yates, you can call me Yates.” He doesn’t offer her his hand for obvious reasons but nods at her. His eyes still linger too long on her. “Cut the bull Yates, what do you want with me?” Ian and Jaclyn share a glance before she turns her gaze back to Yates. His expression doesn’t falter. “I’m your personal trainer, and before you ask anything, please let explain.”

“Explain my ass.” She snorts but remains quiet for him to continue, curious. Ian still has his arms folded and stares at Jaclyn intently. “But first, uh, may I call you Jaclyn.” Jaclyn doesn’t respond and remains silent. Yates sees that it’s her approval. “Jaclyn, can you please retract those enhancements? It is important to have those retracted before I tell you the important details.” Jaclyn hesitates, thinking too long. *Was this a trap?* Even if it was, she could easily unleash the demon. Jaclyn debates then reluctantly retract them. She closes her eyes and clears her mind and thoughts. She focuses and twitches her fingers. She guessed her twitching fingers meant it worked. She opens her eyes to see both Yates and Ian staring at her. She narrows her eyes, trying to chase away their stares, but they keep on staring at her as her enhancements retract. She blinks twice to get used to the normal shade of everything and stares right into Ian’s eyes. He stares back.

“Ok, Jaclyn, now please sit down and let me ask you a few questions before we start.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, no. You aren’t going to just barge in here, tell me to retract my enhancements to make me vulnerable, and ask me questions sittin’ in a shitty chair. No way. So, how we're going to do this is I’m going to ask you questions, and you’re going to answer them. Ok?” Yates' face goes red and he shifts uncomfortably. “Ok.” He says. Jaclyn catches Ian’s eyes narrow on her.

“Ok, tell me about how you support my dad’s lunatic theories on the virus.” Yates' face seems to perk up at that. “What? What theories?” Jaclyn sighs. Ian must have kept this to himself, maybe he was the only crazy man in the corporation. “Never mind that. Now,-“Jaclyn leans into Yates ear and whispers loudly, “-tell me why you are here. The *real* reason.” She could hear Yates' heart start to flutter and pump harder, same as Ian’s. “Jaclyn, what do you mean? I told you he was coming to inspect your enhancements.” Ian buts in.

“Cut the crap, Ian. Tell me the real reason why you’re here, Yates.” Yates curses loudly, his face tomato red. He doesn’t respond though, which makes Jaclyn confirm he wasn’t here to see her enhancements like the scientists back at the corporation. Ian works for a science corporation known as G.E.B.I. Genetically Engineered Biohazardous Implants. The corp. has been in business for a while, working with the military and the government to discover new weapons for soldiers. Ian was the lead scientist and got promoted to the corporation’s personal Doctor. He was part of the main group of the corp.’s government group. F2R8 was the other group and G4D9 was the one he worked for. Each section or group worked on one thing only, internal implants. And when Ian discovered it, determined and fueled by the virus, he didn’t tell anyone except for a few colleagues like Yates here.

“Oh, and tell me what BW stands for.” Jaclyn cuts the silence. Yates and Ian’s eyes grow wide. The burner phone Ian had has the information about the text that Jaclyn read, but the next morning he supposedly got rid of it. “How… H-how did you kn-“

“I read everything on your little burner phone, Ian. What you were saying on the phone, what you were texting, reading, *everything*. I heard everything. You don’t know what you made, Ian, you-“

Alarms start to go off in Jaclyn’s head. Ian looks at her, surprised and dumbfounded. They were urgent and scary. Something was coming; like in the alley, this is what happened. She looks at Yates at sees he has his eyes closed, breathing heavily through his mouth. Something was off. Why was he like this? Nobody could hear the siren screaming in her head but her, and it looks like Yates was hearing it too. “Jaclyn!” Ian shouts. It doesn’t penetrate her mind, and she starts to foam at the mouth. She could feel a presence in her mind, like in the back of her head, waiting. Then something all too familiar speaks to her in the same, raspy voice. “Sit.” Jaclyn was not in control of her body anymore. It was like she was in a corner of her mind cowering while her body was in control of something or *someone* else. She could feel her body sit on the ground. She tries to move her eyes to look and finds she could. Jaclyn then tries to speak and was granted the opportunity. *Who are you?*

*You know who I am.* Jaclyn could sense a smile on the man’s lips. She thrashes her head from side to side, trying to shake the voice from her head, but the voice only gets louder as she does.

*Stop.* Jaclyn’s head stops, now immobilized from head to toe. *Who are you!?* Jaclyn screams inside her own head. This voice was invading her own personal thoughts and privacy, she could feel her memories being looked at like old family photos. *What the hell do you want with me!? Stop going through me.*

*Oh, poor Jaclyn. You don’t have a choice. I’m your personal trainer, remember?* Jaclyn’s head explodes with thoughts and emotions, receiving a soft moan from the voice. *This was Yates speaking? What the hell is happening here?!* She meant to say it to herself, but Yates responds to it*.*

*Clever girl. You are one tough nut to crack. I assume you should stop fighting, and listen to every word I have to say.* Jaclyn could feel a *very* strong impulse to lend Yates all her emotions, body, and will to do anything. But she relents with all of her willpower. *Get out of my head, Yates!* She screams, and a tiny part of Jaclyn could hear she screamed it aloud, but she merely registered it. *Stop resisting me, Jaclyn. It’s useless, I’ve gone through everything. Quite a story you have of Ian. I’ve never experienced something like it before. You are tough, but the only person that can defeat you is yourself. Glad I caught you on a weak moment.*

*Yates, I swear I will rip you apart piece for piece.*

*As you see, Jaclyn, I know you won’t do that for various reasons, including you forming feelings for me. Maybe we should hit it off sometime?* Jaclyn could feel her cheeks flush even if she wasn’t in control. She was starting to sweat in her mind. *Way to go, you found everything about me. What are you going to do, kill me? Mind control me to do something terrible. After all, I know all too well why you’re here. How did you do it, may I ask?* A snicker comes from Yates.

*You see, we brainwashed you for various reasons, and that burner Ian had, wasn’t part of the corporation. You’ll soon find out once I’ll tell you everything.* Jaclyn could feel the presence in her mind leave as if a heavy weight has been lifted from her shoulders. She flexed her fingers and appreciated every moment of it. She looks around, Ian was gone. Yates stands in front of her, smiling. “You bloody guy.” She breathes quietly, hoping Yates wouldn’t hear it. “Jaclyn, I’m your personal trainer for a reason. I was chosen cause’ I know how to BW people, and mind control.”

“It’s a shame you have to waste your time on me, Chris. I’m no more than a lab rat waiting to be dissected.”

“Oh no, Jaclyn. You are worthy of my time, *very* worthy.” He winks at her, and she snickers but says nothing as Yates leaves the basement. She liked Yates, his daring personality. Either it was brainwash or not, Jaclyn started to like him.

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**Chapter 3: Restraints**

  The next day after the argument in the basement with Ian, Jaclyn went to her room. She cried there. Yates left yesterday without another trace. But she knew he was watching her. She could feel that tiny presence in the back of her mind, waiting for her next actions. Jaclyn’s mom, Cattie, came home a few hours later. She looked hungover, but Jaclyn didn’t say anything. She unpacked the groceries as Ian and Cattie shared a kiss. “How was it, sweetie.” He smiles a fake smile to look interested, and Cattie sees it was her opportunity to share her party. She didn’t notice, let alone she never noticed Ian’s falsity. “Babe, the party was great. I have never partied like that in my whole life.” She slurs some of the words, and her eyes were half-lidded. “That’s great! I wish I was there too, but I had to take care of Jaclyn sweetie here soo.” Jaclyn scowls internally to him but continues to put away food. They hug for a long time, Ian with his false love. Jaclyn could tell it was false even without her mind’s awareness to scope it out. “How’s business?” Cattie asks when they depart from the hug. Ian shrugs his broad shoulders and nods his head. “Everything’s going to plan.” He says, which makes Jaclyn look up at him from newly poured cereal. He doesn’t catch her looking at him. “Sweetie, I have to go work now, so why don’t you rest? I see you’re pretty tired right now.” She doesn’t respond, looking dull-fully past Ian. When Ian sees that, he guides her up the stairs and into their bedroom door, closing the door behind him with a soft click. He comes barging downstairs and waits for Jaclyn to finish her cereal, who takes her time. He taps his foot impatiently as he crosses his arms, a very generic look for him. “Yes?” Jaclyn says. After the argument down in the basement, Jaclyn changed her shirt and wiped away her tears. Her palms were scabbed, but healing well. Her head also gave Jaclyn  occasional migraines, but she figured it wasn’t serious. “We're going to go out, with Yates.” And with that he walks away, not wanting to hear Jaclyn’s protests and snarky retorts. She could feel Yates’ presence in the back of her mind get piggy with excitement, ready for another argument, but she quickly turns the idea down, not wanting to give both Ian and him the satisfaction of her anger. “Fine.” She grumbles. “But, where are we going?” She calls out from the kitchen, hoping Ian would respond to her from his office. Jaclyn could feel his hesitation from a mile away like a bad stench that didn’t leave your nostrils. She also knew that Yates could feel what she was feeling, so she had to be precocious. She couldn’t trust Yates, even though she wanted to. He seemed trustworthy for her, but what he did to her yesterday was terrible. She hated and liked him at the same time, which caused a layer of debate over which side she should choose. Jaclyn didn’t choose either side.

“To the corporation. Don’t ask any more questions.” Ian basically growls at her. *Maybe I should ask Yates what’s going on, after all,* Yates *is my* personal *trainer.* Suddenly, alarms went off in Jaclyn’s head. Red lighted, blaring sirens that were planted in the middle of her head screeched inside. It made Jaclyn tremble, but she knew who it was. Apparently, she got a warning when Yates was walking through the door to her head, like a loud doorbell. That was very useful to her. She could feel a warm smile on his voice. *Did someone say my name?*

*Funny. You know, you can be very talkative at times.* Jaclyn walks upstairs and enters her room, enlightened by the conversation Yates was giving. He seemed to be into it too. She plops down on the bed and looks at her IWatch. 12:19. Ian and she would be leaving soon, but Ian didn’t work on Sundays. Jaclyn sighs internally and closes her eyes, fully entering her head to be in the conversation. She was getting the hang of her enhancements, working with them at night. Reaching her mind out farther and stretching her awareness. She also worked out at night as quiet as she could muster. Her strength was strong, more than any human could produce, she noticed. One thing Jaclyn noticed is that her eyes could see farther and were sharper if she focused them. Her senses became very efficient and detailed, along with the help of her mind’s awareness.

Inside her mind, Jaclyn could see Yates waiting for her. She always heard his voice, but when Jaclyn retreated fully into her mind, she saw a ghostly outline of him. She could sense a devious grin on his blank face. *Yes, I am. How could you tell?*

*Your voice got me very annoyed.* His grin widens, and Jaclyn could feel a smile on herself, but quickly erases it. She couldn’t trust Yates just yet, he could take advantage of her. But as soon as she swiped the smile off, Yates grin turned into a frown. *Why can’t you trust me? Yesterday was just harsh introductions. You were a little upset*. Jaclyn mentally kicks herself for being so retarded.

*Because you are with my dad. You don’t know him as much as I do. He’s not the person he is with me. And plus, you were being an ass to me yesterday, invading my own privacy and basically using me. How would you like that if I did that? Invading your life and commanding everything you do. Won’t be as much fun as more of a slave.* Chris goes silent. She must have hit a nerve or something*. Good, plus nobody would even care about me anyway, so why does he pay me too much attention?* Chris is still quiet, chewing on something to say. Jaclyn knew that what she just said, Chris has heard. At first, she didn’t even think about it, obviously too comfortable with her own thoughts, talking to herself, but then she remembers and found she didn’t care. Let him hear, no one could change her childhood. Her mind flicks back to another memory, one so painful and heartbreaking it sometimes brought tears to her eyes. And the worst part was, she blamed herself for it.

Jaclyn was 12 when it happened. Ian was drunk and was sitting on the kitchen counter, Cattie nestled in his lap. He asked for another beer, and Jaclyn knew he already had 4 bottles. He chugged the last one. She denied him, feeling courageous for standing up to him for once. Whenever he got drunk, he would do something horrific to her or Cattie, and it was times worse when he was drunk than when he was sane *enough*. But Jaclyn quickly regretted her action  when he pushes Catties off of his lap and throws her to the ground like a sack of sand, her head hitting the kitchen floor with a *thwack.* Jaclyn was terrified, her fear pulsing through her veins like blood. She was immobilized at the spot. Eyes half-lidded and sunken deeply in Ian’s skull, he slaps little Jaclyn across the face. She cries out and stumbles backward, her back hitting a wall with a thud. Tears stream down her face as Ian comes steaming up to her. Breathing heavily, drunk, sweating, face red, and his stench of BO was all she could see. His anger boiled up and out of him like his stench. The beer bottle he was holding was already empty, but he tries to take a swig from it anyway. It seems to intensify his anger as he realizes. “Turn the hell around Jaclyn!” He screams. She hiccups, trying to hold in her tears but bursts out sobbing. When Ian sees she won’t do what he asks for, his anger seems to ooze out of him like spewing lava. He grunts and slaps Jaclyn across the face again, causing her to ball her eyes out. Snot trickled down from her nose as it mixed with tears. Her face was already bloody and bruised from his slaps, and she figured if she turned around he would just whip her, and it was way better than what she just experienced. She turns around and lifts up her shirt, sobbing quietly. The sound came before the pain. The sound of glass breaking into a million pieces. A stabbing pain that came through her back made her scream. A blood curdling scream that made Ian stop for just a second before he threw another empty beer bottle at her back. The pain was searing through her back like knives cutting and digging in her skin. A white-hot flame that throbbed in her back as she felt blood trickle down her back. Jaclyn immediately pulls down her shirt and lets out another bloody scream. Tears were streaming down her face furiously, as her whole face was blood red mixed with black and greens from the bruises. She pounds her fists against the wall hard enough to break the plaster. “STOP!” Jaclyn screams through sobs. She doesn’t dare turn around though, knowing what would happen if she did. Blood was already soaking the back of her shirt and was dripping on the floor. Jaclyn didn’t know what to do. Ian was making no sign of showing he was there, and the only thing she could see was the blurred darkness of her eyes pressed against the wall. She dares to turn around, taking a peek at her mother, who was unmoving on the floor. She hit her head hard, and that brought fresh tears to her eyes as Jaclyn blames herself for her mother’s damage.

There was still no sign of Ian. Little Jaclyn looks around fully and sees no sign of him anywhere. She takes a step back and cries out in pain. Shards of beer bottles littered the floor all around her feet. He must have thrown all four of them at her back. Jaclyn tries to be strong as she hobbles on one foot to her mother, blood creating a trail behind her. “Mother!” She whispers urgently. Her mother remains unmoving. Jaclyn bites down a layer of fear that tries to freeze her thoughts as she shakes Cattie. “Mother! You have to get up before Dad comes ba—“ Suddenly, a large, sweaty hand grasps her small shoulder. She’s flung backward and steps on glass, which causes angry pain to create flames in her feet. How much more could she take? And all she wanted was for this to stop, for all of this. She faces Ian’s angry eyes and sees he’s holding a stool. He throws it on the ground and yells, “Jump on that.” She looks fearfully into his eyes, his breath heating her face up like an angry bull. “But—“ Her meek voice gets drowned out by Ian’s booming voice of him repeating the instructions. She closes her eyes and sends a silent prayer to anyone who was listening, but she knew no one would come and rescue her. Tears stream down her face. She was getting light headed from the crying, and she was hiccupping sobs now. “I don’t want to!” She whines. Ian’s eyes narrow and she saw he was on the verge of crossing the line between human and animal. She looks in his face. It amazed her how something *so* human can just become a vicious beast. Something that terrified her down to the core of her soul. He looks at her, the calm before the storm, as she fears he would do something so disgusting to her that he would even be scared. “You-“ was all Jaclyn could manage before he slaps her across the face and pushes her with all his might. The wind was knocked out of her as her bloodied back makes contact. The glass shards digging so deep they scraped bone. She didn’t even have time to cry out as Ian flings her around and rips her blood-soaked shirt apart, exposing her back. She was immobilized by pain, her back felt like it was on fire as the glass ripped through tendons and muscle. The deep gashes spewed blood and caused the wall to be streaked with her own life. Jaclyn could hear the whip being yanked out of a drawer. Ian cracks it and the sound makes Jaclyn jump. She sobs with no tears left to cry, making her whole body tremble with the effort. Then a pain so worse than the glass that just made Jaclyn want to tear her eyeballs out instead of feeling it seared through her back like a spreading wildfire. She screams so loud she swore she heard glass break, and even her voice croaked when she couldn’t scream anymore. She felt weak, and frail, that she thought her skin would fall apart at that second.

The second strike came down like lightning. Actually, she would welcome the lightning than this, a quick and painless death. But no, Ian had to make it a death so slow it hurt even when he wasn’t hurting her. Jaclyn cries out in pain and begs and pleads, but the pain kept coming until she was light-headed of all the blood loss. As Ian let loose the 7 strike, Jaclyn went unconscious.

Jaclyn’s memories were interrupted by herself. She retreats out of her mind and found that she was letting tears flow down her cheeks. Every damn time she relieved that memory. Blasted Ian. He *would* pay, even if she was in her grave, he would still pay for his beatings. The glass was taken out and she had lost a third of her blood that night. The gashes had healed, but they were so bad that she had to have several surgeries for it. The scars are a dark skin shade that never seems to lose their color. Her face has healed though, and luckily there was no scarring. She sighs and sobs at the same time, knowing she can’t blame herself for getting Cattie hurt. She had head trauma and had to spend a week in the hospital. Jaclyn couldn’t forgive herself for her careless words. She never watched her mouth.

“Jaclyn! Let’s go!” Ian calls from downstairs. She mutters a few curse words at him but goes downstairs anyway. Jaclyn scowls at him when she sees him, but he didn’t take notice. He hurries out the door with Jaclyn hot on his heels.

Ian pulls up the car by the sidewalk. The day was decent with a light blue sky, not a wispy cloud in sight. Jaclyn liked it out here. They both get out at the same time and slam the car door at the same time. It reminds Jaclyn about when she was younger, she used to time it perfectly so that her door would slam at the same time as the other doors. She didn’t know why she did it. The road was abandoned except for their own car parked to the side, and the sidewalks were lined with old warehouses. One of them looked so old it looked like it was falling apart on broken hinges. She didn’t ask any questions when they passed the corporation, but her mind started to spin on wheels. “Why are we here?” She asks as Ian leads the way across the street and knocks on a rusty metal door that belonged to a moldy red shell of a big warehouse. He doesn’t answer her question, just as she expected, so why bother? She hears light footsteps and hears metal scrape against rusty metal as a lock unlatches. Chris opens the door, (no figure), and has a very sympathetic face on. She could feel the pain radiating from him like sun rays. Ian doesn’t take notice, and strides right in the poorly lit warehouse, leaving them two at the door, standing awkwardly. Before Jaclyn could muster anything out of her mouth, Christ grabs her and bear hugs her. It almost set off her enhancements. He crushes her with his strength but she could manage. It was weird. Her head only came up to his chin, and Jaclyn was 6/1. He smelled of very expensive cologne mixed with flowers. He pulls her against his body with wandering hands under her shirt, his hands feeling her scarred back, making her very uncomfortable. His hands stop on a change of skin, the scars from the glass, and inspects it with his hands. She felt *very* uncomfortable about it as he buries his face in her hair, his hands on top of the scars. *Why is he acting so weird?* She could hear him smelling her hair as silently as he could muster, but it didn’t work out. *And why do guys always love to smell a girl’s hair?* That, she couldn’t answer. She felt awkward about it but welcomed the feeling since she started developing feelings for him, it made her feel giddy inside when he pulls her tighter against his body. She didn’t know why she was acting like this, but after a few mere seconds, she let her body melt into his embrace. He was lean and fit like her too, which made her heart ache. He squeezes his eyes shut and buries his head in her shoulder, lifting her off the ground a few inches. It was a long hug, and when they departed, Jaclyn felt cold. He grips her shoulders and stares deeply into her eyes, they were lit up and glassy. *Is he crying?*

“I’m sorry Jaclyn.” He whispers to her. She stares at him, waiting for an explanation. She didn’t want to use her mind’s awareness, given she wanted to live in the moment and not rush whatever Ian had planned. Ian could wait. “For what?” Jaclyn musters, still staring at his face. His eyes were hungry too, but she ignored the fact. “For what you had to go through. I-I, I never had s-seen that in my life. What did Ian do to you? With the b-beer bottles and whip. I didn’t know you g-grew up like that.” Jaclyn sighs and remembers she didn’t close the conversation when the memory surfaced like an ice cube. She could see he shivers. “I… Wasn’t much disciplined in my childhood.” She *really* didn’t want to talk about her nightmarish childhood with Chris, let alone anyone. She never really liked talking about it because it caused fresh pain to her, including making her scars throb with dull pain, though it was very surreal. But she still felt it in her mind, like scars on her brain. Chris pushes on. “I’m so sorry Jaclyn. What you had to go through with Ian, and his beatings. I didn’t even think about it. He must have hurt you so bad.” Jaclyn was glad of one thing about her thick hair. It covered her scar on her face, and she really didn’t need Chris to pamper her about it either. It was swooshed to her left side so that it gave her style and didn’t make her look Goth. “Look, Chris, I’m fine, you don’t need to baby me with apologies. What’s in the past is in the past. This is between Ian and me.” Chris’ face hardens, but softens after that. Chris was really getting on her nerves now. “Where did he hurt you?” He asks. One of his hands releases her shoulder and wanders her back, feeling the scarred skin. His reaction was all of horror. “What did Ian do to you?” He says a little too loudly. “Nothing, Chris. Just, I’m fine, okay? You don’t need to look at me, I can handle myself.” He tries to turn Jaclyn around so that he could see her scars, but she resents. “Obviously you couldn’t take care of yourself.” He says but regretted the words once he came out. Chris hasn’t lived her childhood. He didn’t live what she had to go through, with no love from alcoholic parents. He didn’t go through the beatings she mustered when she was *4* and ended 9 years later. She was on the verge of ripping her eyes out at that time. “Chris,” Jaclyn’s voice goes into a deep growl. “You haven’t lived what I have been through, you didn’t take the beatings I took, and you never, *ever*, been thrown aside like a pile of rotting trash. Let alone all the public humiliation you get when you go to school with a screwed up face and shit. You didn’t live through my life, and I pretty darn think that I deserve something for being here right now. You never went through my pain, so I think you better back off here.”

Chris takes a step back at her aggressiveness. But he deserved it. He crossed a line *no one* crossed, and it was like getting stabbed in the back all over *again.* “Jaclyn, look I’m sorry, okay. I’m sorry I said that I didn’t think…Well, uh….” Jaclyn stares daggers at him. Of course, she lets a boy she liked get near her personal life and they backstab her because of it. Jaclyn tries to walk into the warehouse but Chris steps in front of her. “Jaclyn, I-“ Jaclyn shoves Chris aside a little too hard. He slams against the wall with a quiet *oomph*. Jaclyn storms into the darkness that engulfed her. She could sense Chris trying to catch up, and she felt hot tears stream down her cheeks. She also found that she didn’t care.

“Jaclyn I’m sorry!” He cries out. Jaclyn felt numb, not knowing where to go in the complete darkness. “Ian let’s go!” She calls out, angry. She feels Chris’ presence behind her getting closer every step. “Jaclyn, stop!” Tired of running around in the darkness, she stops and turns around to see Chris panting. “Look, what you think and what you say are two different things. Keep your thoughts to yourself and if you want to say it well then that’s your own fault. It was your fault that you said it and if you blame me for blowing up well then oh well, it was my life.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t mean to upset you, it just slipped out and I know that you are capable to take care of yourself. At the time I just thought about what of all the possibilities you could have done when you were taking the beatings.”

“Yeah well, you apparently forgot I was 12 years old when a 41-year-old man was beating me half to death’s door. Even if I tried he has more physical strength.” Jaclyn allows herself to calm down, but the anger only dies down to a candle flame, waiting to be unleashed again. It was a trait that she couldn’t shake off, let alone Ian gave it to her. “Okay, I’m sorry that I said that, I just forgot that.” The flame inside of Jaclyn explodes and she couldn’t muster it even if she wanted to, she just rode on top of the thunder. “You lived through my memory, and you knew I was young. You knew that I was 12 and I know that you didn’t forget. People never admit and always make stupid excuses to cover themselves up.” Chris’ face goes red, and he doesn’t say anything when a meaty hand grips Jaclyn's shoulder and pulls her backward, igniting memories from when Ian did that to her. He doesn’t move, just lowers his head like a naughty dog that got into the trash. Jaclyn immediately forces her enhancements out, looking around in the dark, everything getting lit up as her eyes change. She whips around, looking at her left and right, when the meaty hand pulls her around and lands a powerful punch in her gut, knocking the wind out of her with a dry gasp. A huge man dressed in black was her attacker. Jaclyn recovers quickly as adrenaline pumps through her veins fiercely. The man was huge and had broad shoulders packed with a stone face. But he was slow, which made Jaclyn take advantage of him like a baby with candy. The next punch comes to her face, but Jaclyn quickly dodges it and grabs his arm, twisting it at an impossible angle. It snaps with a satisfying crunch. He yelps but she wasn’t done with him. She high kicks his face which sends him stumbling backward, clutching his face with his good arm. She quickly slashes at his stomach, and when her claws come back, they were bloody with chunks of flesh hanging off. Blood spurts out of his stomach, leaving a trail behind him as he retreats into the darkness, his arm twisted so that his elbow was inwards, making an ‘L’. She didn’t want to kill him, but if she needed to she would without hesitation. She snarls, sensing someone to her right where the entrance was. She twirls around to see two other bouncers, dressed in the same identical black. The first one, with a large nose and angry eyes, stares at her. The other one was smaller but just as intimidating.

Jaclyn smiles her devilish grin, and for once likes the terror on both of their faces. She was the first to attack with a run an’ kick. She hits the bigger one and flies past the smaller one. It was like time was slowing down for Jaclyn, or more so the bouncers were getting sluggish. She whips around and attacks the smaller one from behind, lashing at his back with her claws. He screams in pain and trips and falls in his own blood. Jaclyn found that humorous, like a child’s cartoon. He lets out a groan of pain, blood spilling out of his back. Jaclyn stares at the man, unconscious now, when the other bouncer comes up behind her. She senses the punch to her head and dodges it, twisting her arms behind her to try to gouge him. He jumps back with a startled yelp and tries to grab her hand but instead gets clawed. He clutches his hand and stares at Jaclyn with intense anger that could only remind her of Ian. He cracks his neck and charges forward like a bull. Jaclyn dodges to the left but the man had fast reflexes, turning towards her in mid-drive. He strikes her and sends her flying back, spittle flying from her mouth. He charges again, but Jaclyn was ready. She times it perfectly and sends a roundhouse kick to the man’s head. She could hear his head crack, and he falls like a tree. Jaclyn’s senses turn off like they were drowned out by her bloodlust. She growls. A tiny part of Jaclyn, somewhere deeply smothered, knew the horror of what was happening, but it got ignored by instinct. Her mind shut off like a plug, everything she knew at that moment was replaced by one thing and one thing only: Bloodlust. She snarls, looking for a victim to take down, but finds none besides the injured ones. She didn’t *want* to take them down, they were already injured, and she needed *fresh* victims. Jaclyn hears a sudden footstep behind her, followed by a whispered, “I’m sorry.” Turning around a few seconds too late, hands grip her head, and what follows was a massive void that engulfed her entirely.

Jaclyn wakes up to her enhancements retracted, hands tied in thick rope, and an intimidating light above her head. She felt like she was in a cop show. It was a scene to take in, that Ian was angry (it was oozing out of him like goo), Chris with his head down staring at the floor like some punished puppy, and several bouncers who look just as angry as Ian, surrounded her. A man she didn’t recognize who had the same look and vibe as Ian but only twice as worse came up from behind her. The man laid a hesitant hand on her shoulder. She snarls at him happily. The chair that bounded her was metallic, which may come in useful at thwacking someone in the head. She couldn’t get out her enhancements and cut herself out of the rope because everyone would see. But the rope seemed okay, it was just she couldn’t rip it without them seeing too. She had her inhuman strength, hearing, and mind. She didn’t know what else to do, but she knew she couldn’t experiment anymore. She needed help in this.

*Chris*. She calls out, but there was no reply. Typical. Jaclyn shakes off the hand that was still on her shoulder. “And you are?” She spits. “To you, that is not important, but if you must know, I’m Drake Freeman, head of our little rogue party. Now if you don’t mind the introductions and tea parties here, I would like to know more about you, Jaclyn.” Ian snorts silent laughter at Drake’s speech. “You see, *Drake*, I’m no biggie on introductions myself, so why don’t you the hell tell me why I’m here and tied up so I can rip all of your heads off. Hmm? Did I do okay?” Drake merely replies to her snarky comment and continues on. “Why you’re here is because we want you to do some work for us. You see, Chris, as I must assume, has told you he is your personal trainer in all of the subjects. He will guide you through our place and you will corporate.”

“And, what type of dirty business am I doing for you guys?”

“You’ll be our number one hitman for the job. The blood will be on your hands, Jaclyn, if you don’t follow orders.”

“And if I don’t follow orders?” Jaclyn was weirdly curious. She wasn’t much worried because she knew she could slip out of this, but she still was cautious. “Cattie will be eliminated, and it will be all your fault.” Jaclyn was filled with freezing terror. Cattie was going to get killed if she didn’t *kill* for them. She looks in Ian’s brain, needing for a response, but only finds that was the truth. Tears threaten Jaclyn. Ian would turn on his own wife for his business. Jaclyn lets out a groan. *Shit*. What was she going to do? “Ah, there’s my girl,” Ian says when he sees the look of defeat on Jaclyn. Jaclyn yells at him, calling him various curse names and calling out he was a traitor to life.

*I’m going to get my mother killed*. Thought Jaclyn over and over as she for once cooperated with them, leading her deeper into the darkness and up a flight of stairs. There was so many twists and turns that she couldn’t count at that. There were working lights up here, and the air was less musty. The walls and floors were the same dull color of dirty white. Everything looked the same as they rounded another corner to find the hallway filled with doors. Chris was beside her, along with a hefty man dressed in black to her right. Ian and Drake were in the front, leading everyone like there was no one behind them. The rest of the bouncers were behind her, and Jaclyn honestly didn’t know how all of them fit through the hallway. Ian and Drake stop at a more modern looking door with it labeled at the top, “Training”. Drake turns to face Jaclyn, who was faking to struggle out of the man’s grip on her right arm. “Chris, take her into the training room, if she tries anything with you, you know what to do. And Jaclyn. I must say Chris is a wonderful tour guide for you, and to teach you a few lessons before you start your first day on the job.” Chris merely nods, and Jaclyn bites back a snarky retort before going limp. She couldn’t risk anything, given what she knew that Ian would allow it. Ian opens the door like a mindless soldier and walks down the hallway with Drake besides him. Jaclyn was too sick to see which door they went in, and instead, she was escorted by the bouncers into a room that looked like it was made for wrestling. A ring stood in the middle of everything, and what surrounded it was training equipment. A punching bag, weights, gear, training weapons, and what looked like *real* weapons laid in one corner. The other had fitness equipment and mats on the floor. It was every fit person’s dreams.

Jaclyn was shoved through the door and it slams shut, noticing two guards were outside of the door, armed by what she could only explain as real guns. Ian was a criminal. He was co of this rogue thing, and she was going to be high up on their wanted list once she worked for them. She just knew. It gave her a gut-wrenching feeling inside, making her feel sick. Someone clears their throat, and Jaclyn whirls to see Chris at the door. He looked scared. “You. You lured me into this, didn’t you?” He only nods, his eyes wide. Jaclyn scoffs, not wanting to argue anymore. It didn’t get her anywhere, but that feeling to just argue was strong. She mutes the feeling. “Tell me what you have to say.” She snorts. “We are part of this rogue group from G.E.B.I. What we do is something classified, but what Mr. Freeman wants you to do is to eliminate people for him that turned down his business. It was too risky to have them know about our group, R4G9, and spoil it for others. That is your job. And I am here to train you for whatever job you may handle. Today, one of our recent clients is in the city trading items from the black market. You will find him and ask to do business with us or eliminate him entirely.” Chris says, almost like he has rehearsed his speech for her. Jaclyn was terrified. Making people join them or she will have to kill them was something she couldn’t bring to. Jaclyn’s veins freeze with fear. Killing people to save her mother. But if it meant for her mother, one life over God knows how much people Drake wanted her to kill. She couldn’t bring herself to do it. Sure she would kill people, but if it was out of self-defense. Nobody deserved to die like the problem she was going to throw on their shoulders. Even *if* she refused and they killed Cattie, what then? She couldn’t escape, the guards would mow her down with their guns. And if she killed Ian or Drake? Jaclyn didn’t know, but she guessed someone would take their place and finish their dirty work. She couldn’t kill Ian *now*. She wanted him to pay, and a quick and painless death was something he didn’t deserve. Jaclyn was overwhelmed with horror at what her final choice came out to be. She shuts her eyes and prays silently to someone, anyone. Anything but this. Anything. Even if it meant to give up her own life, she would gladly do it with Ian at her side.

Jaclyn curses when she opens up her eyes. She screams and rants, punching the wall that made a hole the size of a watermelon. She looks up at anything to grab and break, but everything was bolted to the floor. She screams out a line of curse words at Chris who remains still and unmoving. Her world was falling apart, but hasn’t it always since Day 1? This time though, Jaclyn was capable of doing something about it, but she couldn’t bring herself to make sacrifices. She felt powerless like from the old days of her childhood. Tears stream down her face, everything becoming so clear. She had *no* choice but to kill for them. It only meant to protect herself and Cattie.

Jaclyn sinks to her knees, lips trembling. She looks up at the bare ceiling. “Why me?” She whispers so quietly, she could see Chris trying to hear what she was saying. “The torture, the pain, the suffering. All of it, why Ian? And now this, something far w-worse t-than that. Just kill me already.” Jaclyn didn’t know who she was speaking to, but she knew no one would answer, not anytime either. “Please,” She whispers again through a trembling voice. “Please, please, please, please, please!” She sobs. And now she couldn’t hold back the tears, hidden from years of pain and suffering under the hands of Ian. All of it just came down to that moment. She screams like she never has before, something mixed with grief and rage. A rage that it seemed so unearthly for her to possess it. Something that was hidden behind a cloak of sadness and falsity. Something that made her think she couldn’t possibly be human anymore, where she crossed a line between human and a demon that has been unleashed for once in her life. She tried to cover it up as the beatings went on, but each day a little piece of the covering, and herself, fell apart and shattered into a million shards, something where it could never be replaced. Until the covering and herself fell apart entirely, and this is when that demon emerges with revenge in its bloody breath. Where it commands for no more suffering, or she would just become a ghost in a broken shell. But if that does happen, she would be wiped out entirely, where her existence would be no mere than a glass bottle breaking on top off all of the other broken bottles. Millions of them, broken, that just make up herself. One human being. And would be doomed to be renewed.

*This is the line when a human being would no longer become something or any form but would become a sinister evil. It was planted in us from the start, and it will always be there until the end. It was the demon that breathed death itself, where it would have blood on its skin, where it would be no monster, but* us*. We are the true monsters, and we’re killing ourselves from the inside out without even knowing it. This is no monster inside of us that you may think, the monster that is truly inside of you is you. You are the monster, and it was a matter of fact if you unleashed it upon wrath or if you kept it hidden deep down inside of you. Either way, it always found a way out. It* always *did.*

Jaclyn screams like the animal she was. It was something that was inside of her that wasn’t her but was at the same time. Spit hangs from her teeth as she claws at her eyes. She digs fingernails in her forehead and lowers her head, still screaming something between a rage-full cry of despair and a blood-curdling sound. She knew what she was, she was the victim that played the monster. Because the victim was tired of getting killed over and over again. Jaclyn barely registers that Chris has his hands covering his ears, wincing in pain. She didn’t care. Nobody could have gone through this. She was making a new path for mankind, and she was sure no one would follow it. She would have blocked the path before anyone could. Jaclyn could feel blood dripping down her forehead as the last of the scream dies down, not because of herself doing it, but because the other side of her, the *demon*, was retreating behind the frailest cloak. Waiting for it to be broken again. Blood runs down her forehead and into her eyes, bathing her eyes a solid red color. Jaclyn bows her head to her knees and wrenches her nails out of her head. She didn’t acknowledge the pain. She cries softly from there, almost like when she was younger, crying herself to sleep. She hears Chris comes up to her and she could *smell* his confusion and sadness. He puts a hand on her back *very* slowly and lets it lay there for what seems like minutes. She didn’t care that she was showing weakness to him. Her time of weakness was lost in her first 14 years of life. She knew now that when she showed weakness to herself or to anyone, it was a sign of help when no one was there. Where her body or her mind broke down, it needed to be repaired by someone else because they couldn’t do it themselves. Weakness was only a sign of help, and right now Jaclyn needed it.

Jaclyn got lightheaded soon after. There were no more tears left to cry, and that only meant it was time to pick herself up again. Chris’ hand was still laying on her back, and he was sitting next to her, silent and waiting. Jaclyn takes a shaky breath and wipes away tears and snot. “Why are you still here?” She asks. Chris looks at her intently, noticing her body was still trembling. He moves his hand very gently from her back and strokes her hair. “I’m sorry I had to do this to you. I couldn’t refuse or else it would be me in the noose.” Jaclyn nods, not wanting to argue with him, and yet she understood. She couldn’t hold people accountable for their actions if she was a hypocrite. If Jaclyn had a choice between killing people herself or to bring it upon others, she would choose the second choice. For her survival and her mother’s. Jaclyn sighs heavily, trying to flush away the feeling of being sick. She couldn’t.

“I’m so sorry,” Chris says again, still trying to earn her trust. She remains silent, trying to pick herself up inside. “We have to do training,” Chris whispers. “or else it would not get us anywhere.”

“Why did you join?” Jaclyn blurts out. Chris gives her a surprised face. “Why? Well, Ian talked me into it. I had no clue what it was, and since we have known each other from business, he said he could use a kid like me with my talents. I didn’t know, and once I met Mr. Freeman, he sucked me into this whole mess. Now I’m working a double work life, one where it involves me in felonies.” Jaclyn didn’t want to ask what felonies he has committed working to, so she asks a little more about him, trying to shake off her feelings about what was happening all around her. “How did you get in G.E.B.I? You are pretty young to have gotten in there with your talents too.”

“You never know why the government agencies want you as their weapon of interrogation.” Jaclyn sucks in an air of breath. She inhales deeply and gets to her feet on wobbly knees. Blood was not dripping down her forehead, so it must have dried. Jaclyn knew she looked like a train wreck, and that she found embarrassing for Chris to see. But she knew that wouldn’t help, even though her mind flicked back to it.

*Screw it*. If Chris liked her, he wouldn’t care about her appearance right now. “What training are you exactly talking about?” She could feel Chris’ presence behind her moving closer to her. “I have to train you. For today’s event.” Chris sighs, and that made Jaclyn’s heart ache. She was stuck with Chris, for what seemed like it. And she was on a hell of a mood swing right now. Liking Chris and then hating him, it was weird for her.“Ok, but you didn’t answer my question, what type of training?”

“Sparring.” Jaclyn could feel Chris’ mood go dark. Though she couldn’t decipher what emotion he was feeling. Jaclyn knew how to defend herself, even without her enhancements. She had taken self-defense classes when she was 15. It lasted for about 3 years until she had enough and quit. That was a few months ago. A devious grin forms on Chris’ lips when she looks back at him. I’ll beat you in it.” He says. Jaclyn scoffs. “Dude, you literally have twig arms. I’ll snap them in half by accident.” Jaclyn knew what Chris was doing, trying to lighten up her mood, and it worked, even though the rain cloud was reduced and the demon was still behind the thin cloak. “Well, uh, you’re a girl, and,”

“So? Why do you have to set yourself up like that, along with that sparring practice you were talking about.” Chris struggles to say something, “We haven’t started it yet. How do you know you’re going to win?”

“I don’t, but all I know is that you’re going to get hurt until you tap.” Chris smiles, but still struggles to say something. “Yeah, well, you’re ugly.” Jaclyn scoffs, feeling bad for hurling what came next at Chris.

“Thanks, I was trying to look like you today.” Chris’ smile turns into a playful frown; he was defeated. “Now that I roasted you over the fire,” Jaclyn claps her bloody hands together, “why don’t we do a little sparring session?” Jaclyn may look calm on the outside, but inside her guts were rolling in fear. She was going to kill someone today. That didn’t sound good at all.

“Come on, let’s go.” Chris urges. Jaclyn keeps a straight face on and enters the arena, Chris right behind her. The arena was meant for wrestling, and it looked like it was straight out of a set. “So, what am I supposed to work on?” Jaclyn asks. Chris’ voice seems to get giddy. “Just see what you’re capable of without enhancements, is what Ian said.” Jaclyn laughs air silently mixed with a snort. “Is that so? Okay then Ian, let you see what you have raised.” Jaclyn takes a defensive stance, legs apart, and raises her arms. Chris does a similar stance, and Jaclyn bounces a few times to get blood to her legs. She balls her fists and smiles devilishly at Chris. His face goes hard, and his brow furrows. “Ready?” She asks.

“Bring it.” He answers. Jaclyn charges first. She didn’t know if Chris was better than those bouncers she defeated, but if he wasn’t, she planned to toy with him before she took him down. She also didn’t want to use her full strength on him or break anything. That was going to be hard for her.

Jaclyn flies at Chris with a punch to his side, but he parries, leaving him vulnerable. She quickly knees him in the groin and he crumples like a piece of paper. Jaclyn swiftly steps back from him. He was *so* weak. Maybe she hit him too hard. Oh well. He wheezes, clutching his crotch. Jaclyn lets out a silent laugh. “Yeah, we’ll see who’ll win.” She mocks. Jaclyn strides up to Chris and offers her hand, and he grabs it. She lifts him up like a sack of feathers, and there was a smile on his lips. “Round two? Or are you too hurt?” She looks at him as he shakes off the pain. She probably hit him too hard then. A little less, this time. Chris, without saying a word, takes the same defensive stance. Jaclyn does the same and lets Chris charge this time. He charges and does a quick kick to her face, but Jaclyn dodges easily. Instead, she takes his leg and twists, his body moving with momentum. But when she thinks he was going to fall on his side, he puts his two arms in front and pushes off the ground, twisting to his feet and facing her again. Jaclyn was impressed, but she couldn’t linger on the thought, she had to defend herself. Jaclyn throws a flurry of punches at Chris, and he parries all but two, which she lands in his stomach. The air gets knocked out of him as he clutches his stomach, bent down. She takes those precious seconds and gets behind Chris, putting both hands on his shoulders and flinging him backward. He flies backward and in Jaclyn’s direction, but is stopped short when she does a light roundhouse kick to his back. She was surprised she had enough time to back up. Chris falls face first on the mat, and Jaclyn tops Chris. With one hand, Jaclyn takes a shoulder and lifts him up like nothing. He tries to hook Jaclyn from the back as she was crushing him, and puts her other arm around Chris’ neck. Just like what she did to Ian. Her knees were digging into his back, and he wheezes. When Jaclyn felt it was her win, she releases her arm, and he falls on his hands and knees, gulping air as much as he could muster. Color returns to his face as he gets more air in his lungs. Jaclyn stands up, not even a scratch on her. She was unstoppable in a way. “You okay?” She asks from behind him. She could see a slight nod from him. Suddenly, Chris’ foot kicks out and swipes Jaclyn from her feet. She guessed he didn’t plan it out well because she landed on top of him. Limbs tangled, Jaclyn starts to laugh. “That backfired quickly for you.” She laughs. Jaclyn gets off of Chris and he wheezes again. Jaclyn was still laughing. “Jaclyn, wow, jeez, you’re, uh, great.”

“Thanks.” She says, a radiant grin on her face. “Come here,” Chris urges. “No way, you’re gonna pull up another trick and try to defeat me,” Jaclyn says, her grin gone. “No seriously, can you pull me up?” Jaclyn rolls her eyes and extends her hand. Chris grabs it, but instead of letting Jaclyn pull, he pulls her down with surprising strength. His strength also seems to make him come alive more, like he never got hurt. Jaclyn tumbles to the ground with a startled yelp. What the hell was he doing? Before she could pull away, their faces met, only inches apart. “I’ll help you get out of this, I promise.” He whispers. Jaclyn’s hairs stand on end, her heart starts to beat hastily, and her stomach feels giddy again. Is that what love was? “I promise.” He breathes again. And with that last word, Chris leans in ever slow slowly. Jaclyn felt like she was being magnetized towards him. She wasn’t ready for this, but then again she felt like she was, a long, long time ago. Her eyes flutter as their lips met, and Chris cups her cheek in his hand. He pulls her closer to her and presses hard into her lips. It was angry but also very passionate. Jaclyn smiles through kisses, breathing heavily. Chris treated her like she was fragile, doing delicate kisses but were also hungry. Jaclyn never felt like this before, and she wanted more of it. Jaclyn wraps her arms around Chris, their bodies touching awkwardly on the mat. “Chris,” Jaclyn gasps when she pulls away reluctantly. Chris sighs. “I’m sorry, I-I, uh.” Jaclyn shuts him up with another passionate kiss, Chris running his hands through her hair doing so. Jaclyn cups his head in her hands. “God,” Chris says when they finish. They share a smile. Jaclyn smiles and gets to her feat steadily. She helps Chris up, and they hug. “I promise I will help you out of here, for your sake and mine. But right now, we have to fake it till’ we make it.” Jaclyn nods. “I’m so glad I met you.” He says after they exit the ring. “I know I am too.” Jaclyn smiles. Right now, the only thing that could brighten her day, even today, was Chris. All she wanted was Chris at that moment. But when the moment passed, she wasn’t so sure at all.

Chris exits her to the door and they both exit side by side, surrounded by the two guards at the door. It was weird how they didn’t barge in when she screamed her lungs off in the room. Chris leads the way, twisting down another hallway and into what looked like the same hallway they were just in, except there were doors on the left side of the hallway. Chris leads her to the first door and opens it up. It was a bedroom. Though it didn’t look like a prison cell, it sure had the same vibe as one. It was much bigger and more modern. It had a lush bed with freshly made sheets, a nightstand with a burner phone on top, and a cabinet with what looked like it was full of food and water. On the other side of the room was a small kitchen with white marble countertops and modern looking stools. There was a small bathroom also. But what took everyone’s gaze was a black wall with gadgets and weapons. Jaclyn felt like it was straight out of a spy movie. It took her too much that she didn’t even notice Ian walking towards them until it was too late. “Jaclyn,” He puts a hand on her shoulder. She whirls around and shrugs it off immediately, her eyes a blazing fury of hurt and pain. “You.” She rasps out. “You, lying traitor!” She screams. She didn’t think she would react this way, but the sight of Ian made her blood boil and steam, and almost like a flick of a switch, her mood faltered. Maybe it wasn’t her after all. “Jaclyn, this was all part of our-“

“Our?! What do you mean ‘our’? This is your gig, not mine, that you sucked me into as your puppet.” She pokes a finger at his chest, hard. And this outbreak, she knew, wasn’t her at all. The cloak was broken in a whirlwind of pain and raging fury. “You can’t do this to me! You can’t do this to Cattie!” She slaps Ian across the face with a wicked snap, and his head snaps to the side like it was broken. All of the bouncers, (3, including one that followed Ian), raise their guns at her. Ian’s face for once looks hurt. But he doesn’t tell them to lower their weapons. It sent a quick bolt of fear in Jaclyn’s spine, but she quickly focuses on Ian, boiling everything down to blind fury. Chris looks like he was about to take down the nearest bouncer, but she could tell he was hanging on to the weakest thread. Ian’s face was red, and she could detect the slightest hint of blue on his cheek. Just like he did to her for what seemed like lifetimes ago. “You don’t think I won’t embarrass you in front of these people?” Ian growls. “Oh, so you think that you can embarrass a grown woman just because she’s your daughter? What is there to embarrass me about, *Ian*?” She could sense Ian’s anger double in matter. “No, wait. Let me tell you that I’m not your daughter anymore, maybe I am somebody completely different. Or maybe I can’t beat you because you beat *me* already to it. And what if I tell Cattie? Huh?” Ian still keeps a straight face on, but she could sense he was heating up pretty fast like he was in a pool of lava. “Cattie will never know!” Ian shouts. “No, she will find out pretty soon. And if you try to stop me I’ll put you in the grave like you did to me a lifetime ago.” Ian shuts his mouth, his jaw tightening. “Get inside.” He growls. “What? You’re gonna put me in this prison house? No way are you going to do that to me.” Ian steps forward, and Jaclyn does the same. “You have someone you need to deal with tonight. So I suggest you get in before Drake has to come out and beat your ass up.”

“Not like the first time *you* beat me up.” Jaclyn retorts. She couldn’t, honestly, do anything. She wanted to get physical with Ian, but all the guns were trained on her. She couldn’t do anything. Chris was standing there, silent, though he was eyeing every bouncer like they were terrible food. She makes quick eye contact with him, and his face hardens when Ian makes eye contact. Jaclyn retreats into the big room and after she shut the door with a loud slam. Ian retreats down the hallway without another trace, leaving the bouncers with him. One of them attempts to lock the door and get Jaclyn her belongings, but Chris volunteers. “I got this,” he says. Even if the bouncer denied him, he still had a higher ranking in this place. The guy looked scared, almost of going near the door, which made Chris’ heart throb for Jaclyn. The bouncer nods quickly, almost relieved. “You guys have somewhere else to be? This chick’s pretty terrifying, I know one thing is that she can knock down doors like that.” He nods towards the thin metal door. The bouncers’ faces all look equally terrified. “Go, I’ll take care of her.” It was like a cartoon. All of the bouncers, even the biggest ones, scramble towards what they thought was the nearest exit, but what was really another hallway. They would all get lost, but Chris didn’t give a shit. He looks at the door, it had three heavy duty locks, but he wasn’t sure if Jaclyn could beat it down. He knocks. “Get lost.” She sighs. He could feel the weight of her mission on him like he was her. She didn’t deserve this, not at all. A flame of anger surges up inside of him, but he didn’t know who to blame it on. Chris knocks again. “I said get lost!”

   Jaclyn yells though it was muted a little by the door. Those words made Chris’ heart hurt. If Ian never abused her, she would have been a totally different girl. Someone who didn’t have to keep their guard up all day. Chris opens the door anyway, seeing Jaclyn on her stomach, face first in a pillow. Chris saw Jaclyn’s nails grow at an amazing rate, taking his gaze away from her rear. “Ian I said, go away!” She screams. She turns around, her eyes a blazing death pool, something so demon, but so badass in a way. In a split second thought, her anger vanishes, along with her enhancements, as she sees Chris standing there. His dark brown hair covering his forehead and part of his eyes was the first noticeable thing that she saw about him. “Chris, what are you doing here?” She asks. Jaclyn seemed very amused at that moment. “I was just checking on you,” He smiles. She smiles. They shared that moment for a very long time. Jaclyn gets out of bed and walks past Chris, shutting the door. The room was musty but otherwise smelled clean enough. She turns on a small fan from the side of the room. “So, how long are they going to keep me here?” Chris shrugs. “I’m… Not sure. Drake, from all I know, wants you for as long as he could keep his hands on you. They’re scared of you.” Jaclyn scoffs. “Good.” She snorts. “Let them be scared, that way I can find a way out of this mess and tell Cattie everything.”

“What about Ian?” Chris asks. “Oh, I’ll find Ian one day, and when I do he’ll pay, for everything he did to me for the past 14 years of my life. Don’t worry, he won’t get far.” Chris nods superstitiously. “Maybe you should get cleaned up. You seem too beat right now.” Jaclyn nods even though her cheeks flush. She could feel the cloak that hid the demon after it retreated crack ever so slightly. She couldn’t get angry. It would just piss her off about the damage she did. Jaclyn gets up and looks in some drawers by her bed. She pulls out the only thing in there. “What the hell is this? Is this from *Underworld* or something?” Inside was a curve-hugging leather suit. It was all black, sleek, thin and stretchy, and looked a size too small for her. It had matching gloves and the suit had matching shoes. She didn’t know whether to be impressed or to be disgusted. They were shiny, punk high heels. How the hell was she, forget the mission, even walk in these. They weren’t thin though. They had more bottom to it than generic ones, and she saw that they had tiny grips on the bottom. Jaclyn was purely disgusted. She was in a prison full of guys and that was the only thing she had to wear. Who even picked this out? “Who picked this out?” She asks Chris, who stares at the outfit in her hand. “I’m not sure, but I think Mr. Freeman-“

“Stop calling him that. He’s not your master, you know.” Chris nods. “Drake, I’m sure of it. He said it was for the mission tonight. It’s equipped with secret compartments.”

“This tiny thing?” Jaclyn raises an eyebrow. She had no other choice though, her clothes were still bloody from the bouncers. She wondered if she killed them, considering she didn’t see them when she awoke. Her nails were crusted with blood, and Jaclyn focuses on picking most of it out. “Shit, I guess this is the only thing I have.” Jaclyn sighs and without waiting for a reply from Chris, she goes into the decent sized bathroom and turns on the shower. She leaves the door open a crack deliberately, and undresses. She lets her dirty clothes fall to the ground with a soft thump. They smelled of sweat, blood, and Chris. She could still sense Chris in the room, sitting on the bed, waiting patiently. And with that, she gets in the shower. It felt like heaven. The hot water ran across her skin and made her groan internally. She needed this. Jaclyn washes her hair and her body, scrubbing away the blood that stained her skin from the clothes. She smelled fresh and clean once she got out, and she takes a quick breath of fresh, less steamy air. The fan really outdid the musty air, and even though it made it chilly, she welcomed the feeling. She wraps a towel around herself and looks in the mirror. Her long and thick brown hair was wet and clean now, and it made her scar pop out because of her red face. She thought it made her look tough, but it really was just a reminder of all the terrible things Ian did to her. She quickly turns around from the steamy mirror and gets dressed. The leather was soft on the inside, and it hugged every part of her skin like a second layer of skin. Even though it had a zipper in the back, it was still tight without it. She couldn’t get it so she would have to ask Chris. That sent a giddy feeling inside of her, but she quickly suppresses her imagination. The leather suit was cut short though. It stopped a little above her calf, and it had an open front. The open was a long V-neck that went to a little too much if she was going to fight in this. The V-neck, on both sides of her shoulders, revealed the inner part of her shoulders and ran through her back, two identical slits that ran through her back and exposed skin. They ran all the way down, on the side of her hips and legs, and stopped a little short. But that wasn’t it. The part of leather that covered her shoulders crawled along her neck and made a wide choker. She liked it. The front had small cuts that were covered by thinner strips of leather, horizontally. The cuts were all identical, though they didn’t run long distances. They were wide though, exposing the front of her hips and thinned out up to the bottom of her breasts. Though nothing was shown. They were almond shaped basically, and Jaclyn liked that design. The sleeves were basic black and stopped at her wrists, leaving no skin to show when she put her gloves on. She zips up her matching high heels and wonders why she was going to fight someone like this. And the thought sent her other thoughts spiraling in a rain cloud. She was going to kill someone today. But she tries to convince herself anyway. It was for her own good. A life for her mother’s, right? Family was family though, and either way, you had to protect them at no costs. Jaclyn looks in the mirror, looking at her every curve and admiring how lucky she was. Jaclyn looks in the mirror, then at the sink and drawers. She opens the first drawer to find simple toiletries. There was a comb, toothpaste, a toothbrush, and what seemed to be expensive makeup. What the hell? Why would she wear makeup for one, in a prison house, and two, out to go fight someone? Where was she meeting this dude anyway? Maybe that was it. The expensive makeup, and the outfit that made her look inappropriate. Maybe she was to lure him somewhere with her looks? That would be stupid, but else would she explain it to be? The second drawer had other less, expensed cosmetics. *Screw it.* Jaclyn grabs some makeup and applies it hastily. But it still looked good either way, at least in her eyes. When she was done, Jaclyn wore a full face that made her edges cut. She added dark red lipstick to make her clothes pop. She also added smoky eyeshadow to match the clothes. Jaclyn wasn’t a fan of makeup or girly things, but she figured she needed to cooperate with them as much as possible. It only made it worse when she didn’t, including it would have her nowhere in escaping.Jaclyn combs her dry hair now, swooping it to the side to cover her scar. She thought she actually looked nice. When she was satisfied with her makeup, she walks over to the door and opens it. She didn’t even notice she was walking great in her heels. “Hey, can you zip this up for me?” Chris spins around from the bed at the sound of her voice, and his face absolutely lights up like Christmas. He stares at her for a little too long, his eyes lingering, but Jaclyn didn’t feel uncomfortable anymore about it. All she felt was the love at the way he looked at her. It was crazy only a couple of days ago, she met Chris. And now Jaclyn was in love with him. She put her trust in him so easily. She didn’t even know it was *that* easy to fall in love. It blew her mind away.

“Wow, Jaclyn. You look amazing.” Jaclyn smiles at a snarky comment but bites it down. Instead, she just keeps on smiling. “Thanks…. Uh, can you zip the back up for me?” Chris seemingly scrambles to get closer to Jaclyn, which causes her to laugh. He doesn’t take notice, or at least he doesn’t say anything. He stands behind her and admires her back a little too long, then zips it up quickly with a sigh. “Where am I going? It has to be somewhere nice, right?” Chris nods. “We are going to go to a restaurant tonight. It’s a really nice restaurant, and your target is going to be there. You will need to seclude him and corner him, then you tell him the options.” Jaclyn tries to go numb on feeling, and it works. She couldn’t deal with this until the moment was happening. Not here, and not right now. “We?” Chris smiles a devious grin. “Yeah, I’m coming with. Just me and you.”

“Then why can’t we escape? From there. No one will be watching us.” Chris sucks in an air of breath and his face comes to a painful wince. “Not, really. Ian and Drake will be watching us. The gear you are wearing, the gadgets, all have trackers in them. And even if you throw them away, we wouldn’t get far. It will be me and you in the mission together, but Ian’s guards will be crawling everywhere tonight. They’re going to keep a close eye on you.” Jaclyn curses. “Then we’ll have to make up another plan sometime soon. You know I can’t cooperate forever. I’ll eventually escape somehow.” Chris nods once again and turns away from Jaclyn, thinking. “Who’s this, *target*? What’s his name?” Chris turns around, tapping his foot on the ground. “John Vedder. Sells illegal equipment in the Black Market. He was going to be our seller.” Jaclyn nods. “Well,” She didn’t know what else to say, so she takes a step towards Chris. He steps up to her too, until their faces were inches apart. Jaclyn puts her arms around him, and she could feel his body tense up, then relax as he welcomes the embrace. “We’re gonna get out of here, ok?” Jaclyn whispers. He smiles. She leans in and their lips meet again. She was savoring every moment they had like this before her life would go back to hell again. She just needed to hold on to those memories. She smiles sadly when they part, and his eyes hold emotions in them. Jaclyn didn’t want to find out what those emotions were. Because she just wanted to be normal again, and if she found everything about Chris, it would just ruin everything. She couldn’t rush their relationship, and she wouldn’t even want to do it anyway. All she wanted was Chris. And she hoped he was the same way towards her too.

**Chapter 4: Death**

Chris exits Jaclyn’s room soon after another session of kissing. Jaclyn sighs and licks her lips, still tasting him and remembering his touch on her lips. She couldn’t leave the room, so she went to the wall of gadgets and other items. There was pistols, ARs, and even what looked like grenades. Well, if you are a criminal, I guess you would keep a stash somewhere. There were walkie-talkies, and a little radar with a dead screen. Jaclyn grabs a pistol and finds it was empty. But she tosses it onto the bed anyway. She grabs two walkie-talkies and the radar. She didn’t know what it did, but the best she could muster was that it was going to track her target. She tosses it all on the bed behind her and looks intently at the pistol she took. It was sleek, lightweight, and was compact. Would they give her bullets? She could ask Chris, but what would she need them for? She decides to put it back and sets out to explore the cabinets for a bag.

In the end, Jaclyn found a black backpack that was stylish, but breathable. That was when she had an idea to escape when she was on the mission. Without Drake and Ian controlling her, and now that she had Chris on her side, she knew what to do. Even with the bouncers all over the place, she knew how to escape with Chris at her side. She packs most of the food and water in the backpack and calls for Chris inside of her head. She felt a slight shift in the presence of her head, but then it returns back to normal. She hoped he was coming. She packs two pistols and stuffs them under the food and water. Jaclyn goes and grabs her toothbrush and comb. She grabs everything in the shower and thought it was a little extra, but you never know. They were going to escape and run away from this blasted place. That’s what they were going to do. As if it was perfect timing, she could hear locks being unlocked. She looks at the door dreamily to find Chris, but what was there wasn’t Chris at all. It was a sweaty, big man that was dressed in black. He smelled like B.O, which made Jaclyn gag inside when he strode up to her and grabbed her arm, flinging her outside the door. She stumbles in her heels and catches herself on the opposite wall in the hallway. She couldn’t do anything, considering that there were 3 other bouncers that had their weapons trained on her. She steadies herself and walks down the hallway without another word, tiding herself up. Ian and Drake were behind her, apparently amused at looking at her backside. They were sick inside and out. She follows the one-way hallway until Chris comes up from around a corner. She smiles, but quickly musters it, feeling eyes on her. Chris catches what she means and his face turns hard. Chris leads her down a different flight of stairs and out a door into fresh air. It was night, and the stars were twinkling in the sky. Jaclyn takes a split second to savor the air before she was led into a plain, white van that had several bouncers inside. She sits in the middle, while Chris and a bouncer next to her trade spots. The bouncer goes to the driving seat. Jaclyn stands in the middle, while the others sit on side benches. She faces Ian’s surprised face, with a snarky smirk on it. She wanted to swipe that smile right off of him. Drake crosses his arms and looks intently at Jaclyn. She does a devious grin at him, trying to creep him out. If it worked, he didn’t show it. “Well,” Jaclyn gasps, trying to make her voice sound lush. “you made it this far. Might as well tell me what he looks like.”

“You’ll see, I assume you took the tracker to find him. That is how you see his face.” Ian winks at her, and she rolls her eyes. “And you’re off!” Drake makes a shooing motion, and like magic the van stars off, Jaclyn still standing, staring out at those two. She swore to herself that when she was ready, she would come and find them. Then she would kill them slowly.

Chris and she didn’t say a word. Instead, they talked mentally. She told him about her plans, and he felt shaky about it, but agreed. It was the only way. Chris takes a walkie-talkie from Jaclyn’s bag and pockets it. He also rummages through his bag and shows clips loaded for her pistols. She smiles at him and winks.

10 minutes later, it was midnight. They arrived at the restaurant, and everyone moved out. Jaclyn also saw two other white vans that looked like they belonged to R4G9, and was confirmed when other bouncers dressed casually move out form them. There was about 3 dozen of them here. Chris was right; this place was going to be crawling with them. “I got to get her situated,” Chris explains to what seems to be the leader of their squad. He nods and walks naturally towards the restaurant, noise spilling from the open doors. Jaclyn tunes out the fact that many couples were arguing inside. “I’ll see you inside.” Chris smiles, hope lighting his eyes up. Jaclyn smiles and hugs him hastily, then throws her backpack inside and the trackers that were inside of her clothes. She found them when she focused on places they would put it, and it wasn’t that hard. They were located in the heel of her right shoe, several of them. Jaclyn then turns around and runs as fast as she could with the heels. It was a decent pace without people bringing suspicion to her swiftness. But she doesn’t go inside. Instead, she goes around the building and finds the nearest door that was open. She tries the first door but finds it was locked. The second door was closed too, but it was open. It must be for employees. She goes inside and finds she was in a narrow hallway, right next to the kitchen. Pots and pans clank together, and she could smell delicious food inside. She licks her lips but resists her temptation. Instead, she looks the other way and finds the bathrooms. Bingo. She goes into the ladies’ room and finds the farthest stall empty. That was even better. She locks herself in and mutes her earpiece. Before everyone moved out, the lead bouncer, Derrick, was his name, handed everyone an earpiece so that they could communicate. Chris didn’t know about this, but that made an even better plan. She was waiting for the crackle of Chris’ voice going on, telling the emergency. Jaclyn waited there for 10 minutes straight until a sign of Derrick comes on. His raspy voice cuts with an edge of alert. “Has anyone seen the girl?!” He cries, even though he tries to sound calm, like a snake loose in a classroom. There was a reply from all squads, each with a negative. “Find her. We have the trackers.” There was an immediate reply. “She’s *moving*. Fast. She’s far away from here.” God, they sounded like morons to Jaclyn. She hoped Chris was hearing this. “Yates, are you getting this?” Derrick demands. Chris’ earpiece crackles as his voice comes on. “She’s nowhere in sight. Shit! Wait, did she take the van?” Chris asks. Jaclyn smiles. His acting sounded terrible, but the guys still believed it. She could hear Derrick’s footsteps outside slow with despair at the realization. “It’s gone. Everyone move out! Follow the van!” Jaclyn could hear the team outside getting in their vans. This was her chance. She calls out to Chris to meet her by the bathrooms, and she gets out of the stall. Just to be sure no one was left behind, she sends her mind out into the hungry crowd. It was all rich people, none with felonies at least. She sighs with relief. Her enhancements were getting almost *too* easy to use. She steps out of the bathroom and finds Chris there, smiling and sweaty. He drove the van far and ran that far back here. She wondered where he parked the van. But there was no time.

Chris and Jaclyn sprint back outside, Chris handing Jaclyn her backpack mid-sprint. She slips into it as they round the building to the other side. Only to be stopped dead in their tracks. 5 men have guns trained on both of them. The man in the middle seemed important, with gold rings and rough whiskers. He was clean and short, and his clothes were made for business. Chris starts to sweat, fear visible on his face like a pimple. “Who the hell are you?” The man in the middle asks. His voice was deep and didn’t match his body. “Who the hell are *you*?” Jaclyn asks, finding a sense of humor in it even though this was not the time. “I’m John Vedder.” Jaclyn groans inside. “And Yates here owes me some big cash tonight, or he owes me his life. Either one is fine by me.” Jaclyn scoffs at John. She laughs sinisterly, which earns a glance from the men that were aiming death at them. “I’m afraid that’s not gonna happen, mister.”Jaclyn flushes out every emotion, clearing her mind. If John wanted Chris, then she would happily kill him for threatening him for his life. It was different. When Jaclyn made the first move to kill someone, that was very wrong. But when someone threatened to kill Chris, well then they were going to get killed. “Chris,” Jaclyn looks at Chris, who takes a defensive stance behind her. “Baby, he’s mine. You shouldn’t get hurt by these strong men here, so why don’t you step aside. Men only.” John looks at one of the guards, “Keep her here, she’s mine after this.” The guard nods and trains his gun on her. “Yates, I didn’t know you had a girlfriend, she’s a pretty one.” John looks her up and down, sending a snarl from Chris. Jaclyn smiles at him. “I’m sorry, *baby*, Chris is mine.”

John’s face turns hard. “Kill him,” He orders. Jaclyn sends the command out to her body, and her nails start to grow first. Then her eyesight, and finally her teeth. She smiles at the men, their faces horrified. She attacks first. She swiftly kicks the gun out of the nearest guard and it goes flying with a stray shot. She claws the man’s face and tears at cheek. He screams as blood spurts from his body. Jaclyn felt herself go numb and felt the cloak hiding the demon inside shatter completely. Jaclyn snarls, lashing out at his face and tears at his eye. She skewers it along with skin, and it comes out with a wet pop. It was stuck to her ring finger, but she didn’t notice. Blood splatters onto her face and in her mouth. She could taste the man’s fear and she started to crave it. He tumbles backward and clutches his eye, tripping on something Jaclyn couldn’t see, and he falls with a lifeless thump. She turns to the next man who has his gun trained on her. She was close enough to kick him, and she does on reflex. The gun goes tumbling and skittering on the concrete. He lashes out at her face, but she quickly dodges it. Once he was done, she knees him in the groin, harder than what she did to Chris. He crumples with a moan. But Jaclyn wasn’t finished. She digs her daggers into his skull, disappearing with a spurt of blood. She scrapes skull and pulls out. Her whole hand was covered in a thick layer of blood. The man falls with another thump. 2 down, 4 more to go. She takes a quick glance at Chris, who was dealing with two of them. She looks at the next man, but his face was one of fear instead of determination. He drops his gun and flees at the sight, and Jaclyn smiles with her monster teeth.

John was nowhere in sight, so she quickly runs at the man closest to her that was tackling Chris. Chris wasn’t holding on to anything anymore. The two men beat him up pretty hard, and that made a flame of anger surge through her. She kicks him in the head, and he falls, unconscious. The other was choking Chris. Jaclyn feels fear tingle her spine, but she shuts it down. She launches herself at him, tackling him from the side. She rolls on top of him, her whole body felt numb now, like she wasn’t in control anymore. But she allowed it because it felt *so* good. Without hesitation, Jaclyn sinks her teeth in the man’s throat. He gurgles out a scream as Jaclyn rips it out, loving the splatter of warm life in her mouth and on her face. She snarls and lashes at his lifeless body, tearing chunks of flesh away. She quickly gets off of him, remembering there were others, and sees the other man, still lying on the ground. Jaclyn needed more of this. So much more. She pounces on top of him like a tiger and rips at his throat with her teeth. It tears like she was chewing taffy, and she spits out the flesh. Blood soaks her bodysuit, but she doesn’t notice. Instead, she looks around for John but finds he has vanished. She looks out with her mind, but it only reached so far, and without John in sight. She snarls instead of an intended curse. She gets up and uses one of the man’s shirt to clean up her mouth and suit. She looks at Chris, who lays lifeless on the ground. She commands for her enhancements to retract, and they do. Along with the demon. She heard a wet plop behind her and finds an eyeball by her feet. She turns away with a shudder, knowing how it fell off. Jaclyn could hear Chris still had a heartbeat, and he wasn’t bleeding majorly. She bends down and taps his cheek, but nothing. “Chris, Chris,” She whispers. “we have to go.” Still, he doesn’t wake. Great. Suddenly, red and blue sirens screech in the parking lot. Isn’t this greater. Someone must have heard the gunshots and called the police. Without thinking too much about her actions, she scoops up Chris in her arms. Even though he was bigger than her, she had the strength to pick him up like a sack of feathers. She starts to move quickly, going into the forest that was behind the restaurant. She jumps the fence, clutching Chris to her body. His head rolls to the side with each step as she bounds into the forest. She commands for her enhancements to be out as she couldn’t see a thing in here. As softly as she could, she tries to not let her nails dig into Chris skin as she clutches him to her chest. He was light, to be honest. But that wasn’t the case without her strength. She bounds over a log and takes a quick glance behind her, the lights of the restaurant fully engulfed as the night and ghastly trees overwhelm it. She slows to a stop, going to a tree to sit. She would hear someone if they snuck up on them. She casts her mind out, only sensing the minds of nightly creatures. She gasps for air. Her lungs were burning. The sounds behind her were faint, even with her super hearing. She must have run far, deep in the forest’s heart. She runs her tongue over her teeth, trying to get chunks of throat out of her teeth. She sits slowly, looking at Chris’ face. What did they do to him? His face was bloodied and bruised, and Jaclyn wipes away the dried blood on his face with her sleeve. She looks at him with love and sympathy. She swipes away a strand of hair from his face ever so *gently* with the tip of her dagger. She smiles lovingly, though she knew it didn’t look like that. But she needed to see if there was a danger. She was on the run now with Chris, and that was what she wanted all along. Jaclyn slowly turns around and takes off the bloody backpack on her back. She rummages through it with only her fingers. She grabs a water bottle and opens it, glad that opening bottles with her hand than fingers. Chris moans slightly at her movement, but Jaclyn shushes him.

“Shhh. You’re okay Chris, I’m here.” She didn’t know why she was mothering him all of a sudden, but it felt nice for her to take care of him when he was in a state of weakness. When he needed it. Jaclyn takes the water bottle and gently brings it to his busted lips. He gulps water slowly, moaning when she took a swig from it afterward. She could feel Chris’ body waking up, but his body goes limp again. Why was he falling unconscious again? Jaclyn lays a palm to his forehead, it wasn’t hot. He was covered in a thin sheet of sweat now that Jaclyn noticed. Chris has a fever, and he may be sick. Jaclyn also thought that he must have terrible migraines right now, and she felt bad for him. Those men deserved it. They deserved to die if they hurt Chris. A low growl comes from somewhere, and Jaclyn realizes it was her. Chris was vulnerable right now, and it was her job to take care of him. She looks around in the darkness, at the dead looking trees and the earthly plants. Chris moans again, and Jaclyn puts the water to his lips. He drinks greedily this time. Jaclyn slowly puts back the water and puts on her backpack. She stands with Chris in her arms and starts to walk silently, heading deeper into the twisted forest.

Miles pass of Jaclyn walking. She didn’t really get tired until now, but she has been walking in the forest for about an hour now. The forest didn’t relent its end, so she’s been walking by and on gnarled limbs of trees and dead bushes. There was no pursuit after her. Just to make sure though, she went left into the forest about 45 minutes ago, then went straight after that. She didn’t know what she was doing but figured she could lose anyone if they were following her. Chris didn’t wake at all, which kind of sucked for Jaclyn when you were in the middle of a forest dark at night. It was silent. Almost *too* silent, which made Jaclyn’s skin crawl. And she was supposed to be the monster. Jaclyn felt scared even with Chris in her arms. But she ignored it, thinking about Chris the whole journey. The presence left in her mind, which made her feel weak and alone. But still, she pressed on, knowing that Chris was still alive and he was right next to her. Her body wasn’t *that* tired. It just started to protest now. But she ignored it too. She ignored everything and focused on one thing only: Chris. Chris’ fever died down a little with sessions of water as she walked, but it didn’t die down fully. He might have a concussion. That scared Jaclyn, she didn’t know how to treat it. Twigs snap under Jaclyn’s foot as she keeps pushing forward. Eventually, she would come to the end of the forest, and sooner or later she would have to rest soon. She couldn’t risk going back anymore. Jaclyn looks around at the forest. The trees were thinning out, and Jaclyn thought that the forest was coming to an end. She quickens her pace a little to find fewer trees and plants, and finally to an open field. It was dark, and the grass sways gently in the steady wind. Jaclyn lets everything she ignored flood back into her. Her knees buckle beneath her weight, and she almost drops Chris but doesn’t. The grass rolled on for as far as she could see in the dark, and there was not a sign of civilization in sight. Jaclyn walks on her knees towards a thick tree. She takes off her backpack with a sigh and puts it next to her. She lays Chris against her lap, his head against her shoulder, and his back propped up against her front. She was cold, and his heat helped her. She just hoped that he wouldn’t get cold too. She takes out a pistol from the back and lays it in the backpack, but on top of all the food. She retracts her enhancements, and everything turns pitch black. She couldn’t even see her hands in front of her face. She grabs the bag that was rubbing against her hips and puts it in front of Chris. Though Chris didn’t have his bag, he brought a few clips that were loaded. She wraps her arms around Chris gently and forces herself to fall asleep gently. She couldn’t afford to get them both killed if she was sleeping on the job. She closes her eyes and savors the moment, keeping her senses alert as she lightly dozes with Chris in her arms.

Jaclyn awoke. It was dawn, and the sun was just coming up. The grass field looked totally innocent now, the lush grass sparkles with fresh morning dew. It must be around 5-ish right now. Chris was still in her lap, and the bag was where it was. She gets up slowly and stretches, scoping out the place, but there was no activity. She needed that sleep, and it felt so good. She should inspect Chris now that it was light. He looked peaceful sleeping, though his face was covered in green and black bruises. *They would be fine though,* Jaclyn thought. She has had that before, and they healed. Chris’ breathing was jagged and shallow, and Jaclyn didn’t know what that was. His lips were busted and scabbed over, but they seemed to be healing nicely. His nose had bled over the night, Jaclyn noticed, and he had a decent sized cut above his eyebrow. She lifts up his shirt, finding his skin was bruised purple. He probably had some broken ribs that would need to heal correctly. That probably was the problem with his breathing problem too. She checks his legs but finds that he wasn’t hurt there. He was still knocked out though, and Jaclyn’s suspicions about him having a concussion doubled. She needed him awake though, and that was going to be a problem. She bends down to get closer to him. “Chris,” She puts her hand on his cold cheek. “Chris, wake up. I need you here with me.” His fever was gone, but he seemed cold. She didn’t have anything, so she snuggles up behind him again, eating an energy bar she wraps her arms around him at the waist and entangles their legs together. She sighs for not knowing why. “Chris,” She whispers in his ear. “Chris wake up. I need you here right now.” Chris doesn’t muster. So Jaclyn lays there until it got to be noonish. The sun was at the highest peak of today when Chris stirred. He groans again, and Jaclyn perks up. She grabs a water bottle and puts it to his lips, his head now resting on her hip. He drinks greedily this time, downing half the bottle this time before Jaclyn took a few sips. He groans again this time, and his eyelids start to flutter. It was like a miracle. She didn’t think he could recover that fast, but here he was, alive and not dead. His eyes roll in his head, and Jaclyn calls out his name again. She cups his cheek with her hand, trying to suck all of the cold out of him. Chris stirs this time, moving his sore body a tad. “Chris, are you with me?” His eyelids flutter half open this time, but close again like an empty tank of gas.

“Chris,” Jaclyn urges. He stirs at his name, moaning in pain doing so. “Chris, wake up Chris. I need you c’mon.” His eyelids flutter again, and she could hear him sigh in pain. “Chris?” Jaclyn gasps. His eyelids flutter again, and he opens his eyes very slowly and painfully. “J-Jaclyn?” He shivers. She hugs his body so close to her, cradling him like he was a baby, his head resting against her chest. “You’re alive.” She says with a smile. “I-I’m c-co-ld.” He shivers, pulling himself against her chest as tightly as he could muster. He probably didn’t know what was going on, but Jaclyn felt so good when his eyes opened. She hugs him to her chest, bending over so that she could muster all the warmth to him. It was super cold out here, and Jaclyn didn’t know why. It was the middle of summer, and it was like what, 34 degrees out here? That made Jaclyn wonder as Chris clings to her with most of his strength like a newborn. She felt bad for him, he most likely had a concussion. Jaclyn clings to him, a strong breeze sweeping over them. Then suddenly, a monstrous boom that took over Jaclyn’s hearing swept over the two. She covers her ears with a cry of pain and drops Chris in her lap. She screams as a strong force of air knocks her forward, taking Chris too. She tumbles and lands on her back, facing the dark sky. What the hell was this? She could smell smoke behind her, and cries erupt from behind her. She gets to her swiftly and starts to look for Chris. “Chris?” she calls out, looking around. In the end, he was still unconscious and tangled up in a bush. Jaclyn scoops him up and throws him over her shoulder, needing a hand free. She runs over, grabbing her bag. The smoke was thick over here, and she chokes back a cough. Screams of desperation come across the forest, and it was getting very cold. The sky was getting hazy, and the light was coming at a low rate.

She sets Chris down quickly and throws on her bag, then scooping Chris up over her shoulder. She wished so badly that he could run right now. She starts to run to the left, from what she hoped was farther from the explosion. Cries ring out as she runs at an amazing rate with Chris over her shoulder. Jaclyn leaps over a log and catches herself after a stumble. She didn’t know how she could run in these heels, but when fear pushed you, she guessed you could do anything. But the heels did have a disadvantage, they got stuck in everything. Jaclyn runs for another 5 minutes before she’s had enough in the mushy grass. The heels were slowing her down even though she was running at an amazing rate. The forest was no longer behind her, but screams of blood still surrounded her. Everywhere. Jaclyn stops and catches her breath, bending down to take off her heels. A flood of relief moves through her toes as the heels no longer trap them. She sprints at full speed this time, everything flying past her at an alarming rate. She didn’t know she could run this fast, but it must have come with the enhancements. She felt like she was looking out of a car, everything flying past her as she runs in the grass. Jaclyn concentrates on not tripping, looking down at the ground. Alarms blare up ahead of her, but it wasn’t up ahead, it was *all* around. Jaclyn realizes it was in her head, the same red blaring sirens going off. For a second Jaclyn thought it was Chris, but these sirens ha a slight urgency to them. She looks around, in front, behind her, to the left, then to the right. She could see something in the distance northeast from here, what looked like a ravaged city. Smoke plumes arise from the tallest buildings, and Jaclyn didn’t need to hear screams to know that they were there. Was it a terrorist attack? No, it couldn’t. There weren’t any gunshots that rang out, so I couldn’t be. Jaclyn didn’t know what it was, but all she knew was that all the smoke and ashes were blocking the sun. The temperature was dropping dramatically too, and they needed to find shelter soon before nightfall.

Jaclyn ignored her instincts screaming at her, and heads towards the raging city, hoping to find aid for Chris.

Hours pass and the city came closer each step of the way. Jaclyn’s knees felt like giving in to buckling, but she pressed on once again. Chris needed her help right now, and he might have permanent head damage, she didn’t know. She hoped not. Hope was a funny thing. It was something like gambling on giving in to something that couldn’t be there at all. Or could. She just didn’t know. Chris kept on moaning a lot throughout the journey, but he didn’t really stir much. From now, the city was close enough to do a 5-minute drive. She could have run there, but she was so tired, and screams were drowning everything else out. The alarms in her head went dead, accepting the fact that she was going to die if she went into the city. Jaclyn sits, cradling Chris in her lap. She digs around in her backpack, finding an energy bar and some water. She lets Chris drink before she does, and she eats the bar. She sighs, thankful that she made it to the city. She closes her eyes, sighing. She was sweaty, and she felt clammy in her clothes. The sound of twigs snapping behind her made Jaclyn perk up. She looks behind her, a growl emitting from her throat. A man, no older than his late thirties, with *black* eyes, and blood covering a wound in his neck and his mouth. “What the hell?!” Jaclyn screeches as he pounces at her, gnashing his teeth at her neck. His eyes were *all* black, nothing about them had any other color than that. It was terrifying as hell, but she guessed she was like that too when she got her enhancements out. The man howls an unearthly howl, more on the animal side. He tries to claw at Jaclyn, quickly stops mid-strike as Jaclyn’s enhancements unearth too. He snaps his head to the right, sniffing the air. And before Jaclyn knew what he was going to do, he lunges at Chris, snarling. Black blood erupts from his mouth as he gets flung backward by Jaclyn’s strong grip. He lands with a thump of ratty torn clothes, and snarls at Jaclyn, but doesn’t attack. “What the hell are you?!” Jaclyn yells at him, her mind spinning. She thrusts her daggers into his forehead, his body going down in a heap of last snarls. She breathes blood as she studies the man. He had several claw marks on his chest, and his throat has been ripped out. And yet he was moving. *What the hell just happened? That man shouldn’t be moving, and he has chunks of flesh in his teeth. What the hell is this shit?!*

Jaclyn demands an answer, but couldn’t figure anything out. Not even a guess. She looks at Chris, her chest heaving. She snarls at trying to contain herself, but it was no use. Her enhancements got the better of her, and she knew it. She studies the man, his eyes still pitted black. She needed to move out, and get away from wherever this man came from. She growls unexpectedly and picks up Chris in her arms as gently as she could. She snarls once more, not knowing why she was doing it, but it felt right. Instinct, probably.

Jaclyn moves into the city, hoping to help Chris and to get away from the freak, but she was wrong. It only made it 100 times worse.

The first sign of the city was the road. It had several bodies lying there, each in their own pool of dark blood. There were blood stains everywhere with no sign of its owner, so common that they were equal to cracks in the road. Some people were lying face up, and they had limbs missing, gnawed off, or bullet holes inside of their bodies. Jaclyn was frankly disgusted. But she moves on. She had Chris to take care of, and his head trauma could potentially get worse. She had to look out for herself and Chris, and if anything, she was sure her enhancements would not attract anyone. That deranged man, he stopped attacking her when her enhancements were out. He went after Chris instead, and that was when that split second of icy fear took root in her body. It was like her best friend, there whenever you needed it until you pissed your friend off. Jaclyn laughs to herself, trying to lighten the mood besides the fact she was walking to death’s door to sell cookies. Was the man thinking she was his own? She has seen plenty of movies where the predator didn’t kill their own. So did it think it was her own? If so, then why did it attack her before? Maybe it was the appearance of her monster within. Similar cousins or something.

Jaclyn continues on the road. The air was clearing up, but it was getting close to nightfall. Jaclyn thought it was around 4-ish right now. The road was littered with blood, weeds, chewed limbs and hollowed cars. One of them still had smoke rising from the exhaust. Jaclyn follows the highway, the city at the end like a pot of gold. Chris doesn’t move, let alone make a sound. She feared for him, and his life right now was more important than hers. She trudges on with new determination when a wet and bloody scream rings out in front of her. Her hairs rise on end, and she could hear pleas in front again. She sends her mind out, to find a girl no more than 14 years fighting what seemed to be another woman, with dark pitted eyes and stringy blood hanging from her mouth. It snarls at her, and she screams again. They were in a standoff, neither making a move. The girl was crying, and blood was coming out from her side, the pain a fiery sting. She didn’t look to be hurt, but Jaclyn couldn’t walk by like somebody minding their own business, and that woman may come after Chris in her arms. Jaclyn curses to herself, the forest on both sides of the road, hiding what may be more of those freaks. Jaclyn growls to herself over thinking where to put Chris. She could see the girl, and the freak still standing there, blood dripping down her mouth like saliva.

“Hey, kid!” She yells over to be heard. Both heads twist around to see the new person added to the group. “Stay right where you are, okay? I’m coming to help.” The girl looks at her with beady eyes, glassy from tears. She nods and turns around to face the freak again, who snarls at her. She didn’t know why the freak was standing off, but that gave her enough time to find a put Chris in a car, closing all doors. She runs at her amazing speed, flushing her thoughts about Chris out of her head. She snarls, the freak tilting its head in confusion. It was no longer focused on the girl though, so that was good. When Jaclyn was close enough, she flies by the girl and kicks the woman in the head. Her head snaps with a crack, and she stumbles back, growling at Jaclyn and jumping to attack. She claws at her, trying to scratch her face, but Jaclyn grabs her arm and pulls. She didn’t know how much strength she had, she obviously a lot. Her arm rips off like a pillow, blood spewing out of the stump. She howls in pain, and that was where Jaclyn finishes her. She sends her daggers through the woman’s head, scraping skull and brain. She pulls out after, the freak landing on the ground with blood still pumping out of her forehead. Jaclyn breathes heavily this time, a slight snarl on her breath from the bloodlust.

Jaclyn turns around, and an ear piercing scream follows as the girl sees what Jaclyn was. But it was gone in a heartbeat as they retract. “It’s okay, you’re okay,” Jaclyn says, trying to calm down the girl. She shows her hands in front of her, but the girl wasn’t having it. “Y-you’re.” She says through shaky sobs. Jaclyn didn’t blame her. A girl that was about to die when another monster came and saved her. “It’s okay, I’m not going to hurt you.” Jaclyn could tell the girl was trying to pull it together, but she couldn’t do it. She takes a step back, ready to bolt when Jaclyn hears footsteps above the road where she came from. Her mind flicks back to Chris, and her heart rate goes through the roof. “Chris,” She mutters, mind racing. The girl looks back at Jaclyn and gives her a questioning look. Jaclyn books it. She never ran this fast in her life, including the times after she got her enhancements. She was barefoot still, but she didn’t care that her feet were being ripped up from broken glass on the road. She dealt with it before, and she had something to go through to get to Chris. She makes it back to the car in a few seconds. Mind racing, Jaclyn commands for her enhancements to be out. The door to the car was still closed, but several freaks were pounding on the door. They were bigger than the ones she originally saw, and she roars at them to get their attention. All 4 of their heads snap at the sound like hungry coyotes, one even snapping its teeth together. They were all too stupid to open the car door, and that saved Chris’ life. Jaclyn charges at the first one, a man in his 50’s, with bite marks all over his body. Jaclyn sinks both of her hands in his head. He lets out a scowling scream and he falls with a bloody thump. Jaclyn roars at the others. A woman no older than her screeches and proceeds to attack. She catches Jaclyn off guard as she was dealing with the older man. She turns around and was greeted with nails raking down her exposed chest from the body suit. Jaclyn roars, more so because the motion felt like she was being whipped from Ian. She kicks the freak in the chest, who stumbles backward into the two others content on getting in the car. They fall like bowling pins, but Jaclyn didn’t find it funny anymore. All she wanted was for these freaks to die. She pounces on the one closest to her and sinks her teeth in its face. It screams in pain, but Jaclyn kept biting, rotten copper spilling into her mouth like spoiled milk. She gags and spits out the chunks of flesh in her teeth. The woman had a huge cavity in her upper cheek and part of her eye socket, which made Jaclyn grin up at her. She screams again and rakes at Jaclyn’s face, but it was no use. She ends her quickly, thrusting her daggers through both eye sockets and scraping brain. Jaclyn felt a large force knock her backward and into the car. Her head hits the metal car, and she starts to get a headache. She shakes herself though and sees her assailant. It was a middle-aged man that was smaller than the other one, but just as fierce. He snarls at her, tendons of raw flesh stuck in his bloody teeth. Jaclyn smiles at him though, showing her own set of teeth like a show and tell. He attacks first, trying to sink his teeth into her throat, but Jaclyn throws her daggers at his face instead. He didn’t see them, and his head rams right into the daggers, eye first. It slides in smoothly with a wet *squelch*, and his head goes limp. Jaclyn looks around for the other one, but the freak was nowhere in sight. That was good, it was scared of her. She shakes herself, looking down to see four rake marks that were shallow, but still dripping blood. She had a bad headache, but it wasn’t too bad. Jaclyn gets shakily to her feet, covered mostly in her assailants’ blood. She spits, blood replaced for normal saliva.

Jaclyn opens the door, to find a surprising thing. Chris was awake, and he was staring at her with large beady eyes. Jaclyn was covered in rotten blood from head to toe, and her face probably looked screwed up. “Chris?” Jaclyn says, his face one of awe. He gets out of the car on wobbly legs, and Jaclyn catches him before he could fall. “Jaclyn? What-“ Jaclyn wraps her arms around him, and she jumps up into his arms, oblivious to his ribs. He pushes her against the car for support and hugs her close to her. Jaclyn draws in a shaky breath. “I-I thought you were going to die. I was so afraid for you Chris, I-I just couldn’t,” Jaclyn couldn’t finish her words, overwhelmed by joy. She breathes heavily, her daggers not touching his back. She wraps her legs around him, breathing him in. “What, happened?” He asks after a long time of hugging. “Does your head hurt?” Jaclyn asks, avoiding the question. Not here, and not now. Night was settling in, and she didn’t want to be out here with the freaks roaming. “Yeah, a shitty headache. What the hell is happening around here?”

“I have to explain later, all I know is that we need shelter and food. You must be starved.” He nods. The sun was setting and the light was going at a limited supply. Jaclyn decides to keep her enhancements out. Chris lets go of Jaclyn and they start walking down the road to the city. Jaclyn almost forgets about the girl, and she stops dead in her tracks. Chris does too, alert. He was walking better, but she had to get his ribs healed somehow. He was breathing a little better, as she noticed, but he still had the problem. “Hello?” Jaclyn calls out, hoping not to scare her. She knew that the girl couldn’t survive on her own and that leaving her was like killing her. There was a faint sound of shoes scuffing concrete, and Jaclyn could sense the girl was still here. Why was she still here though? She knew that Jaclyn was a monster, so why did she stay knowing that? Kids were sometimes dumb though. “Hello?” Was a reply. Jaclyn makes her way down the road until she heard the moving of shoes very close. “It’s just me, I’m not going to hurt you.”

“Easy for you to say, freak! You’re going to kill me!” Jaclyn laughs at the girl’s common sense. “Then why did I save you from that freak that was about to kill you? And after leave you than rather kill you. If I wanted you dead, you would’ve been dead a long time ago.” Jaclyn could hear a sigh as the realization sets through her mind, and she could sense the girl’s fear emitting from her like heat. She steps out from a car, face scared but determined. She was a short girl, with long black hair and brown oval eyes. She was pretty in a way. Her shirt has been ripped and claw marks were shown on her side. They were dried and crusty, though. “Name?” She asks Jaclyn, though she eyes Chris, who stands by Jaclyn’s side. “Jaclyn and this is Chris. Yours?”

“Tai-Bengian. But you can call me Tai.” Jaclyn nods, not wanting to smile at the girl. She could feel her fear loosen a little. “Do you know what is happening? We were in the forest for a long time, running.”

“We were?” Chris asks from behind, his face confused. Jaclyn gives him a look and he doesn’t press the question. He will get answers soon. “No. All I know is that my mom and I were in my apartment, then a loud, like, *boom* happened. We went outside to see people like this-“ She gestures to the dead woman that Jaclyn killed earlier on. “-eating each other like some zombie movie. We fled. And my mom, she, left me. Just straight up left me. And I ran until I slammed into this shit show here.” Tai’s eyes start to tear up, but she held them back. “I’m sorry, Tai. I know what it’s like to lose family.” Tai looks at her, something she wanted to say, but holds it back. “I’ll explain this, later to you. It must be horrific to see, but I have to see in the dark.” Tai nods, looking fearfully at her. Jaclyn wipes her mouth with the back of her hand and starts off, Tai keeping her distance from her, but seemingly goes to Chris, who stays silent. She couldn’t run with Chris, but they were close enough to make it just before pitch black.

Jaclyn hoped so.

**Chapter 5: Moving on**

Dark came when they reached apartments. Jaclyn was lucky she didn’t run into any more of those freaks, but they all took different roads when they heard screams up ahead. The apartment they found was small and had blood smeared on the windows. The doors were wide open, and the lobby lights were dark. Jaclyn goes first, hearing for anything out there. Along the way, she handed Chris a pistol, and he held it like a child. Tai was silent most of the way, and she really didn’t ask questions which Jaclyn liked. Maybe she was traumatized, or scared, but either way, Jaclyn liked the silence. It made them avoid any sort of trouble.

The lobby was dark without Jaclyn’s vision, but there were dead bodies everywhere. Some were split in two, and others had their whole head decapitated. The blood was dried though, so it wasn’t fresh. Jaclyn scopes the lobby, looking for any freaks, but there was no sign of them. Jaclyn throws a thumb up behind her and hears the scuffs of shoes as they enter the hallway. “Stay close behind me.” Jaclyn looks for the stairs and finds them down the hall on the left. She looks back every few seconds to make sure they were following, and they were. The stairwell had a drop in temperature, but there was nothing strange about it. No dead bodies, no blood, nothing. Jaclyn leads the way to the 4th floor. She opens the door a crack and looks out. The hallway was eerie and silent, the cold air matching Jaclyn’s cheeks. She peers around but finds it silent like any other day. She opens it some more, the door creaking as she went. It made her cringe, sending a silent laugh through her as if she was in a terrible spy movie. All the doors in their hallway were closed, though one of the doors had blood smeared on it. Jaclyn opens the door all the way. It swings open with creaky hinges, and Chris makes a weird sound with his mouth. Jaclyn looks back at him, face not amused. It looked like the coast was clear, and Jaclyn sneaks towards the first door. It was clean, no specks of dried blood, and the door looked unlocked. Jaclyn tries the handle and swings open with efficiency. The room was trashed with household items. The light was still on, so that meant that electricity still worked here. That made Jaclyn’s heart thump, causing her to smile. Light pours into the dark hallway, and she realized that there were multiple blood stains. Her vision only worked for so good in the pitch dark, and that made Jaclyn happy. It made her *feel* more normal. Jaclyn steps inside, sensing nobody was here, and beckons for Chris and Tai to come in. They hurry in, imagination working with the dark hallway, spinning terrible ideas in the dark. But wasn’t that all? In the dark, everyone thought about what could be lurking in the darkness, but there was always nothing. *Until* now. Jaclyn shuts the door with a muted click, and hurries to the window, peeking out to see if anyone followed them. This side of the street was burnt, the fires long died down now, and charred skeletons of cars litter the road like ants. Jaclyn couldn’t make out any blood, but she was sure it was there like water. There were corpses everywhere. Some even had charred skin and showed dirty whites of bones. The other apartment next to them had broken windows and charred brick, and Jaclyn was surprised it wasn’t toppling over right at that second. It looked like it was on its last leg.

“Ok, let me start first. What the hell just happened?” Chris sweeps his hands in a big motion. Jaclyn switches off her enhancements, sending a gasp from Tai, but she ignores him. “Chris,” Jaclyn’s voice goes on the edge of tears. The emotions swept over her at that moment. She was so intent on finding shelter, that she hadn’t realized that he was alive and well. Jaclyn walks slowly to him, her eyes watery. Their world was falling apart, and now it made her job a million times worse. She promised herself she will kill Ian when she got the chance. She just hoped he wasn’t too far from her.

“I-I, I’m sorry, Chris.” Jaclyn whispers, their faces inches apart. She never cared so much for anybody in her life, and here he was. The man she loved. And yet Jaclyn knew she was desperate for attention. She never got it and wanted to feel what it felt like. Jaclyn starts out in a jumble, words tumbling out, from the fight, to the forest hike, and to her encounter to with those freaks. She felt guilty, for leaving Chris like that in the fight. She never roamed the consequences of leaving him, and it hurt her to the core. But still, she had to shake it off, knowing that what was in the past stayed there.And yet she couldn’t shake her abusive memories. Jaclyn guessed it was the long, stretched years that tore into her brain and stayed there.

After Jaclyn was finished, Chris’ face was one of sorrow. “I’m sorry, Jaclyn. You should have just left me there.” He jokes though Jaclyn didn’t need it right now. Jaclyn smiles warmly. “I had to flee when the police came, and I couldn’t have left you there.” Chris cracks a smile. “You might have a few broken ribs, and you got hit pretty hard in the head. You might a have a concussion.”

“So that explains…” Chris mutters. Jaclyn was delighted at the moment, but a question still burned in the back of her brain. “Chris?” Jaclyn asks. “Hmm?”

“Why did John demand money from you? Or try to kill you? I thought I was supposed to kill him because of valuable information.” Chris’ face looked like he was dreading this moment. He sucks in an air of breath and starts to explain. “Drake didn’t want you to kill him because of the info. You see, he did offer him the spot, but he denied. He could honestly care less if word spreads about R4G9. We traded contraband with him, and we were going to meet up at the restaurant. That was why Drake sent me with you. He didn’t have the money, and I was the bait. You were supposed to kill him either way though.” Jaclyn thought about it and felt disgusted in being tangled up in felonies. She didn’t want to dive any deeper in this conversation and was glad when Tai clears her throat. Both heads swivel to look at her, arms against her hips. “Tell me. What you are.” She demands, looking Jaclyn up and down. Jaclyn sighs and goes to sit down on the couch, which seemed brand new. Chris follows her, sitting down next to her and interlocking their hands. He gives Jaclyn’s hand a reassuring squeeze. “It’s, a long story.” Jaclyn laughs, thinking about how long it really was ago. A lifetime of pain. “So, tell me anyway, so that I know you’re not going to go ballistic on me in the middle of the night when I’m sleeping.”

“If you’re that afraid, you could always leave,” Chris says. Jaclyn gives him another look, and his eyes go dark. Tai scoffs. “Yeah, no shit I’ll go out there right now or even later. I’m not even armed, and I got hurt.” Jaclyn suddenly remembers at the mention of it and puts a barrier of caution between her. She didn’t know, but if Tai got scratched, then she could become a freak. Maybe it wasn’t contagious that way though. Maybe the infection spreads quickly and you turn in a few seconds. Maybe not. Jaclyn didn’t know for sure.

“Are you ok?” Jaclyn blurts, looking at Tai’s side. Tai smiles. “It hurt like hell, but I’m fine. I just hope I don’t turn into a zombie.” Tai laughs, but it quickly turns in a serious manner when silence fills the room. “I don’t know, ok? I just don’t know. Please, don’t do this. I’m fine, really I am.” Tai pleas as Jaclyn debates. “Let me see your side,” Chris demands. Tai obeys, not wanting to upset him when he had the choice to kick her out or not. The scratch was already scabbing over, and dried blood runs down her side. Tai closes her eyes. But there was no sign of infection, and that was good.

Chris sighs and steps back, sitting on the couch again. He looks her over one last time and turns away with an unreadable emotion on his face. Jaclyn decides to let Chris make the decision, her hands were already too bloody. “She has no sign of infection, and its healing okay. I’m not sure how long it takes to get infected though.”

“Wouldn’t I have turned by now? It really takes a few hours to turn, and its nightfall right now.” Tai says, trying to convince the two. “Okay, enough with this. If she turns in the night, I’ll kill her. She can stay, I’ll take first watch.” Jaclyn compromises, because she couldn’t handle herself seeing Tai out there, probably getting munched on. It was much easier if she turned to kill her, knowing that she was already gone. Tai’s face turns into fear, but she nods, glad that she isn’t going to be kicked out. Chris gives Jaclyn a funny face but stays quiet. Jaclyn felt uncomfortable and tries to change the subject. “Tai, I know you wanted to know what I am, and I’m going to give you it. You see, my lunatic dad wanted to give me implants to survive this so-called—“ Jaclyn’s face turns into horror. Ian was *right,* about the virus that was going to strike the Earth to its knees. And that was why he got her implanted. Or to go be his hitman. It didn’t connect, and Jaclyn felt dizzy. How was Ian right? Jaclyn curses him so much, and it hurt her just to be blood-related. How did he predict it? He worked for G.E.B.I, not some science lab. Or did he? Jaclyn’s mind spun, and she springs up from the couch, pacing. “He was right, all along,” Jaclyn mutters to herself. She didn’t know how he could have predicted it, but he must have got something secret other than the rogue group. It hurt to admit he was right. “Right about what?” Chris cuts in from her thinking like a knife to a block of cheese. “Nothing, I don’t want to get you sucked into this. It would be pointless since I don’t even know how he did it, and it wouldn’t matter anyway.”

“Ok, but just tell me anyway, I’m curious.” Chris protests. Tai cuts in too, “No, she was going to tell me what she is.” Chris makes a *very* quiet whining sound but shuts his mouth. This conversation reminded Jaclyn of bickering children. “My *father*, Ian, before this all went down, thought a virus was coming that was going to wipe the Earth of life. He wanted me to be prepared, but I know that was only half-truth. He had me implanted with these, well, I don’t know. These *weapons*. He was very abusive to me, and well, let's just say he was using me for his hitman in this rogue group.” Jaclyn sighs, not wanting to go into details about anything else. She also didn’t want a pity party for her. She has had enough of those to know it won’t make anything better, and that it won’t help. People won’t truly feel sorry for her.

Tai’s face goes from sympathetic, to fear, and finally to curiosity. “I’m sorry, Jaclyn. I know what it feels like to be betrayed by family. My father left us to die in Vietnam. He was a police officer and took his job more seriously than us. We were a poor family, and when he left us dry and high, we had no more money left to even buy any food. It was rough, but my mom scraped up enough money to let me live.” Jaclyn nods, feeling sorry for the girl. No one should have gone through her life like she did. *Anyone* deserved better. There was a moment of silence, self-grief taking over the remembrance. “So, are you going to kill me in the night?” Tai asks, trying to break the thick ice. Jaclyn laughs at it but finds that Tai was serious. “No, but if you turn then you’ll have to face me.” Tai nods, her long and silky black hair moving with her head like strings on a puppet. Jaclyn admired her hair. Chris stays silent, his eyes looking off in the distance of the room, trying not to engage. Jaclyn sighs wistfully and gets up from the couch, Chris’ eyes burning into her like fire. He was angry with her because she didn’t share something with him? That made her get the vibe that he was spoiled, but she ignores it.

Jaclyn needed to change her clothes, and find some shoes. Her feet were okay, but they throbbed with each step she took, all reminding her when Ian did those terrible things to her. He would pay for his crime, and it was going to be revengeful death. Jaclyn goes to the other room, looking in the drawers and finds clothes that were a size too small for her. The room was trashed, and it looked like its occupants left in a hurry. Jaclyn also decides to take a shower, hoping that it wouldn’t be too loud for anything to hear her. She turns on the water, trying to savor every moment, knowing that this would probably be the last time in a while. Steam wafts up from the curtain, and all the toiletries were left here. She strips away her jumpsuit, clinging to her skin from all the sticky blood. Her whole body was covered in blood from her attackers. The scratch on her chest was healing well too, and it dawns on her like an idiot. She could turn too. She didn’t even realize the scratch was there, and she basically slaps her forehead. She was a hypocrite, but she felt fine, and maybe even better with her spoiled shower. The wound didn’t look infected, but there was so much blood covering it, that you could only see the darker shade of blood from the scab. They were shallow and small too, and that wasn’t really worrying. *What if you’re infected though?* A voice nagged in her mind like a fish on a hook. Jaclyn felt like she was being overdramatic. But she didn’t want to die tonight, and it was always safe than sorry. Jaclyn hops in the shower, trying to shake her mind that it wasn’t convinced she was going to die tonight. And, she needed to see the wound thoroughly. Jaclyn cleans herself, the water dripping down looking like watered down blood. There was shampoo, and judging from the clothes and shampoo scent, it looked like a woman lived here. Jaclyn was lucky she picked the right room to have all the essentials to cleanliness.

Jaclyn cleans herself, and turns off the shower, remembering the hot water falling on her skin. She takes a deep breath, then steps out and wraps a towel around her body. She looks in her mirror again, wiping off the diamond droplets of warm water and steam. She looks at her face, her summer green eyes always catching her attention like a moth drawn to a flame. She also noticed that she had very light freckles on her cheeks, and despises them. She didn’t look pretty in her eyes, comparing to other girls. She looks at her scar that had a pinkish tint to it. She didn’t like it there, but always thought it made her look badass. Hating it and loving it was everything she thought about. Jaclyn turns away from the mirror and looks at her chest, the scabs soft because of the moisture. She looks at them, then turns away, fear making her look at them again, but the second time she resists.

Jaclyn goes out of the bathroom and sees Tai sitting on the bed, Chris nowhere in sight. “Hey,” Jaclyn says, water dripping from her hair and onto the dirty carpet. “My turn,” Tai says, getting up from the bed and taking some clothes with her, closing the bathroom door behind her. Jaclyn liked her, despite the situation they were in. Jaclyn rummages in the chipped drawers to find some decent clothes, finding a pair of jeggings and a simple T-shirt. She looks at her feet before putting on socks, inspecting if they were cut. Her left foot had some shallow cuts, but the cuts were already closed. She throws on some socks and a pair of shoes a size too big. But it will do, having something better than the bloody body suit.

Jaclyn was scared, and she felt like the idea of not having the world like it was didn’t really settle in. it didn’t really dawn on her. And now that she thought about it, her insides turned to liquid. She gasps. Everything was falling apart, and she acted like it would be replaced. Nothing was going to be replaced like the old world. This was something new, and that scared her half to death. Jaclyn felt a fear from the past welcome its way into her. It was the fear of something all too familiar. When she was always with Ian. When he struck the fear into her. When she got stabbed, that was when she feared for her life.

Jaclyn just turned 14. Her birthday was that day, which made it even worse in such a twisted way of perspective. Cattie baked a cake for her that day, and Jaclyn felt so happy. Ian was quiet in the corner of the room, eyes a silent fury like always. Cattie was now frosting the cake after she took it out of the fridge, and Jaclyn was sitting at the kitchen table, drinking a glass of water. She was happy, but she knew she couldn’t show it. It was just a gut feeling inside of her when she got happy, being restricted to show any emotion when Ian was around. “Thank you, mom,” Jaclyn says after a fresh gulp of water. Cattie turns back and smiles at her as a sign of gratitude, smeared frosting on the side of her cheek. Jaclyn was getting eager at each moment now, and a smug smile reaches her face. She was happy her parents did this for her, and it made her feel special. Jaclyn takes a quick glance at Ian, his arms folded across his chest, and he shares the same glance with her. But they exchanged no words.

After a few silent moments, Cattie picks up the cake carefully and sets it on the table in front of Jaclyn’s gleeful face. “Ian honey? Why don’t you cut the cake?” Ian only grunts his affirmation. He gets up as Jaclyn sets down her half-full glass. The happiness inside of her kept bouncing inside, causing her to keep the smug grin on her face. Ian grabs a kitchen knife and pulls a chair next to Jaclyn. He starts cutting the cake quietly. Jaclyn looks at the fresh cake. A classic vanilla with white frosting and sprinkles. Her mother didn’t have any candles or had any interest in singing Happy Birthday, but that was okay with Jaclyn. Her mother just baked a cake for her, and that was a lot. Jaclyn had a sudden urge to take a fingerful of frosting. It looked so good and she hasn’t had a lot of sweets lately. Jaclyn couldn’t resist her childish temptation and reaches out to scoop frosting on her finger. But she doesn’t. Instead, she knocks over her glass, spilling water all over the table. It wasn't the sound of glass chipping on the table, it was the fear that sent her trembling. Everything she felt was all set back to zero in a blink. She felt numb inside, trying to prepare herself for the worst. Ian stops cutting the cake abruptly and yanks the knife out of the cake without a single word. Cattie stood still, fear making her tremble too. Sweat was covering her face and her eyes were wide and white. “Turn around, Jackie,” Ian whispers. His voice sounded soothing. Jaclyn’s body trembles and she scoots back her chair and catches herself from falling, her knees buckling once she stood. She looks Ian in the eyes, her lips trembling with sweaty fear. Her eyes flick back to the knife poised in his hand, moist cake still stuck to it. Ian catches her change in gaze, and turns back, grabbing a napkin and cleaning the knife, until it was free of cake. This was the problem with Ian. He was *so* unexpected. You never knew if he was going to freak or stay fearfully calm. It was when he was calm that made times worse. Ian grabs Jaclyn’s shoulder gently, and the touch sent a whimper out of her. His eyes weren’t though. They were a blazing fury, and they had an obvious hatred for them.

Without warning, Ian’s facial features twist and his wrinkles wrinkle. He thrusts the kitchen knife in Jaclyn’s stomach, sending a pain that radiates from her whole body. It shook her down to her mind, and the pain was a black void that singed every muscle inside of her, causing her to fall to her knees. Jaclyn wheezes, blood coming out of her mouth. Ian stands and looks down at her. Cattie screams at what his actions caused, and she starts to cry, knowing she couldn’t do anything without getting herself killed first. Blood seeps from the wound, and Jaclyn wheezes to get air in her lungs. She inhales nothing though. Blood was splattered all over the cake and table, and dark red droplets were slowly expanding in a smoky way, the spilled water engulfing them entirely.

Suddenly, everything seemed a shade darker to Jaclyn. Her eyesight was failing, and her body screamed. The black void had fully engulfed her body, squeezing the life out of her lungs, replacing it with useless blood. It also brought that fear that whispered in your ear softly, though the words sent chills down your spine. Saying: ‘Your life is spilling out of you, and soon you won’t have anything else to give me.’ It was the inevitable time that was all slowly marching us to what we thought was a better future, but it struck us to our knees and cut our throats until there was nothing left to bleed but death itself. When fingers went dead, and eyes became dusty windows, looking into our past mistakes. And the reaper himself was there to see our last dying breath, waiting to see if there was a return in life. Then he would take the empty husks and drag them down to hell.

And he was waiting there, out of the corner of Jaclyn’s eyes, he was waiting for her, and when she tried to look, he would dance away from her sight. He was waiting for her to die. The corner of her eyesight went dead and black, and the world was spinning of unrecognizable walls and bright lights. Blank white walls blurred yelling, and she herself almost went from this world. Jaclyn felt dizzy, and the last thing she saw was an unknown man with a face mask on and white gloves, crouching over her body.

Jaclyn awoke with a scream. She was covered in a sheet of thick sweat, and she could smell her own body odor. She was not in her own clothes anymore, but a hospital gown. Memories fly by her head like boomerangs. All she remembered was Ian and his hatred for stabbing her in the stomach. But why was she here? She was hooked up to several machines that had healthy beeps, and several needles were strung from her arms. Jaclyn tries to sit up, but a searing pain in her stomach prevents her. She cries out in pain as it throbs continuously from the sudden movement. Tears roll down her cheeks, and the hiccups of sobs make the pain worsen. Jaclyn relives the moment like it was minutes ago, and she noticed her life didn’t flash before her eyes. The only thing that caused the pain to subside was the demon watching her. It was watching, and she swore it laughed. Because she was about to die, to become his forever and ever. To fall to her knees and wait for him to slit her throat. But she realized it never came. It never happened where no weapon but the man himself would cut her throat and watch her bleed quickly to death. He laughed at her, but why? Because the demon’s deed was already sealed. Because her punishment was to not be dragged down but to live. Because her life was a wreck, and that only led to Ian. And the realization was that the demon *was* Ian. He wanted her to live in this world. To suffer under his evil clutches and not escape like all the other empty husks. They couldn’t escape, and neither could she. Jaclyn starts to sob under realization and the pain in her stomach. Ian wanted her to live so that he could use her for his enjoyment. But how did she get in the hospital? The question still burned inside of her when a large man rushes into her room like an elephant. He was coated in a doctor’s uniform and his face was of fear. “Are you okay?” He asks. He rushes to her side and looks her up and down, Jaclyn only manages to nod through a faceful of tears. “Don’t move okay? You’re really bad right about now.” Jaclyn’s cheeks were warm and soggy, and her eyes were crusty. She wipes away at them, sending a heavy gasp from her from the sudden movement. “I said don’t move okay? You’re gonna rip something.” Jaclyn only grunts her affirmation. The man goes to a computer, obviously thinking she was fine, and types on it. “What day is it?” Jaclyn asks, hungry for questions after the pain subsided enough for her to speak. The man looks up from the computer, his rat-like nose raised in the air as if he was smelling something. He smiles with buck teeth, and Jaclyn thought he was part rat. “You were out for about 2 days after your mother rushed you here.”

“What about my father? Did he come?” The man tsks. “I’m afraid not, he never showed his face.” Jaclyn’s blood boils, but she dials it down to a simmer. She tries to act dumb. “What h-happened to me?” Jaclyn thought she was terrible at acting, but the man took the bait like cheese. “I’m so sorry Jaclyn. I’m afraid you received a fatal wound to your stomach. You were running out of our handy-dandy oxygen and luckily we saved you in the *nick* of time.” Jaclyn felt relieved besides the simmering blood inside of her. “Where’s my mother?” Jaclyn fires another question at him. “I’m Doctor Heng,” He says, avoiding her question. “You’re going to be staying in the hospital for a little bit with us so that you can recover. Your mother is at home, saying she was not going to be so clumsy again.”

“What do you mean?” Jaclyn was confused. “You don’t remember? Well, your mom and you were-“

“That’s okay, I remember now that you mention it.” Doctor Heng’s face lights up besides that fact that his patient was dying. She didn’t really need to know what excuse Ian made Cattie say. Jaclyn, very slowly, moves her arms. They felt frail and weak, to a point where she had to drop them. She was weak from all the blood loss, and she doesn’t know how much she lost. It hurt to be this weak and sweaty, smelling like BO, and feel like you want to slit your own throat instead of the demon. Doctor Heng looks at the computer, reads something, then looks down and types slowly. He was in his mid-fifties, and Jaclyn noticed he didn’t have a ring on his finger. She wondered why she looked at people’s hands to see if they’re married. Jaclyn felt a pang of sympathy for the man, the looks he was given would never get a girl, but at least he has a doctor’s degree. The pang of sympathy also takes down her boiling blood, changing her thoughts. She didn’t need to worry about Ian right now. He was a pain in the ass, or more like a knife in your stomach.

Jaclyn knew one thing though. It was when Ian rarely showed his psycho personality was when Jaclyn questioned her love for him. At her age, she was always in arguments with herself, even to now before he showed what he was hiding. Just another stone on top of others that he carried on his shoulders. And yet he stood tall. How could someone even live like that? That was a man Jaclyn no longer knew or loved, but hated. All the years of debating wasted once he showed another piece of his life. His life was no mere than an ant that Jaclyn knew she was going to rip to pieces slowly. Let him bleed. Then she would patch him up again only to have him ripped up again. That was what he did to her. And there was going to be a time when the tables turn.

Jaclyn’s whole body still trembles, though the remembered black void loosens around her mind. Jaclyn lifts up her shirt, looking at her scar that ran from the top of her belly button to the right. It was long, but not wide, which meant her insides weren’t going to fall out. She pulls down her shirt and gets up, the sneakers she put on flopping as she went. She goes out of the bedroom and sees Chris on the couch, head in hands and elbows on knees. He doesn’t look up when she sits next to him. *He must be going through some real shit right now.* Chris had his eyes shut, and it looked like he was praying but you couldn’t be sure. Jaclyn turns to her side, grabbing her backpack where she left it and unzips it. She grabs a water bottle, two spoons, and a jar of Nutella, glad that the prison house had decent snacks with them. Jaclyn grazes her thoughts, reminding her that she was starved and that the food might be poisoned, but she ignores it and zips up the backpack once again. She turns back to Chris, waiting. She didn’t dig in though, wanting to share the jar with him as if it were a picnic.

He notices her silence in presence, and looks up, eyes bloodshot and crazed. Dark rings circle his eyes, and his nostrils flare. He raises an eyebrow with tired eyes. Jaclyn offers the spoon to him, and he takes it with a slow motion. Jaclyn opens the jar of Nutella and sets it in the middle of the two, both immediately digging in the jar. No words were exchanged though, and Jaclyn didn’t seem to mind it. Once they were finished, Jaclyn closes the jar and leaves it on the table next to the couch for Tai to finish the rest. Jaclyn smiles at Chris when he looks at her, and he manages to smile back at her. Bruises covered his face, and they seemed severe. Chris had a black eye though, and his cut above his left eyebrow was scarred and healing. His neck was red from the chokehold, but that was about it from visibility. Jaclyn was also glad no teeth were knocked out in the fight. “It’s a lot.” Jaclyn breathes. It *was* a lot to handle. Getting knocked out, being dragged here, then waking up to see zombies milling around and eating everyone. The only thing now that mattered was to survive.

Chris just nods and looks away. She hated seeing him hurt, and that was somewhat his fault. He has to be able to fight better, and if he could life would be easier to survive. She just didn’t know what she could do. “How did you learn to fight?” She asks after thinking a bit. Chris returns his gaze with her. “I didn’t learn. It was just nature.”

“Then maybe I could teach you. If we ever run into danger, you know as well as I do is that we will. You couldn’t really handle those men.” Jaclyn didn’t have any issue pointing out he couldn’t handle the men, and she could see his jaw clench. “I *could* handle them, but there was two of them on me.”

“Exactly. No one is going to wait in line to try and kill you. They’re gonna swarm you, and you wouldn’t be prepared.” Jaclyn thought she hit a nerve, but he kept pushing his side. “I can handle multiple people.” He growls. Why was he acting so weird? “Dude, what’s wrong?” Jaclyn asks. She really didn’t need to handle Chris in such a difficult way. She just saved his life, twice, and now he’s acting all superior. Jaclyn just made a statement that he needed to improve his skill and he thought he was fine. And he even admitted that he doesn’t know how to properly fight. Chris’ jaw tightens. “Nothing is wrong, I just don’t like how you told me that I need to improve my skill.”

“Well, maybe you need to improve. You just got your ass kicked and you think you’re alright. You weren’t. I had to carry your ass through the woods and take the beatings for you. If it wasn’t for me, you’ll be dead by now.”

“No, I wouldn’t, I-“

“No, Chris. Why do you defend yourself and get all mad when I say something? It is the truth and you deny it. I know you know you couldn’t handle those men…” Chris struggles to say something, his eyes identical to Ian’s. “Why do you get so mad? Just because I didn’t tell you something or you didn’t get your way?”

“No, it was just-“

“Just what?” Jaclyn narrows her eyes and looks away. “Yes, it was that. I don’t know why you didn’t share something with me when you thought it was important.”

“Yeah well, that is just between Ian and me. It’s not your business. Just because I don’t share something with you doesn’t mean you have to get all pouty about it.” Chris stays quiet. He looks away from her gaze and sighs. Chris was just getting on her nerves and she didn’t need to handle that right now. Jaclyn gets up to see Tai coming out of the bedroom, dressed in fresh clothes. She points to the jar of Nutella and Tai rushes over to it, wrenching the lid off and digging in.

It was night already, and there were no signs of anyone out there. Jaclyn sighs then turns back to Chris. “I’m taking the couch and first watch. You can have bed if Tai doesn’t want it.” Chris doesn’t look at Jaclyn, but nods. She would let them two figure it out, but Jaclyn guessed Tai would kick Chris out of the bed.

Jaclyn goes to the window one last time, parting the curtain a sliver so that light doesn’t shine through. The streets were empty and charred, and Jaclyn hoped nothing would change.

But she was very wrong.

**Chapter 6: Ian**

“Dammit, we lost her!” Drake screams, pounding his fist on his desk. The movement made Ian lower his head even more. “Yates went with her too,” Ian states quietly. He could feel Drake’s eyes burn holes in his head, feeling the anger oozing out of him like goo. “Him too?” Drake says after a few moments of brilliant thinking. “Yes, sir,” Ian responds. “I should’ve known…” He growls. Drake stands, and Ian follows. He wasn’t sure how plans were going, but they weren’t dead yet so that was good. Ian smothers a growl inside of him and looks Drake in the eye, something he rarely does. “Derrick followed all orders sir, they just got tricked by her. Don’t worry though, I know Jackie enough to know where she’s heading.” Ian keeps his gaze with Drake, then looks away first. “Forerb, you better know the hell what you’re doing.” Drake leans closer to Ian. “Or else I’ll have you taken care of. This is your last chance, and if you screw up like the last time I swear to God *Ian*. I’ll kill you myself.” Ian didn’t like to be scolded like a child, but what could he do? He couldn’t take his anger out on Jaclyn anymore, and he knew he was being hunted by her. She just couldn’t do it now with all the impediments.

“Get out,” Drake says after Ian’s silence. Ian doesn’t need to be told twice. He leaves the dark office and enters a brilliant white lit hallway. He then walks down the hall, takes a right and enters the small laboratory, where several busy people type frantically on computers. One of them, a man with big glasses and no older than Yates, stands from his desk and looks at Ian. “Sir, the vaccine is spreading almost too quick for us to handle. I’m not even sure if we could control its wildfire. Half of the population has been wiped out, along with social media. Electricity still stands though.” The boy’s voice was childish, and that annoyed Ian. He swats at the kid. “Leave. I don’t need the reports right now.” The boy scuttles back to his desk and starts to type again.

The man-made vaccine was created by G.E.B.I to help soldiers fight mental illnesses like post-traumatic stress. It was made to cure the mental illnesses so that soldiers could keep fighting under the government’s regulation. G.E.B.I was a very selfish business, but when going against rivals they had to have secret weapons to stay in business. Prototypes were made, but none of them helped. They made patients even more mental and even animal-like, causing some patients to claw at their eyes. Sometimes though, patients would act like they were cured, but after a day in solitary, they would go ballistic. Snarling at people, not using word vocabulary, and even trying to bite at people. And Ian was the big man creating the vaccine. The corporation put him in charge because of his unique set of skills, and that was before he even had Jaclyn. Ian was the only man who could find a cure, but he didn’t want that. People used to say that after he got the role, something different completely changed him. He never said much anymore, and he would always be aggressive towards people. One time at the corporation, he even punched a lady because she filed paperwork for him late.

Ian worked for years, trying to manipulate the vaccine the way he wanted it to be. And two years ago, he created the Black Tunnel Vaccine. G.E.B.I didn’t even have a damn clue what he was making too, thinking it was the same thing what they asked for. It was hysterical at some points to Ian. He presented the vaccine to G.E.B.I just a few months ago and they took it with greedy little hands, injecting half of their soldiers with it and putting them in solitary for a month. Ian guessed G.E.B.I didn’t trust his work anymore, but they were wrong. The soldiers came out brand new, no side effects or weird behaviors. And of course, G.E.B.I let the soldiers go back to their families for the Holidays, and that was when the Black Tunnel took hold of their victims. It was a parasitic vaccine, where microscopic eggs took hold of the host’s nervous system. The eggs would then hatch and would start to feed on their insides, having no control over their body anymore. The parasites then travel up the body and take hold of the host’s brain like some 1990’s horror movie. When the parasites had complete control of the body, the host’s eyes would turn a pitch black and their veins would pump black goo, which was the victim’s blood and the parasite’s saliva mixed. Ian had to clap himself on the back. It took 20 years to finish this, creating the parasites by breeding two different parasites. It took 5 years for the right combination, and then he had to test how long the eggs had to hatch in a warm environment. Now, the Black tunnel virus was unleashed upon the world at the hands of Ian. It would spread by bite, where the host would inflict infection by their own infected blood. If the victim had black blood in the wound, then they were infected.

Ian leaves the laboratory, trying to come up with ways to find Jaclyn. *Jaclyn*. He hated her so much, and every time he whipped her, he felt like he was seeing the presents under the Christmas tree.

Jaclyn would be somewhere in the city he supposed, from what she knows to her mindset, Ian guessed she would be there. But he could be wrong. So very wrong. And that angered him, for being wrong. He was *always* right, and Jaclyn always second guessed him. He hated her for that, and even her existence made his blood boil. He didn’t know why he hated her so much though.

It was a deep, unearthed feeling that made him do those things, a voice in his head. And he listened to that voice. To feed his needs, or else he would go crazy. Ian walks away from the hall and goes into an empty room with one window and a deadbolt on the lock. A low ranked man follows him, knowing what Ian was planning. “An hour.” Ian snarls at the man, but he pays no attention to his attitude. Ian enters the room and hears the steel door behind him lock heavily. The room was bare, with only the moonlight shining in and a wooden chair in the middle. He looks up at the ceiling, then down at the chair, and a snarl lets loose out of his mouth. The voice inside of him awoke deep inside, and now it was hungry. *So* very hungry. And Ian needed to provide what was asked for by him. The voice controlled him, and Ian allowed it with a welcoming. He sits in the wooden chair but stands right up again. The voice was calling for him now, and he needed to provide, but he couldn’t. There was nothing he could put his hands on. Nothing. Ian could feel the urgency inside of him, knowing what would happen. But he always did this, and he had to go home empty. He couldn’t keep his body in control anymore, and he thrashes. His hand starts to twitch, and he could see his vein turning a darker shade. This was the feeling he loved, and he wished it would stay forever. But he knew deep down buried in thoughts it wouldn’t. And that angered him too. Ian turns around and picks up the chair, tossing it at the cement wall and watching the splinters break in a thousand pieces. It was satisfying to him. But he didn’t have anything else to feed the voice. That hungry voice that pleaded with him, but there was nothing here. Ian starts to convulse, his whole body twitching now. He looks around once more, finding nothing but broken wood and looks at the ground, his whole body calm.

Ian starts to scream.

**Chapter 7: Detective Miller**

*Last night*

DI Miller was in his office, drinking a cold cup of bitter coffee. The coffee was awful, but it was the only thing he had in his cold office. It was 11 at night, and DI Miller was staying late at work. He was about to solve his case, but after 13 hours of non-stop working, his brain was fried. He wouldn’t even call himself a detective. Miller was in his early 50’s but he would never stop working for the police force. It just called to him, even when he became a widower a few months ago. He was dealing with a great force of depression, but working for cases for hours helped him. He barely had time to let his mind graze over *Grace*. That was all he allowed himself to think about before he shut down, knowing if he ventured further he would fall apart completely. He was numb and hurting, and he welcomed it with better pleasure.

DI Miller twirls a pen in his hand, trying to get his brain back on. The atmosphere was quiet, and there was no sign of anyone else working late. The criminal he was trying to capture was something he was working on for a few years now, either alone without the police force or with them. This man was something worth more than a criminal to Miller, something *way* more. He looks down at his papers scattered all over his desk, a dim lamp trying to spread its light across the wood. There were several pictures of the man, having fake tattoos or changing his appearance. He was spotted several times out in the city, and disposed burner phones were found out in a land dump with his fingerprints attached to them. That was a while back though. The police force stopped looking for him after all these years, but Miller continued his search. This criminal was very valuable to him.

Miller looks at the phone on his desk, everything silent around him. He picks up the phone and dials a number, waiting silently until it picks up. “DI Miller. What a pleasure.”

“Cut the bullshit Den, get out of bed with whoever you’re with now and get down to the office. That’s an order.” Detective Den cuts his breathing short, and Miller almost thought he was going to backtalk his orders. “Yes, sir. I’m on my way in 10.” Miller puts back the phone, the plastic clanking was the only noise in his big office. Miller rubs at his eyes with fists and sighs. He was getting tired.

Miller looks down at the papers once more, a mild headache ringing in his mind. The man had several fake identities, using fake names to get into the black market business. He was working somewhere in the city, and every time Miller got close enough to finally catch the man he would slip away from under his nose with a clever trick up his sleeve. The criminal reminded him of all the clever delinquents he tried to catch a long time ago. But they didn’t get too far from the city. Apparently, this one did though, and it angered Miller. He shuffles papers on his desk, trying to be productive without thinking. It was no use though, so he just sat there quietly and waited for Den to arrive.

Den arrived 30 minutes late. Miller just sat there the whole time, a defeated look on his face was present. Den closes the door quietly and casually sits in a chair, his face smug. “Having fun with your girlfriend in bed?” Den’s face falls. “Sir, she wouldn’t let me leave. ‘Bloody work,’ She would always say, trying to keep me stay.”

“Enough with the excuses okay? What we need is to find him. He can’t be too far from the office, a hideout in the city maybe?” Den just shrugs. “I’m not so sure, sir. Nothing I found out would be useful.”

“I know, you’re such a failure.” Den smiles deviously. “I know, sir. I am *such* a failure.” Den grabs a paper from his desk, looking it over and tossing it back on the table. He was a good-looking man, in his early 30’s too. “Why don’t we focus on the latest? Last sightings were at some low-level bar at midnight. He was giving the man drug cash. Traced it back and it was from the heist a couple of years ago. Now we found it.”

“And where did you get the information?” Den asks. Miller sighs, “Security camera. Too dumb to go into the bathroom.”

“Who was the man?” Den asks, taking another report from his desk, then scans it thoroughly. “There’s supposed to be three of them there. Suspect included.” Den says, looking up from the paper. He smiles. “Shit, were they?” Den hands Miller the paper, and Miller reads it with hungry eyes. Den was right. There was a sighting of three men together, though the third looked like he was ordering a drink. The fuzzy, black and white picture had the criminal included. The third man was taller than the suspect, and he stood by his side, looking at the bartender instead of the group. *What were they trading untraceable money for?*

“Do you identify the taker?” Miller asks. He studies the picture then hands it back to Den. “Negative. I’ll search it right now sir if you want me to.”

“Yes go ahead and do that.” Den gets up and goes to a counter, one of the perks of having a big office. Miller scans through other reports but finds nothing else useful. When he looks back, Den was typing furiously away. “Any luck?” Miller asks after a few minutes. “Almost there. Shit, this guy is sheltered well. There are only a few matches of reports in a few cities spread out from the state. All were at bars or terrible clubs. The man is short from some security cameras, but he doesn’t seem like a filthy criminal. Must be black market. No wonder why the drug money was being used. They were trading something, but what?”

“That’s what we're trying to find out here, Den? Do you know his name?”

“Yeah, just came up. There’s a bunch of fake IDs here. How did we not find this guy sooner?” Den cries.

“I’m not sure. Must be well-protected here. Very cautious, but from what you’re saying he must be clean. This guy must make millions. Have you found any name yet?” There was a moment’s silence when Den replies with a positive. “Uh, yeah, I found an old driver’s license. Name… Is…. Uh, John Vedder?”

Miller writes down the name on a clean sheet of notepad. Then writes complicated questions related to the trading. *What were they trading for? And if they have the money, was the heist on their part?* “I hope they are still in our area,” Miller says, his thoughts spinning puzzle pieces. But he couldn’t catch the pieces at all. DI Miller starts to bite his thumb. “Search the other man. Not the suspect. We already know who that son of a bitch is.” Den gives a silent thumbs up from behind his back and starts to type again.

Ten minutes after searching for the man, results became positive again. “Found him!” Den says.

“Who?”

“Shit, you’re not gonna like this.”

“Who is he?” Miller says, impatient.

“Derrick Shay,” Den says. “Criminal charges the last few months, and sightings were out of the city limits, along-“

“Of course, with the man himself. I know. They're working together most likely. They were both spotted in the same exact area, so there must be something there.” Den nods his agreement. “Exactly, sir. But my question is what are they planning? Suspect hasn’t gotten any charges since the starting of August. He must be planning something big, considering the trading and area he was found in.”

Miller nods his agreement. Whatever he was planning, DI Miller was going to catch him no matter the cost.

Den left after an hour or so of brainstorming. Miller went through papers from there, trying to find missing pieces of the puzzle, but nothing came related. He searched more about John Vedder, not knowing him. He was a criminal from a young age, the first record was stealing at a *7-11*. Speeding records, moving cities, and even accused of murder. How did this man not be found? He was accused of murder, from what records say, 2 years ago. Was on the move from there, and he probably ended up somewhere here. How did the police not even catch this man? He’s been living in this city for a while now, and searches of his ID should have come up by now. Miller sighs. A famous detective couldn’t even solve this case, and that even lead to other cases. His mind spun with thoughts, trying to catch them, but he came up empty handed. He needed to catch his first suspect, then the others. Interrogate him, then dispose of his body after, wiping everything clean from his records. The police force wouldn’t suspect him if he was careful, which meant the plan was less risky. Den didn’t know, but the only person that knew was a dead person, and yet dead men don’t tell lies. Miller thought about the man dead, and he smiles. This was only between Miller and him, and nothing was going to get in the way. Miller picks up the original report with the three men, and looks at the man himself. He blood starts to boil at the sight. “I swear to God, I will find you, and I will kill you ever so slowly. I tell Grace this and I tell you, I will kill you. You did this to Grace, and I’ll do this to you.” Miller hisses under his breath. And with that he crumples the paper and tosses on his desk, standing up and leaving his office, shutting the door behind him with a slam.

*I’m sorry Grace, but I have to do this.*

As DI Miller left the office, a scorching hot heat engulfed his back, and he felt himself go flying off his feet and rolling on the concrete. Miller immediately pulls out his gun, which he always kept on him when known as one of the most famous detectives that kicked ass. He gets to his feet and looks behind him, his heart sinking in his chest. The whole office was in flames, and all his work was destroyed. But he was glad his blood wasn’t raining down into the flames. There was no time to investigate though. If somebody just blew this up, they were obviously intending to kill him. Miller runs, not even taking a glance back. Behind him, he could hear screams bubbling up, but he paid no attention to them. He was running and weaving towards the side of the forest, looking up every so often. But the night held nothing more than thick smoke and star lights. Miller could only hear nothing but his heavy breath and the crackle of fire as he pumped his legs. He follows a dirt road and turns left, more or so into the forest. He sprints from there, and takes a quick glance behind him. There was nothing pursuing him. So what was the explosion? Miller runs for another 5 minutes before ignoring his instincts and slows down. It was black from here, and Miller was glad he didn’t trip on anything. The only thing that penetrated the silence of the night was his heavy breathing. It was too silent, and Miller’s mood became eerie. There was no chirping of crickets and no generic night owl hoots.

Miller looks in all directions, gun pointed to soft earth. Nothing came out and tried to shoot at him, but he still stayed on end. He walks slowly now, wishing he could have taken his car. Miller takes out his own cell phone, dialing Den. He answers five rings late. “What the hell is going on here!” Den answers. Miller could hear he was running by his heavy breath and the crunch of gravel. “Where are you?” Miller says, trying to act calm in front of him, but his heavy breathing gave it away. The sprint killed him. “She’s dead! She’s dead! Miller, *she’s dead*!”

“Who’s dead?” Miller could hear Den was trying to hold it together, but he completely fell. “She’s dead Miller! She’s dead! Please,” Den cries. Miller takes in a deep breath. “Who’s dead? Den you have to stay calm. Where are you?”

“For Christ’s sake Miller! Dammit she’s dead! Ren’s dead! She tried to-“

“Ren? What happened? Where are you?”

“She tried to, like *bite* me. Please Miller, don’t make me do this!” What the hell did he just say? Miller stops walking and focuses on his phone. Ren just tried to bite him? “Was she attacking you? What happened exactly tell me. I’m on-“ Miller looks around, trying to find a street sign, but he was surrounded by forest. Up ahead was an opening, and behind him was still dirt. He hoped it would change to road, and hope surges inside of him. Miller was going to get to the bottom of this and find out who caused this.

“Den, you have to stay with me,” Miller says, running at the same time. With the gun in his right hand and phone in his left, he tries to calm Den, but it was no use. He was mumbling, and Miller couldn’t hear a word he was saying. “Miller! She tried to bite me. Please, oh please, please, *please*.” Miller needed to know what was happening, and Den wasn’t helping with his crying. “Shut the hell up! I need to know what’s happening right now.” Den says nothing, and Miller could almost see his jaw clamp and tighten. “Where are you?”

“I’m working on it.” Miller hisses to him, wasting no breath on his attitude. Miller reaches the opening, and finds it was an intersection. The next step he took was on smooth and cold concrete, which made him relieved. Miller squints up to look at the sign. “I’m on 47th. You didn’t get far before this happened. Where are you now?” There was a moment of silence then Den says, “I see you!”

Miller turns to his right, and sees Den running towards him, his dark figure taller and lean. Miller pockets his phone, and looks behind him. The road he just traveled was empty. “What the hell happened to you?” Den says, panting as he approached Miller. But he wasn’t replying anytime soon. He motions for Den to follow, and Miller sprints back into the woods, where they were fully engulfed. Once there, Den repeats the question. “Nothing, the police station just exploded into flames, almost got me there. I ran from here, do you know what’s happening?”

“Yeah, almost getting blown up is nothing.” Den says sadly. He must be taking Ren’s death badly. She was his girlfriend, but the relationship only started a few weeks ago. “What about you? Are you hurt?”

“No, sir. I went back, and Ren was there. She didn’t look too good, and I noticed a bite mark on her shoulder and-“

“Wait what? She had a bite mark on her shoulder? From what?”

“I, I couldn’t tell. I’m not sure but our front door was open. She was convulsing and then like, you’re not gonna’ believe this bullshit!” Den snaps, he grips his hair and turns away from Miller. Miller waits patiently, though inside he was screaming at him to grip it together. Den turns back and breathes silently, scrunching his eyes up. “Shit shit shit! Dammit why? Why!” Den thrashes and punches a thin tree, the bark snapping and flying in little pieces. Miller could see something gleaming on his knuckles and realizes it was blood. “Jesus calm down Den! Get it together man!” Den glares at Miller, and hatred gleams in his eyes, but he says nothing. “She’s dead. I had to kill her after she attac-“ Den chokes up. “attacked me. It was like out of some movie. Her eyes were all *black* and her major arteries were all like, *black*! Okay? She attacked me like a zombie and I had to kill her!” He sobs. This wasn’t connecting to Miller. His office got exploded and now it was like he was thrown in some zombie movie. Miller curses loudly, and Den’s body trembles. “Is the news working?”

“I already tried. Nothing’s responding. What do we do now?” But Miller couldn’t reply. A question still burned in his mind before he did anything. “Did you get hurt?” Miller asks. Den gives him a weird glance. “No, she didn’t bite me.” Miller pulls out his phone and dials the police station, but there was no answer. It kept on ringing and ringing, but no one picked up. He dials 9-11, and to his suspicion they don’t pick up either. DI Miller curses once more, and looks to Den, who was leaning against a tree. He seemed pretty calm, which was nerve wracking to Miller. “They’re not picking up…” Miller says, but the conversation goes into empty silence. For once, Miller really did wish he died with Grace.

“We run as far away from here, I’ll tell you. Grasslands or some shit. Just not in the city.”

“But,”

“Do you want to die, Den? Do you want to go see someone? Well guess what? You can’t. If what you say is true and this is some crazy shit, then we need to leave. ASAP.” Den looks uncertain, but what was he going to do? If he left Miller, than he would probably get killed. He could tell by the way Den was just standing there, his whole body shaking with fear. Miller himself was scared half to death too, but he sure as hell didn’t show it. That could get you killed.

**Chapter 8: Jaclyn**

Jaclyn didn’t get any sleep that night. She was really tired, but her mind just wouldn’t let her close her eyes. So she just laid there on the ground, wide awake. Tai got the bed, and she felt selfish for letting Chris get the floor. So she let him get the couch. She made a decision like she was leader of this trio. But she wasn’t, and that bothered her for stepping up and being one. She thought she was being selfish, but she was the one that protected this trio, right? Chris couldn’t fight, and Tai was only a girl. She couldn’t do anything about it even if she wanted to.

There was no sign of Jaclyn turning into a freak, and every hour she would get up and check on Tai. Tai would be sound asleep, and no veins were pumping black goo. It was silent, and every now and then Jaclyn would hear a rat scuttle near an alley. The city was silent, and it was still dark enough to be around 2 AM. The sun never poked its head through the silent hours of the room, and Jaclyn sat up. She gets up silently and looks in her backpack. They were running low on food, considering somebody had taken a few snacks when she wasn’t looking. They had 3 water bottles left and a couple of energy bars. The warehouse wasn’t very helpful, but she guessed the food was only for the day of the mission. Jaclyn took a moment’s thought and debated between herself, but she won over herself. If she went by herself, she wouldn’t put the others in danger and they wouldn’t slow her down. Jaclyn throws the backpack over her shoulders and goes to the door, looking at Chris. He was dead asleep. Jaclyn opens the apartment door and looks out in the hallway, but the coast was clear. Jaclyn knew she shouldn’t be going on a supply run at this time, but it would mean less people would be bustling. Jaclyn steps out and closes the door quietly. She starts walking silently rather not wanting to make any noise. *If* she did run into anyone, she wanted to make sure her enhancements weren’t going to be out. Shoot her in the back or something. It was just too risky, and she couldn’t predict people’s reactions. So she does this old school. Jaclyn makes it out of the apartment, looking back at the dark building. The street lights were still working, though some of them were out, and others were just flickering. Jaclyn moves to the middle of the street, hood on and backpack clanking. Jaclyn felt tired, but she moves on quietly, looking around in the semi-dark. She could see a Walmart in the distance, and heads towards there, veering off the road. But she stops mid-way when she hears footsteps behind her. And they were *close*. How come she didn’t hear them before? Her brain was tired, but she didn’t think she was *that* tired. Jaclyn whirls behind her, finding a girl her age. Jaclyn takes a defensive stance, but the girl’s face was of fear. Her face was bruised and bloody, and it reminded her of her childhood. “I’m sorry,” She whispers, almost like she was about to cry. It dawns on her that this wasn’t right, and she looks to her left, but was face with something way worse than a dark alley.

A guy dressed a full ski mask holds a gun towards her head. She couldn’t see his features, and fear goes through her. If he saw what she was going to do, he would blast her brains on the sidewalk. “Don’t move.” His voice was young. Jaclyn rolls her eyes to her right, and sees men in ski masks pointing guns at her. She was surrounded.

“Shiiiiiiiiiit.” Jaclyn mutters. Her heart sinks.“You’re coming with us,” The first man says. Jaclyn looks to the girl, who lowers her head. “Don’t,” She whispers again. A man from behind her comes up and takes her away into the alley, gripping her a little too tightly. The first man nods to another, and he comes up from behind, wrenching her backpack off. Jaclyn breathes heavily, trying to contain her anger. If they didn’t have guns she would slaughter them all. She could hear him rummaging through her bag, pulling out the two pistols. She could almost see a wicked smile on his face. “Don’t move or else I splatter your brains out on the concrete, you hear me?” He says, looking directly at Jaclyn. As much as she wanted to, she couldn’t do anything. It would get her killed. Jaclyn looks around, and can sense 7 armed men were surrounding her. She had no choice but to follow them. Guns still trained on her, they lead her through the dark alley where the girl was taken to. They take her to an almost crumbling office building, tons of glass littering the concrete around the building. Glass crunches under sole as they push her into the building. It was dark, and she couldn’t make out a thing. Silently, they take her down a flight of stairs, and the whole complex underground was lit with small fires. There were guys all around, all of them mostly her age. And there were girls here too, though they were dressed in rags and were bloody and bruised. All eyes were on her, and she felt like they were burning holes in her. A day into the apocalypse and there’s already gangs. She guessed people will take what they can get. There were whistles from the crowds of guys, and Jaclyn could feel each mind poking at her. There must have been 30 guys here. Jaclyn looks around, marking potential exits that were hallways. But she was sure the only way out was the way she came, and that scared her. A wave of panic knocks her over, and she gasps. “What’s the matter there?” The first *boy* calls out to her. He must be the leader, assuming from all of the worried faces around him when he passed people. Her anger was getting out of hand, she could feel it. And she knew she would snap like a twig at some point. Jaclyn remains silent as the group stops and earns a few more whistles from the crowd. The first boy looks her up and down, then pulls off his black ski mask. Blonde hair falls from it’s suspension, and the boy was no older than Jaclyn. He had a nasty scar running down his eye and left cheek. He also had a fiery eye, but the other one was clouded gray from the scar. He smiles at Jaclyn, and Jaclyn smiles back at him, knowing he was going to get killed. He took the smile confusingly. “What you scared of there?” He asks. Jaclyn laughs, but cries inside knowing her anger has gotten control of her.

“I’m so scared,” She mocks, narrowing her eyes. “You picked the wrong girl.” He snickers. “Oh no, I’m frightened. You think you’re so tough.” He laughs. The boy unsheathes two knives from his hip. They glimmer as he twirls them in his hands. Jaclyn smiles, though she herself didn’t like the sight of that. She thought no one did. And with surprising speed, the boy had his knife at her throat. Jaclyn lifts her head a little, trying to get the cold steel out of her neck. “I *own* you now.” He hisses. Jaclyn remains neutral, staring him down. He scoffs, then presses the knife deeper into her throat, causing blood to trickle down. “Such a waste, but I guess you’re a rotten one. Might as well use you.” He snickers, then spits in her face, saliva running down her cheek. Jaclyn’s blood boils, and she *almost* commanded for the death to begin. “Bring her to the ring!” He calls out, and men push her towards a hall, no one following but the original capturers. There was no sign of the other girl too. Jaclyn wipes the spit off of her face, trying to map out an exit. Her throat was burning, but it was nothing. This man was going to die tonight with horror in his eyes. Jaclyn liked that idea. They lead her down the hall, the walls concrete and cracked. There were bodies *everywhere*, and blood followed them like their best friends. They get to the end of the hall, and an opening clears up, holding a bare room. They push her into it and the boy follows her, twirling knives in each hand. Jaclyn stood still, eyeing the boy. He comes right to her face, face inches apart. He smiles then strokes her hair, bringing his other knife to her left cheek. “I’m sorry, but you won’t cooperate here. Too bad I have to waste your pretty little face.” He smiles, then strikes at her. But Jaclyn dances away to the right. She smiles. “Too bad I have to kill *you*.” He looked confused, and he backs away from her, taking a defensive stance. He watches in horror as she pulls a trick from her sleeve, daggers growing out of her hands with a sickening sound. Jaclyn takes the chance to strike. Claws raised, she strikes at his face, but he parries it with a flick of his wrist, claws pushing against metal. “What the hell are you?” He asks. He does a twirl then a roundhouse kick, not waiting for Jaclyn to dodge it. He approaches with knives raised and plows through a flurry of strikes, but Jaclyn dodges them with her speed. She strikes again, but he parries. It goes on like that for what seemed like a lifetime of fighting, the boy almost striking her, but she wiggled away fast enough.

He was the best fighter she has ever seen in her life. Wielding two knives helped him too. The boy tries to kick her, doing a three-sixty in the air as he did so. He was going to show off and die too? Might as well pump out the best moves you’ve got when your life’s on the line. Jaclyn claws at him, trying to sink her nails anywhere, but he strikes them with his forearm. She takes the chances and sinks them in his arm, earning a yelp from him. He pulls away and dances away from her strikes. The boy was good enough, but the time came when it wanted to. His time was running low at the moment.

He does a wide sweep with his arm, thrusting a knife at her stomach. She parries, but sees the other coming, a wave of panic washing over. Her reflexes kick in once again after the millisecond of fear, and she kicks it, the knife flying away from his hand. He looks at it for a second, almost hoping it would come to his hands like wannabe Jedi kids. He grunts again, his eyes filled with fury. He looks her in the eye, and she smiles back at him.

It was either the smile or the plan he was sticking to that made him run towards the fallen knife. Jaclyn follows, but he caught her off guard, him taking the lead. She was right behind him though when he picked up the knife, turning around and thrusting at her quickly. She skids to a stop, and sees no chance but to grab his hand and twist. He yelps again as nails dig in his wrist, and jumps back from Jaclyn’s approaching strikes. She could see determination in his eyes though.

Jaclyn kicks at his head this time, but he catches her foot and twists, sending her flying to the ground. She lands on hard concrete, but it broke her fall. The worst part was that she landed on her stomach, where she left her back exposed for him to sink a knife in her back. Jaclyn snarls at all her hard work not even paying off and she kicks to her feet, something cold grazing her left thigh. But she had no time to check for injuries as she sweeps both of her feet at his legs, spinning in the air to get the velocity. He saw it coming though, and twisted his body in the air, landing in a pushup position. He pushes himself up, but Jaclyn tackles him from his blind side, sending both crashing. They thrash and punch, claw, thrust, and kick. He landed some pretty good blows in various areas to Jaclyn, but she could hold her ground. It looked the same with him even with a hurt wrist. Jaclyn moves in with the finishing blow, diving in for his neck, teeth bared. He saw it coming, and jabs his elbow in her exposed throat, sending a moment of choking from her. Saliva dribbles down her chin, but she ignores it as she recovers just in the nick of time as the two knives come hurling at her face. She grabs both arms at the same time, and now they were fighting fire on fire. He was strong. *Really* strong, or it was just that she was just getting weaker at the moment without sleep. Determination still on his face, he sends an unsuspected kick up at her face, and her head snaps upwards, knee connecting with skull followed by a wet crunch. Her vision went blurry, and her head was spinning, but she shook herself. Knowing he had an opportunity, Jaclyn tries her best to back up quickly before he sinks a knife in her heart. She backflips from on her hands and knees, getting enough momentum to land on crouching feet. She stands to her full height and smiles down at boy, his face blurry from her strikes.

He snarls back at her, but stands, not attempting to approach her. Jaclyn needed to recover, her head still spinning. She stays where she was, not taking her eyes off of him. “I could have you dead at this second.” He growls. “But I found out you’re too good to be wasted. If you try to kill one of us, I blow your brains out right now.” Jaclyn scoffs. “Finally a good person who can fight and he tries to kill me. Typical.” Jaclyn accepted this though: it was that she was going to be here for a long time, and that Tai and Chris were going to be looking for her. Like she left them. A sinking feeling wells inside of her. “You try anything clever, I could rip your throat out now.”

“Oh no I won’t.” He pulls out a gun from under his shirt, the same one he held against her forehead in the beginning. Jaclyn screams internally, but remains calm. How did she not see this coming? At least she surprised him with her enhancements. “You’re still mine, you know.” He flicks his eyes above her, then returns his gaze back to her. “I will—“ Was all she could manage before something big and hard whacked her on top of her head, sending her crashing to forbidden sleep.

**Chapter 9: Ian**

Time was running out. Time was *so* running out. If he didn’t do it perfectly all his decade’s work would be wasted, and the world would be an empty husk of ghosts. Ian kicks at his chair, trying to figure out something. Anything. *Just think!* He couldn’t figure out where Jaclyn could be. If he didn’t figure it out, he will be dead, and it wasn’t his life that was important, it would be his work. Blasted Drake wouldn’t know what to press or what to control. Hell, he could even get himself killed, though the odds were against it. Ian smashes the chair against the wall now, trying to get his brain working. If Jaclyn started south, at the restaurant… Ian smashes the chair into little pieces now, trying to make his brain work. If she took out Vedder, then the police came, she would have fled by now? Right? With Yates of course, but where? Ian didn’t know the layout of the restaurant, but would she have gone east? Jaclyn would be smart about it though, so she would have… Ian loses his train of thought, then grunts. He runs his hands through his hair, trying to think. He came up empty, only knowing she fled the scene after the fight. Yates was with her too, and it disgusted Ian. He would get them, snatching them up like little children. It would be *that* easy. Ian smiles to himself, even though every little information he received was going to rip him apart. Drake would get to him first though, and if she was lucky Jaclyn would come if he didn’t find her first. He was basically bait hanging on a meat hook. That made him angry, thinking the possibility of how Jaclyn could finish him off. He was being hunted, and if not being used by Drake.

There was a knock, saving Ian from his mind. He strides over and opens it, seeing Drake there. He looked nervous, and that was a rare sight from him. “Come see this,” He motions, and Ian follows him, leaving the lights on in his cold office.

**Chapter 10: Miller**

DI Miller traveled a full day. Den came with him, not saying much besides when they ran into danger. It was a madhouse out there, and Miller got his first taste of what it was like out there. It was like hell did a little visit to earth. Blood everywhere, deceased bodies lying eaten on the ground, and those *freaks*. With bloody mouths, chunks of human flesh stuck in teeth, and their distinguishing black eyes. But what caused it all? Sure DI Miller was scared out of his mind, but there has to be some type of cause like any zombie movie. A virus? No, the news never had any sort of sickness flying around continents, but Miller thought about how it could have spread so quickly no one ever saw it. It could be something else too.

Miller traveled west, doing several loops around the city limits to avoid trouble. Along the way there were gas station, and Miller raided them with Den, gun raised every moment. They got lucky too, one of the gas stations not even raided and abandoned. Miller was tired from the start, but he kept pushing on. Den was quiet, sulking about Ren. He must be taking her loss hard, especially after he had to kill her. Miller learned a lot from the journey. Don’t talk to anyone, don’t die, and don’t get bitten. When Miller was approaching the city outskirts, he saw a pregnant lady running to a man; it didn’t work out too well. The man shot her and she bled to death like a fish out of water. It was bad, but what could he do? Go out and help with hundreds of people rampaging and not even knowing who to shoot? Miller guessed against it, and trudged on, trying not to look at the blood and gnawed off limbs. Someone’s skull was bashed against the sidewalk too. It gave him shivers, but it made him even more determined to not die like those people. The streetlights were still working, so it meant that the city’s power grid was still working, or that any EMP’s hit. It would be the perfect opportunity for other countries to strike at America. Social media had fallen a long time ago, Den finding a radio but all the major stations were just static. They got attacked twice. The first encounter was with a man, no older than him. He looked lost, but when they locked eyes he charged like a bull. He held a bloody baseball bat, and swung it at Miller’s head. Miller ducked just in time, and with great efficiency, he fires several shots in the man’s chest. Blood splattered everywhere, and his clothes were stained. Den stayed behind him, silent. The second time was with a *freak*. It came out of nowhere when they were crossing the forest, a woman with rags for clothes. She had bite and claw marks all over her body, and they looked badly infected. Stringy blood dripped out of her mouth and she snarls, teeth bloody. Her eyes were a deep and dark abyss black, where nothing in contrast showed. She goes for Den, who was frozen by his side. Charging with her head down and a wet snarl, she tackles Den. He falls in a heap, and Miller yells at Den to move. He couldn’t though, trying to punch the girl. She claws back at him, trying to bite him too. Miller curses and points his gun at the girl, trying to get a clear shot with unsteady hands. Den kept screaming at Miller, saying: ‘Shoot it, shoot it, shoot it!’ Miller grunts and with shaking hands, pulls the trigger. The bullet speeds through the freak’s back, sending an in-human shriek echoing through the forest. Den pushes her off of him, then punches her square in the nose, her nose snapping and staying at an awkward angle. Miller rushes up at the withering freak, then puts a bullet in her head, the dying screech cutting off. “Did you get bit?" Miller asks Den, who looks at the freak with unblinking eyes. “No. Thankfully.” Den says, but Miller still looks him up and down, finding nothing but a small scratch on his forearm. He didn’t know if that was contagious, so he keeps his hairs raised and his distance. It didn’t look infected, but who knew? Miller walks behind Den, letting him take the lead for once.

From there, they never got attacked again, staying in the middle of the highway road. Empty cars lay there lost and abandoned forever. There were less and less bodies the more they went on, but blood stayed a little longer like annoying relatives. It was dawn now, and DI Miller was resting against a tree, looking out at the rolling hills of grass. They would travel for tonight, but he needed to rest. His feet were killing him, and Den was right beside him, sleeping. He would take first watch though, and so far it was quiet. Along the way, one of the gas stations had a backpack, so he picked it up and stuffed it with perishable food, water, and a small hunting knife he pick pocketed from a dead man. He didn’t like stealing from the dead, but the weapon that was *once* yours, could save his life. Miller always had his gun out, and it was laying by his side, pointing behind him. He had 5 bullets left, and pretty soon he would run out, leaving them armed with fists and a small hunting knife.

Miller looks down at the gun, reminding him of Grace. Poor Grace. At least she wouldn’t be able to live through this nightmare like he was. Maybe it was his punishment for not being able to protect her? Miller shut his brain off, not wanting to go in that area. He shuts his eyes, feeling a wave of tiredness sweeping over him.

He could still see Grace’s bloody face, her eyes lifeless and dead. The image burned his eyes, but he couldn’t look away. He was glued to the picture, and he could hear her screams echoing through his skull.

*Help me.*

*Why couldn’t you save me?*

*Why?*

*Please, come to me.* The image is chased away, and Miller could see Grace with open arms. Her face was no longer bloody, but normal. Her beautiful face. Miller runs towards her, passing the blood and screams, and into his wife’s arms. “Grace?” He says, looking up at her face. But it wasn’t her beautiful face at all anymore. It was even bloodier, two huge gashes across her face. Her eyes were not the golden brown he loved to fall in, but a clouded red. The gash marks were yellow and red, infected. And the worst part was that they marked an ‘X’ across her face, blood spilling out from face and falling in the pool of blood. Her scream flashes his ears, then she screams in his face, a terrifying scream that shook his soul to the core.

*Why didn’t you save me?!* She grips both sides of his face, shaking him, making him look at her even more.

*Why couldn’t you save me Miller?!* Miller couldn’t even move his eyes, glued to her horrific face. He couldn’t even flinch when she plunges knives into his eyes, sending a spray of blood and a splash of pain.

*Why why why WHY?!* She screams in his face, and that was when Miller snapped awake.

**Chapter 11: Jaclyn**

Jaclyn awoke to screaming. She could feel the agony of the scream, the desperate help that never came to weep over the smoky death. She didn’t dare open her eyes though. She focuses her fingers to feel again, and the surface she was on was cold metal. It reminded her of the surgery table, of when Ian knocked her out cold and she awoke to something far worse than she imagined. The scream, it died down at this point, though it’s withering wail was the worse of the pain. Or it was just all in her head. She couldn’t mix reality with it. The sound sounded too surreal, like when you were half awake and heard something. Jaclyn couldn’t tell, and she didn’t know where she was. Memory of the fight zips by, but that was it. She never remembered going to sleep.

    A voice penetrates her thoughts like a knife to Jell-O. “…I’m not sure what she is.” It was the boy. The *damn* boy! A flurry of rage makes her blood pump, but she smothers it. Eyes still closed, Jaclyn listens to the close conversation. “Is she one of *them*?” An unfamiliar voice asks the boy. Boy snickers. “I’m not sure. Man, she’s decent at fighting though. Very useful. But I’m not sure how to keep her with conditions like that.”

    “You could always kill her. Keep her on a tight leash.” The other voice comments. Jaclyn could almost see Boy smile wickedly. “Yeah, you’re right.”

    Jaclyn takes a chance and peeks her eyes open. They were about 15 feet away from her, standing in a corner and talking privately, though there was no one else in the room. Jaclyn could already tell her enhancements retracted by her vision, so that meant she has been sleeping for a long time. They usually did that when she slept for about 2 hours. So how did she fall asleep?

  Jaclyn was on her side, staring out at the two. She feels around with her mind but found they were the only two in the room. The hallway was empty, and a wooden door protected them from the hallway. The thing was she didn’t know if they had a gun or not on them. It seemed like they always did, but she couldn’t take the chance. It was too risky. She could call out to Chris, but she didn’t feel the presence in the back of her mind. Which worried her to death. He could still be sleeping, or he could be dead. Two options that were so far away from each other, that Jaclyn couldn’t choose. If the gang found her, then that means they were stalking her from before. They could have found Chris and Tai by now, and it would be all her fault. Jaclyn grits her teeth, biting her tongue hard enough to stop thinking about the thought. She needed to stop blaming herself. *But you were the one that chose to go out at dark without letting them know.* Jaclyn just couldn’t even trust her own thoughts. They teased her, told her the people were right about her, told her that she should let Ian do what he wants. Told her she should kill herself.

    But sometimes she would resist the voices and would troop on, hope becoming a pebble inside of her. She lost hope a lot, but it was like a lost dog. Eventually, it would come back, but it wouldn’t come back the same way it entered. It came back small, broken, or battered. And yet Jaclyn clung to it still, because it was still there. It was still *alive*, though it was hurt. And that was what mattered to her, that she hasn’t lost it entirely.

  Jaclyn shuts her eyes and commands for her enhancements. She would have to catch them off guard, hope making her fearless. If they killed her, well then she would have the burden lifted from her shoulders. Cause’ sometimes to stay alive you got to kill your mind. The conversation lasted a few more minutes of useless stuff. But it stopped abruptly when she guessed they looked back at her. “Why…” Boy says, but it trails off as they approach her. A good sign so far that they thought she was sleeping. Jaclyn had a plan brewing, and it was the only plan she had. If it went haywire, Jaclyn would be on her own from there.

    She could feel their presences on either side of the table, inspecting her like a new species. “What the-“ Was all Boy could say when Jaclyn springs to life and wraps her hand around his throat, digging her claws in soft skin. He coughs as she squeezes hard. “Move a muscle and I’ll rip his throat out.” She snarls at the other man, who stands paralyzed. Jaclyn turns back to Boy, who remains calm, though fear was present in his eyes. “Hello again.” She smiles, then returns her eyes back to the other man who stayed paralyzed. Jaclyn carefully gets off the table with her hand still in his throat, and moves to the side, so that she could see both out of her vision. “Clever,” Boy says, though his voice quivers. She could kill them, but where would she run from there. This building was crawling with them, and the entrance was probably going to be guarded. Jaclyn didn’t know what to do with the gold once she got the upper hand. “You gonna kill us?” The other boy says. He was a little older than Boy, with dark black hair and a jutting jawline. “Huh? You gonna kill us or not? Cause if you are then get it over with before I kill you.” Boy teases. Jaclyn didn’t know how he could keep his cool when he was about to have his throat ripped out. Jaclyn gets up in his face, squeezing his neck tighter. She digs her claws deeper, and he wheezes. “You wanna bet?” Jaclyn snarls. She presses deeper, and blood was streaming out from his wounds. The other boy didn’t dare move a muscle. “Darris, now.” Boy wheezes. It all suddenly clicks to Jaclyn. She whips around to get at Darris, but she was already late. He whistles an ear-piercing screech, and Jaclyn’s insides turned to liquid. This wasn’t her card, it was *theirs*. They wanted her to do this so that she was occupied. No wonder Boy and Darris never attacked her when they had a chance with their weapons.

    Jaclyn didn’t know what to do, so she uses her lightning speed to turn Boy around and wrap her arm around his neck. She brings her claws to his back, digging them in ever so slightly so that they hurt the most. He winces but remains breathing. Darris pulls out his gun and aims it at the two of them. “You’re gonna shoot one of your own?” Jaclyn warns. She could see his hesitation in his eyes, but his gun was steady. “Darris,” Boy wheezes from her. Jaclyn digs her nails around his back, and he sucks in an air of breath. “You messed with the wrong person.” She could snap Boy’s neck at this point, but she didn’t want to. He deserved a slower death. Jaclyn could feel minds approaching the room, and a wave of fear flushes through. She could take down one person, but a whole squad? Jaclyn leans into Boy’s ear, “Try anything clever, and I’ll rip you apart piece for piece.” She hisses, feeling adrenaline pumping through her veins now. She was on her own, with no plan what so ever. Darris still had his gun pointing at the two of them, but now he looked too hesitant. Time was running out, and several people were coming their way. Jaclyn tries to get a quick layout of the underground, using her mind to siphon it all from the approaching people. There were two exits she found. They were far from here, and if she ran, she needed to run full speed. Jaclyn hypes herself up, a ball of doubt welling inside. She could die or live. And the chances of living were slim even with the help of her enhancements.

  Jaclyn estimated the people were a few away, and if she needed to leave, it would be now. Jaclyn inches closer to the door with Boy still in a chokehold. He coughs and sputters at her movement. “Don’t shoot and I won’t kill him. Okay?” Jaclyn says. She was fairly close to the door, and she thought she could make it without getting a bullet in her back. Darris looked hesitant, but he still doesn’t lower his gun. Jaclyn takes the chance to retract her claws from Boy’s back and tighten her grip on his neck. He coughs once more but remains still. What was he planning? Time was running low, and you could hear the footsteps getting louder. Jaclyn curses then makes her move. She pushes Boy with her incredible strength, and he stumbles forward towards the door. She bolts towards it, using him as a shield if Darris pulled the trigger. She flings the door open, ripping the handle in the process, and a bullet whizzes by her head, inches apart. It almost made her stop, but she was still alive. Jaclyn takes a right immediately, hearing thunderous footsteps right behind her. The other group was too late, and that saved her life from them. Jaclyn pushes herself even though her left thigh hurt with every step. Still, she plows forward, reaching the intersection of hallways in a few mere seconds. And it was fifty meters away from the door. Jaclyn turns left, feeling luck from there. She remembered the exits, but she didn’t know where she was. Up ahead was an open room, with chairs, desks, and equipment all pushed to the side.

    She reaches the clearing and found another fork in the hall. The footsteps pounding behind her were faint, but getting closer every second. Jaclyn squeezes her eyes shut and prays she goes the right way. She goes right this time, speeding off into the distance of a dark tunnel. She reaches the end of the tunnel and stops dead in her tracks. It was blocked by rubble and office equipment. The ceiling must have collapsed, and Jaclyn’s heart sinks to the bottom of the floor. She could hear the footsteps reach the clearing, and she moves to the side of the cement wall, hoping they couldn’t see her in the dark tunnel. “Which way?” A voice asks. *Darris*.

  “Split up. I haven’t ventured this far.” Boy says, his voice booming her thoughts like a knife to butter. She could feel several minds enter her tunnel, and she presses her back to the wall, scooting towards the rubble. It was dark, even for her with night vision, so she hoped that they couldn’t see her too. She closes her eyes, hoping they also couldn’t see her glowing eyes. She stretches out her mind, feeling them approach her in a few seconds. The tunnel was wide, though the ceiling drooped a little. Jaclyn could still fight though, so that made her a little comfortable.

  The footsteps stop, and she could feel 7 men next to her. They were so close, but she guessed they didn’t see her because there was no knife in her throat. “Road’s blocked.” A voice sounded, but she didn’t recognize it. “Yeah, dumbass, I didn’t know that we stopped. She’s not here,” Boy laughs. “But what if she’s hiding? She could be anywhere.” Jaclyn breathes through her nose and holds her breath, hoping they didn’t feel around the walls. They were literally a few feet away from her, and they couldn’t see. She could feel one of them so close to her they could turn around and reach out their arms. Jaclyn prays they don’t go looking for her, sweat pouring out of her. “I don’t know man. We could do that if you want, but we can’t see a damn thing here.”

    Boy ponders, then says: “Maybe we should go back, find the other group and see if they have a sighting.” Jaclyn peaks her eyes open and could see them in a huddle nodding their heads. “Alright, let’s go.” Jaclyn sighs silently as they start to jog back.

    She immediately takes a step forward, and a sound like a bomb going off echoes through the tunnel. Her foot hit something, and it went skidding through the tunnel, each individual noise like a scream. “What was that?” Someone says from up above. The group stops running and she could feel their presence go tense. “Shit, what the hell was that?” The same voice repeats.

    “Shut up Henry,” another voice barks. The voice stops panicking, and the group listens for another sound. “What do you think it was.” A voice asks the group. “I don’t know. Maybe it was her.”

    “Her? No. She couldn’t be there when we were right there.”

 “You never know. We could’ve had her if…”

 “It could’ve been a rat.” Voices argue. Though, none of them were Boy. “It’s her. I know she’s here.” Boy says. “How do you know that? It could have been an animal or something. How are we even supposed to fight in the dark?” Henry whines. These people were just little boys, and she was the bear. What was she supposed to do? If they charge her, she would have the upper hand with a better sight in the dark, but she was only one person. Against 7 trained guys. Boy curses, knowing if that was her and they left she would get away. “Alright let’s go.” Boy commands, making a quick decision. Jaclyn lets go of all her breath, relieved. She needed to get out of here before they come back.

    Footsteps echo as they get fainter, leaving the tunnel and going towards the other tunnel. Jaclyn takes a tentative step forward, then another. Once the footsteps disappear, she starts off at a light jog, trying not to step on stray debris. Jaclyn reaches the end of the tunnel, and pokes her head out, looking for anyone. There was nothing in her way. Jaclyn didn’t know where to go, knowing that Darris and his group were searching the other tunnel. She just couldn’t figure it out even with adrenaline pushing her forward. Jaclyn looks down the hall Darris went, seeing if they were approaching but the coast was clear. She turns around, looking towards the hall she came but the only thing she saw was a blade soaring towards her face. Caught off guard, Jaclyn uses her speed to escape the knife by grabbing the hand. The knife stopped centimeters from her nose. Her assailant looks at her with fear in his eyes, and she growls. Jaclyn could feel her body go numb, and her emotions freeze besides the flaming rage. The boy was no older than her and had fiery red hair. Jaclyn twists her body and kicks him with all her might, sending him tumbling backward. The group must have waited for her to come out.

    Jaclyn could feel something whizz by her head, feeling the air of another blade. She whirls around to see another boy, the same age as her. He backs up as Jaclyn strikes, and Jaclyn could sense another person behind her. She kicks behind her, shoe connecting with stomach. There was an *oomph*, as another assailant goes flying from her kick. The first boy strikes again while she was preoccupied, and Jaclyn dodges, moving to the right and grabbing his arm at the same time. She twists, and a scream of pain pierces her ears. Jaclyn advances on the injured guy and claws at his face, tearing cheek and scraping bone. He falls immediately, and Jaclyn could feel herself crave the feeling again.

    Jaclyn hated that feeling, though once she uncovered it again it felt like she never experienced it before. Brand new and thirsty for more. Jaclyn snarls and turns around, two other guys she didn’t recognize charging forward. They both wield blades, though none of them were double like Boy. The first one was a little bigger than the other, and Jaclyn charges for him first. She reaches him and swipes at his face, but he parries with his blade. He swings at her with his left fist, going in for her stomach, but Jaclyn beats him to the target. She plunges her other claw in his shoulder, digging around and scraping bone. He squeals with pain, stumbling back from her. But that was her first mistake.

  The second guy plunges his knife in her shoulder blade, and it felt like Ian was there again. Jaclyn howls in pain, twisting her body around and blindly swinging. She feels her nails graze skin but didn’t sink in fully as the second man jumps back. Using her good shoulder, Jaclyn swings again but misses as he dances away swiftly. Jaclyn backs up to the side, the three of them making a triangle. The first man was pumping out blood from his shoulder, but otherwise, he seemed fine.

  The shorter man twirls his blade in his hand, hatred gleaming in his eyes. Jaclyn smiles even though her shoulder was on fire, and makes her move. She takes a quick step, and leaps in the air, split-kicking the two in the air. Her feet connect with skull, and both of the men fall like heavy trees. Jaclyn’s bloodlust gets the better of her, and she tears the two apart piece to piece. When she was finished, she wipes her mouth with the back of her hand, blood dripping from it. She needed so much *more*. It was like a craving that made you do bad things, but it was meant for her to survive. No one would understand it but her, and that she found frustrating. Jaclyn looks around, but no other men were in the room. The two that she kicked wasn’t here either. Jaclyn takes the chance and runs, going towards the tunnel she didn’t venture yet, blood dripping from her mouth still. The tunnel was long and narrow, with several forks in the way. After random turns, Jaclyn found she entered a small hallway with stairs. *This was it*! She takes two stairs at a time, the air getting fresher every step. Finally, she reaches the top and was in the crumbling office building. She looks around, finding nothing but dawn and a light breeze.

    The sun was just coming up as she ran. She ran for what seemed like hours before she found the right building. Jaclyn’s shoulder was killing her, pumping out precious blood each second she wasted, and a wave of tiredness sweeps her off her feet.

Her whole body ached and hurt as she came to the entrance of the apartment. Her bloodlust has worn off, and that made it even worse. She blinks her eyes lazily and pushes the rest of her energy out to make it up the stairs before the blood loss and tiredness made darkness come early.

**Chapter 11: Ian**

Time was running so low that Ian could feel his own death near as Drake led him down the hall and towards the window. He pulls the curtain fully, and fresh sunlight pours into the dimly lit halls. Silently, he points below, where the entrance of the warehouse leaks security. But it was blocked off.

    A mass of infected pound on the door with dead tissue and nerves. It was horrifying, seeing gnawed off limbs, throats ripped out, and all with the accompany of infected blood in the nasty wounds. Ian made himself stare for as long as a man could see the sight, though. He needed to see the beautiful creation he made, even if the host’s body was mutilated by it. Dull snarls and in-human cries erupt from the seething crowd, and there must have been at least 50 of them.  Ian curses, not wanting to look away but forces himself to. “What do we do?” Ian breathes. This crowd was way too powerful to fight hand to hand, so it made this situation even worse. Nobody would survive this.

Drake curses as well, trying to think of a plan. The doors won’t hold forever, and it looked like they would give any second. Ian watches outside again, the desperate bodies seething like  worms. He could see more running in twitchy forms, making the crowd bigger. More and more were piling out of buildings, homes, alleys, and one even jumped out of a 2 story house to run towards here, all the while the banging on the door getting louder. Drake uses a line of cursing, turning away from the window and striding down the hall, letting the curtain fall. Ian’s retinas adjust and he hurries after Drake. *There has to be a way to painfully destroy the hosts.*

Ian was reluctant to kill them off, but Drake wanted to. The rusted warehouse door would give, but how would the infected find them? In a room and down winding halls, Ian was sure the parasites would get lost and ultimately not lock eyes with him.

   Ian follows Drake as he rounds a corner and into his office, yanking the door with such strength that the door flung open and almost caught him in the face. It slams into the wall with a bang, and the sound vibrates in his skull, ringing like a bell Mother would use to call her children to dinner. “Tell me what to do.” Drake demands, yanking drawers off his desk and letting all of his unimportant work clatter to the floor. Ian locks his eyes on the falling materials, his mind and eyes blank. He found the falling clutter oddly satisfying, and it sucked all of his thoughts with it. Ian’s mind totally forgot what it was thinking, and that was when *the* voice inside of him awoke.

  “Dammit, Ian! Tell me what to do!” Drake grabs his lamp and snaps the thin metal in half, his muscles bulging with effort. That grabbed Ian’s attention, but what came out of his mouth was something far worse. It was too early. *Way* too early. The time had come for him, and now his has end. Something inside of him wakes deeply, like an ancient monster that emerges from the tomb, emotions running through it’s head like a car on a freeway.

   “There is no way,” Ian breathes, eyes still locked on nothingness now. He could feel his veins bulge with black, slowly crawling up his arms like a army of ants. “There is no way,” he repeats, loving the confused look on Drake’s face. By now, Ian had lost complete control, the veins bulging as they slowly reach the side of his face and eye. His whole body felt numb, and his fingers start to twitch uncontrollably. The clock ticked to zero as the last grain of sand fell from the hourglass. “What the hell do you mean?!” Drake demands, angry now. Ian *felt* his eyes move upon Drake, eyeing him up. What was his job to destroy what he worked so hard to create? Ian worked for decades trying to achieve his goal, and Drake was about to throw it back in a shithole. “You can’t. They *can’t* die. Nothing would make them leave, and the only way to disperse them is to sacrifice one to *us*.” Drake’s brow furrows, and realization dawns on him as he looks Ian up and down. Drake had known from the start, and right now, Ian felt like he regretted sharing his life’s secrets with him. Everything seemed off in that moment, like even the air was *off*. It was that awkwardness that made Ian’s blood rage. His icy eyes narrowed on Drake’s, and he could feel something wriggle beneath his fingertips. Or maybe it was his imagination? “Ian,” Drake breathes, looking at what was left of his face, the black veins coursing through the other side of his face now.

 Ian snarls, only able to control his thoughts now. By now, the virus has taken complete control, and the only thing he could do was watch as his mind races. “Sacrifice who?” Drake’s voice turns from anger to confusion. Ian could feel his body move to the side, limbs twitching as he lunges at Drake, screaming. He didn’t know what the outburst was about, but he knew that Drake somehow pissed off the devil within.

 Drake prances back, and judging from the way he grabbed the twisted lamp, Drake thought Ian was gone completely, or he was done with his bullshit of lies. He swings with great precision, but Ian’s animal-like senses cause him to dodge backwards. Incable of words, Ian only grunts and snarls, as he bares his teeth. A thin sheen of sweat covers both men’s faces, and as Drake eyes Ian, something causes them both to stop their catfight.

   Rumbling beneath them, the warehouse shook slightly on weak foundations as the entrance beneath them gave, letting dozens of infected pour in like rushing water.

**Chapter 12: Miller**

Either it was the nightmare or the feeling of cold metal against his forehead that awoke DI Miller. He didn’t dare open his eyes though, knowing something was terribly wrong, and even though his falter in breathing gave it away, he still acted like he was still sleeping. Shoulders slumped against the sturdy tree, Miller tries to stay calm as the cold steel presses harder into his forehead.

 “I know you’re awake.” So well for his plan. The voice sounded unfamiliar, but it was no mistake it was female with a jagged edge to it. Miller peals his eyes open, half of his vision taken up with what he recognized immediately as a Sig Sauer P226. His eyes snake up the pistol, looking at long and bony fingers that gripped the gun a little too tightly, her knuckles turning white from the pressure. *She was scared.* Miller only moves his eyes to the right, hoping to find Den, but he was nowhere in sight, and even his backpack was gone. Miller couldn’t feel the gun by his side anymore, and that worried him. Did Den take it?

   Miller finally moves his eyes up to his attacker. She was dressed in all black, with a hood covering half of her face, shadows creeping up from the left side of her face even though it was dawn and the sky was a honey orange. The girl was no older than Den, with dark bags under her eyes and smeared makeup on her face. Brown, knotted tendrils of hair fall on either side of the hoodie, and bangs covered what looked like a sweaty forehead. Her face was ashen white, with no color in her cheeks, and she looked like she didn’t get any sleep. “Much better,” She says, and her voice was ragged and croaked, accompanying parched blue lips. Her voice sounded like she had a swollen tongue, though she had an edge to her tone. Eyes deeply sunk into her skull, she says, “Now, raise your hands where I can see em’!” She definitely had a swollen tongue, and Miller wondered why. He slowly raises his hands above his head, trying to figure out a way to distract her so that he could get to his knife in his pocket.

   A chilly breeze sweeps over the two, and the woman shivers uncontrollably. “Aren’t you a lovely one,” She coos, looking at Miller, who was at *least* 20 years older than her. Despite her appearance, the woman looked older than she should be. Miller remains silent, watching her every move from twitching in the fingers and her eyes. Foam and spittle collecting at the corners of her mouth, she screams at the top of her diseased lungs, “WHY DID YOU HAVE TO DO IT *MILLER*?!” Tears roll down her cheeks as she spits in his face, but he doesn’t flinch, even when she said his name. She buries the gun deeper into his forehead, the cold steel biting into hot skin.

   It wasn’t uncommon for Miller to be known, after all, he was as iconic as Sherlock Holmes. But the words, how the un-sane woman used them from her foaming mouth, made Miller’s skin crawl. He squirms for a moment, but reminds himself he can’t let his captor take satisfaction. Taking a calmer approach, he breathes as softly as he could, “What did I do?”

  The woman looked at him as if he didn’t know what was rain. “What did you do,” The woman repeats, though it more came out as a restrained growl. “What *you* did,” Tears threatened her eyes again, and her throat tightens, clamping out the words she was trying to say. Miller could see her gun hand shaking, and the black barrel of the gun shakes with it. He watches her trigger finger, but it stayed steady on the trigger, which made Miller unnerving. *Whatever this lady was trying, she would make up her mind quickly.*

   A shadow clears from the woman’s hood as the sun rises to morning, and Miller got a closer inspection of her face. Tear streaked and with smeared makeup, he could see dark bruises around the edges of her face, covered up by the deceased shadow. A healing scab covered the top of her forehead, and dried and crusty blood clung to the wound and skin. Now that the shadow was removed from her face, Miller recognized the face through the layers of dirt, makeup, and bruises. And nothing clicks like it should. She inhales deeply and whispers ever so softly like a mother would to her children when they were sleeping. “Why’d you kill Grace?”

**Chapter 12: Jaclyn**

 All she could hear were voices, and they sounded familiar. Almost *too* familiar. But her senses were just playing fatal tricks on her. “She lost a lot of blood,” A girl’s voice points out, with an edgy tone, almost disappointing though. “How did she get there?” A boy’s voice this time, with worrisome in it. She recognized the voice anywhere.

  Jaclyn moans, an exhausting pain in her whole body, and when she tried to move, her whole body gave protest with bruises and cuts. The memory of last night sweeps through her, and she groans both from her stupidity and pain. She hadn’t felt like this since her fourteen years of torture, and Jaclyn tries all her might to submerge the memories that were piling up like shattered pieces of glass. She couldn’t open her eyes, and her sore body couldn’t move a muscle. The adrenaline from last night really pushed her, and she was glad it worn off when she was sleeping to reduce most of the pain. But her shoulder still bit like hell, and her legs throbbed like rubbery noodles.

  Jaclyn could feel a pair of strong hands grip her waist and stands her upright, but her legs give immediately. She collapses with a cry of pain, and Chris catches her before she could feel the cold ground of stairs beneath her, just inches from her face. “Woah, easy there,” He soothes, gripping her by the waist and trying to guide her down the stairs. Jaclyn’s head hung low and relaxed, and a soft groan escapes her mouth. She couldn’t force herself to open her eyes.

  Then she feels the extra assist as Tai helps carry her down the steps of stairs, neither of their hands touching her shoulder as they carried her entirely once they found her legs wouldn’t work. The brewery of tunnels and turns had Jaclyn panting like a dog, and the only thing that kept her going was adrenaline and fear. Boy was still out there, so was Darris, and that was something that worried her, for the fear of Chris and Tai. Jaclyn could hear the clatter of glass dropping and smashing, then she was on a slim marble table. “Hell, what happened to her?” Chris asks, words dripping with anger. “How am I supposed to know? You were the one sleeping next to her! I was in the bedroom.” Tai accuses, and Jaclyn could feel his anger seeping out of him. “Weren’t you awake? I thought you had second guard or something!”

   “No, I wasn’t. Jaclyn never awoke me.” Tai’s voice trails off, and Jaclyn could feel eyes on her. “What did she do? Did she get into a bloody fight? Did someone snatch her through the night while we were sleeping? Her shoulder lost a lot of blood.”

   “Ya, no shit Sherlock. Hand me a bottle behind you. My mom was a doctor, and if anything, we should clean it before it gets badly infected.” Jaclyn’s whole body ached, and she didn’t bother to open her eyes or even move a limb. She felt lightheaded, and sunlight crept under her eyelids like dark honey. She moans softly, and could feel a hand stroking her hair. “Stand back, she has a wicked swipe.” Chris warns, and footsteps follow, though Jaclyn couldn’t be bothered. She could feel Tai lean in, and whisper in her ear, “This might sting a little.” Then, a few seconds later, she could hear a cork coming off a bottle and the smell of strong alcohol fills her nose, reminding her too much of Ian and her mom. And it was like Ian was there all over again. A flesh melting pain erupted only in her shoulder as liquid drowns her wound, and she lets out a startled cry. She digs her claws in the narrow table, and grits her teeth as the pain dissipated to a hissing steam. Jaclyn’s eyes shoot wide open, and the scene of Chris stood before her. He stood behind a bar table, with several bottles of booze behind him. She was on her side, and could feel a pool of booze and late night blood circling under her. Jaclyn grinds her teeth, the world still bathed in a red glow. Chris curses, and takes a bottle of booze from Tai.

   Jaclyn felt groggy as she took in the world before her, and her eyes felt droopy. Sleep was definitely an option, but not with the pain in her shoulder. It was excruciating. Now that Chris saw her awake, he started to say something as Tai bandaged Jaclyn’s shoulder up. “Where the hell did you go? And why are you covered in blood from head to toe.”

   “Fuck off,” Jaclyn hisses as she winces in pain from Tai’s doing, using the med kit from wherever the hell they got it from. She didn’t know why the words tumbled out, or why her mood was so foul, but it felt right. Chris seemed to be taken aback by it, and Jaclyn couldn’t care less. Her whole body screamed as she tried to move, and ultimately failed. “What do you mean? You were missing for more than half the night and you come back hurt, unconscious, and covered in other people’s blood. Where did you go without telling me?” Another angry flame of pain flared up from her shoulder, and Jaclyn moans at Tai’s working hands. “Sorry.” She mutters under her breath, concentrating. “Chris, please.” Jaclyn pleads, not wanting to explain when she had to make an effort of talking.

   “So, you’re in charge now?” Jaclyn winces, shutting her eyes tight. “Chris, leave her alone. She needs rest, and she hit her head pretty hard on the stairs. I’m sure when she’s better she can explain.” Tai intersects. Jaclyn had nothing to say, nor did she even want to speak. All she focused on was staying alive at that moment, which seemed hard when your body felt like it battered and broken. Jaclyn winces once more as Tai seals up the wound, the needle she was using drenched in bright red blood. Images like those reminded her too much of Ian, so she focuses on the swirled marble bar counter. Chris hides back his frustration poorly, and he leaves Jaclyn’s sight, going somewhere to make himself useful. Tai puts a bandage over the stitches, and Jaclyn felt better immediately. “Rest, you need it.” Tai says.

   “But aren’t we leaving?” Jaclyn didn’t want to slow down the duo, and it made her feel guilty. “No. Where are we supposed to go? There’s no purpose in life besides to survive.” Jaclyn couldn’t bother to argue as her eyelids gave way to a migraine, sending her into a deep slumber.

It was the best rest Jaclyn could get considering her options. She slept soundly, though when she was semi-conscious, she could hear voices in the background. But she paid no attention, sleep pulling her under into the overlapping waves of blackness.

   The next time she awoke, she was able to crack her eyes open. Her whole body had time to heal, and it didn’t complain as bad when she moved. Her shoulder was stiff, and each time she moved it, it bit back in sore pain. Her neck killed her, and her legs were rubbery bruises. Each movement sent a dulled pain through her body, and she groaned each time when she moved, cursing her uncomfortableness. A flare of pain shoots through her thigh as she turns, and a memory surges to the top of her mind. Boy.

   She was in a different spot than the bar table, and realized it was the apartment room. She was lying on the couch, and saw nothing but darkness. The lights weren’t on in the apartment, so she couldn’t see a thing, reminding her that her enhancements retracted whilst she was sleeping, which made Jaclyn wonder.

   She calls for her enhancements and lets her eyes adjust to the room. Everything glinting in red, the room was empty, except for *one* thing. She was facing the door, and could see the slightest movement of the door knob, and then it turns fully, sending her heart pumping blood furiously. *It could be Chris,* Jaclyn soothes herself, but a gut churning fear told her otherwise. The door swings open entirely, whoever breaking in not wanting to be discreet. A tall figure enters, and the sight almost made Jaclyn’s heart stop. Even in the dark, his face was lit up in a red glow, and it held a sinister vibe to the way his hard features were set, and his jaw clamped. Dual knives glint in her night vision, making them look like blood was already on them. There probably was.

   “Hello, again.” Boy smiles at Jaclyn, who tried desperately to move her broken body but couldn’t.

**Chapter 13: Dust and Blood**

“How’d you find me?” Jaclyn stutters, trying to get up, but couldn’t. Acting up had caused her delicate stitches to rip, and blood already seeped through her dirty shirt. Her thigh hurt badly, and her neck pinched. Boy advances, not answering her weak attempt to stall. Even with her enhancements, Jaclyn was so weak she could barely move. The last couple of days of surviving were harsh and brutal, and it all summed up to the worst time possible. Chris and Tai were nowhere in sight as Jaclyn frantically forces herself up and jumps back from Boy. There was no choice, but to do or die.

   Jaclyn moves swiftly, cursing herself silently from the pain that flared up. She limped a little, but with her unnatural speed, she was quicker than she anticipated. Jaclyn dodges to the left, where the small kitchen was, and around the small couch. Boy follows, lunging after her and swiping, trying to catch the back of her neck but she was too quick for his failed attempt. She speeds out the open door, not even looking back to confirm that Boy was hot on her heels. He was *fast*, but Jaclyn was quicker thanks to her dad’s creations. She runs down the stairs, taking three at a time with her long legs, and enters the lobby in seconds. She bolts despite the pain in her body, adrenaline acted like a pain killer as she races out the door and into the eerie night. A light breeze whips at her face as she races out the street, picking a random street to go down. She silently curses whoever took her shoes off during her slumber, because every now and then she would step on shattered glass and submerge a cry of pain that bubbled up from deep inside.

   Boy was silent behind her, but she could feel his presence behind her the whole time, running at his fullest to catch her. Jaclyn sprints through the streets, jumping over spilled and rotten trash cans, avoiding charred or bloody bodies in the process. A building comes into view, and she races at it, the windows intact and dark. It was a library, and as she entered the building she slipped on a child’s book, the thin, plastic cover going flying in the air as she was vise versa. A frickin book was what got her killed. A *book.* Jaclyn hits the ground face first, her nose breaking her fall, and could hear a sickening crack hollows out her ears, but she wasn’t paying attention to the white, hot pain in her face. Boy was hovering over her, a lion readying to pounce on its prey. But his gaze changes, and he backs up immediately, only to come right back to where he was standing. His eyes go wide as he does a three-sixty, staring at something that Jaclyn couldn’t see. But then she saw it. A withered foot comes into view just inches from her face, the smell humid and rotten, causing her to gag. She pushes herself to her feet as she takes in her death.

   Freaks surrounded Boy and her in a large circle, and they were closing in fast. Jaclyn’s head spins as she tries to count how many there was, but she couldn’t be sure. Dozens of them surrounded the two, and the smell was unbearable to Jaclyn’s nostrils. She gags, and holds back vomit as the infected snarl. Boy paid no attention to her, instead focusing on the Freak’s closest to him. Lashing out with his dual knives, he strikes a Freak in the center of her forehead, and she falls in a heap of black blood and rotting skin. Bones protruded from some of the Freaks, and some were missing limbs and chunks of flesh. One even had a hole so big in its stomach that it took up its whole abdomen. They snarl in a thirsty bloodlust, but don’t attack Jaclyn at all. They brush past her in twitchy forms, and advance towards Boy. He was fighting furiously, stabbing the next after next as black blood sprays everywhere. Jaclyn froze her feet, trying to move them but they felt like boulders. She watches in paralyzed fear as Boy fights, taking down several at a time. But he was outnumbered thoroughly. He strikes at one another, but once he finished with one, another took its spot before the body even hit the ground.

   Boy snarls back, and lunges, slashing at a Freak’s throat, taking it down with practiced finesse. But once he turns around to fight another, one of the Freaks jumps on top of him, slashing its own form of claws at his legs, and Jaclyn watches in horror as skin tears and blood pours out. Reacting to the injured area, Boy turns around quickly and stabs at the attacking one, but that was his first mistake. With his back exposed, a Freak takes a chance and plunges it’s dirty claws in his back. He cries out in pain and stumbles backward, tripping on a deceased body and falling flat on his face, a knife tumbling out of his hand. So much for his grace and finesse. The Freaks take advantage of him, and lunge towards him, closing in on the kill. Boy tries to fight back desperately, taking several down before he was completely surrounded, the Freaks eager for their kill. He growls, showing that he was going to fight to his death, but that was when Jaclyn finally found the strength to move her feet. It was like she pulled her feet free from mud, and she was flat out sprinting towards Boy.

   Jaclyn just couldn’t watch someone die before her eyes and do nothing, no matter their intentions. Fighting for survival wasn’t easy, and the bigger problem at hand was worse than hunting her down.

   She lets out a snarl of her own, ignoring the flaming pain in her shoulder and the ache in her body, and lashes out. Her claws her sharp, sharper than the Freaks nails, and probably a Boy’s knives. She catches a Freak in the side of his head, her claws plunging deeply into the soft and rotting skin. He falls with a spurt of blood and a strangled sound of inhuman cries. The next one was already on top of Boy, but Jaclyn didn’t give up. She swipes at its back, getting a grip of its rotting flesh and pulls back. The Freak follows her momentum and stumbles back, Jaclyn swiping with her other hand at its head. Her nails scrape bone as she rips her other hand out of its back. The Freaks seemed to pay no attention to her even after she attacked their own, but it paid Boy some time to scramble up swiftly and grab his fallen knife, striking out at the nearest one that lunged for him, teeth gnashing wildly. He catches it in the Freak’s throat, and it falls down, still gasping for air like a fish out of water. It lets out an inhuman cry as the Freaks advance. Jaclyn snarls, knowing it was too late to become a human being. She cries inside, but lunges out the nearest one that was pushing its way towards Boy eagerly. The Freak had half of its cheek torn out, and exposed tendons and muscles flex as the Freak opens its mouth. The area was infected, and the skin was pale with a gray tint to it. All of their eyes were circling black pits, devoid of anything human but a dusty hollow shell. Veins bleed thick, black blood, and each time a throat was slit a spray of black Mercury would stain everything in its wake.

    Boy was fighting furiously again, pulling out tricks that had Jaclyn in amazement even as she fought herself. His eyes were fiery black pits, and each time he earned a kill, black blood would stain his blonde hair and fall onto his naturally pale face. Speckled in black blood, Jaclyn fights and falls in place next Boy, fighting back to back. Alone, they couldn’t beat the Freaks, but now, Jaclyn had a smother of hope that they would walk out of the library. If Boy didn’t get to her after.

 She tries to concentrate on fighting, tearing at the nearest Freaks with raging fire in her stomach. By now, the pain in her shoulder and body has dulled completely, and she couldn’t feel anything even if she tried to. Jaclyn swipes, catching a Freak in the stomach and it screeches in pain. The Freak lashes out too, clawing at Jaclyn’s forearm weakly. Though it broke skin, Jaclyn didn’t notice as she quickly finishes the Freak, another taking its position. Jaclyn sneaks a quick glance at Boy, his body a dark blur as he takes down two Freaks in seconds with great agility and finesse. She turns her attention back just in time to dodge a Freak’s rotting teeth. Stained with glossy blood, the Freak bares it teeth and snarls at Jaclyn. Jaclyn snarls back. Using more humane moves, Jaclyn kicks the Freak in the head, then finishes it by attacking the heart. Digging around the Freak’s chest, Jaclyn rips the diseased heart out, the veins black and the blood red muscle had a black tint to it. It still beats in her bloody hand, and Jaclyn quickly discards it, throwing it at its owner’s face. The Freak manages a wheeze of air as it claws as something imaginary before tumbling to the ground, black blood creating a thick puddle beneath Jaclyn’s feet. She didn’t even find the emotions to back up her thoughts as Jaclyn whirls, screaming cries. She dives for another Freak that was behind the one attacking Boy but it ultimately meets blade than flesh. She rips at the back of its neck, tearing muscles and tendons that spurt black. It screeches and tries to attack Jaclyn, but she was too quick. Swiftly plunging her blood soaked daggers into the base of its skull, she scrapes bone and brain. Her daggers went so deep that her fingers were touching the Freak’s head, and she estimated that the daggers were halfway through its thick head. Jaclyn pulls out with more force than intended, and she rips out a chunk of skin still attached with ratty hair. Jaclyn didn’t feel anything except for the need of revenge, even though they really didn’t do anything to her.

Jaclyn takes down two more with the same finesse, and still didn’t feel any sort of emotions. Besides the revenge that became thirsty. Jaclyn fights, every kill boosting her energy, until she was killing more than Boy could. Bodies littered the floor every inch, and it looked like the library was flooding with black blood, swirling in the thick puddles. Chunks of flesh and bone bathed in the swirling black as Jaclyn added more and more. Several times she slipped, but quickly regained her balance and attacked. This was the worst Jaclyn’s temper got out, along with the demon, and it was a swirling rampage of blood and death. Jaclyn was so engrossed in fighting that she didn’t even realize that someone else entered the library, until the last Freaks stood. She caught a glimpse of raven black hair, and blue eyes, but that was all she could get out before another Freak pounces on her. Caught off guard, Jaclyn was sent tumbling with a growl instead of a gasp. Blood soaks her back as she lands on the cool cement, the impact sending shockwaves of numbed pain through her. The Freak cries its own tongue, and stringy salvia hang from its mouth, already bloodied with victims. Face inches from Jaclyn’s, she swallows a gag. The stench was horrible, and each breath of rotten air made her stomach revolt. The Freak’s eyes were pitch black, and nothing but hollowness and death beheld its definition. Up close, the skin was pale, and it was peeling off like an orange. Hanging flaps of skin sagged on hinges, and yellowed bones protrude from the inside.

After taking a good look of the Freak, Jaclyn snaps. She flings the Freak off of her, and scrambles to her feet. Leaping over several bodies, Jaclyn kicks the Freak in the chest, and it stumbles back, a once determined cry turned into a wheeze as the air was knocked out of its rotting lungs. She swipes, and Freak attempts to jump back, but failed. Her daggers catch the side of its face, and a spurt of blood escapes from the pale skin. She didn’t stop from there. Jaclyn goes low, swiping at the Freaks legs, and succeed when it falls to the ground, unable to get up. She towers over it, looking down at the withering creature. The human it once was, was gone. Jaclyn could almost see the life from it, the loving father it once had been, doomed to become something much worse than what he imagined. The creature moans in pain as it tries but fails to get up, blood slowly draining from its feeble body. Something penetrates Jaclyn’s blind rage: Grief. The man it once have been, was gone. Like a snap of her fingers, a life would be gone, forever dammed to see anything but the dying light of the sun. Black blotches threatened his eyesight, and soon nothing would be recognizable as the poor man relives the death of him. Now the only thing to remind the world that he was still there, but not *really* there, was the body that was inhabited by something worse. Something so bad that it made the man’s hollow shell turn on his own family and eat them.

That was what Jaclyn saw. The grief ebbed Jaclyn’s rage, and soon she could feel a tear trickle down her cheeks. But what she said aloud, was the demon that was running loose. “Screw you,” She says furiously, her voice hoarse. And with that, Jaclyn kneels down, her bones popping with the effort. She lets the tears rain down furiously, though she never made a peep. Jaclyn plunges her daggers in its throat so deep, that the head hung by a thin strip of flesh. The *Freak* was long gone, but Jaclyn wasn’t finished. She grips the greasy hair and rips of the head, chucking it somewhere behind her. She hears it skid across the bloody floor with a wet smack.

Jaclyn knew that there was no more bodies hungry for flesh, so she retracts her enhancements, itching for the demon to hide again, to cower behind its stupid cloak. But that was the first mistake. She couldn’t see anything as her stubborn eyes refuse to adjust to the darkness again. The second was, she had no weapon to defend herself when a presence steps behind her silently. She whirls, backing up from the frame of a Freak, and snarls. Her whole body goes rigid as it advances faster than she hoped, cursing her rage and blind fury for not getting her enhancements out earlier than she wanted. Finding no other way, Jaclyn turns and runs, but the figure grabs her hurt shoulder. But the gesture wasn’t harsh or hungry; it was gentle even though the fingers dug in her shoulder to keep her from running. Jaclyn forces her enhancements out with fear instead of fury, not realizing what the gesture meant. Jaclyn swipes at the hand on her shoulder and turns to face her attacker. Her eyes adjust, and she takes a step back before realizing it was no Freak. It was Boy. Seeing her daggers, Boy takes a cautious step back from her. “What do you want?” Jaclyn spits, the fight forgotten. Jaclyn takes a glimpse of black hair and blue eyes behind Boy, and realizes Darris was here too. What was he doing her?

“What do you think?” Boy asks. His whole body was soaked in black blood, and his face was splattered with it. His hair also had flecks of black in them too, making them pop from his blonde hair. His good eye was its normal brown shade, though it didn’t hold any fury in them. The gray and clouded one was devoid of anything. Jaclyn takes a step back. “You’re going to finish what you’ve started?” She asks, eyeing his sheathed knives. She takes another glance at Darris, who looked like he was covered in blood. It had no traces of black to it.

“The compound’s gone.” Boy says, sadness in his voice. What the hell was he talking about? A minute ago he wanted me bleeding to death, but now he’s telling me about his compound like I was his favorite buddy. “What the hell has this have to do with me?” Jaclyn growls, wanting to let him know that she wasn’t his friend. “It’s been breached. Everyone’s dead.” A word of silence falls over Jaclyn as she takes in the death Boy was telling. Dozens of people dead within the snap of a finger. “Everyone died to those *things*,” Boy gestures to dead Freaks lying lifelessly on the ground. “What are those thing?” Boy demands, fear for once in his words. He has never seen the Freaks? Why do you think the world was turned upside down? “You don’t know what that is?” Jaclyn says, curious. “No. I was below ground when the world went to hell, and only traveled at night. I guess I was lucky.” Jaclyn scoffs. Then how did he have a whole frickin army of people there? How did he have so many weapons? And most of all, why did he have imprisoned woman there? Though Jaclyn already knew the answer, and it disgusted her so much that she couldn’t bring herself to think about it. “What do you want with me?” Jaclyn carefully chooses her words. Boy smiles, though it had no trace of murderous intentions. “Darris was the only survivor. We have nothing, and seeing the bigger problem…” Boy trails off. Jaclyn realizes what he was asking, and her eyes go wide. Her hair triggered temper gets pulled too hard. “Then why did you just try to murder me?!” Jaclyn snarls, scolding herself. Although Boy had a point that they had a bigger problem at hand, it made no sense that her designed killer would want to do that with his intended victim. Boy’s face holds no emotions, though Jaclyn could see gears turning in his heads. His emotions radiated off of him, and it was determination. “We have a bigger problem. If we want to survive, you have to trust me and I have to trust you. I came after you because I had a rage that controlled me. No *one* ever tied me in a fight. I had the urge to finish it, and now after this fight, I realize that we can’t be fighting amongst each other when this is a bigger problem.” Boy stares boldly in Jaclyn’s eyes. She stares back. He *did* have a point, but Jaclyn didn’t let things go so easily.

Her mind whirls, trying to decide. “You also saved my life,” Boy adds, seeing Jaclyn’s debating. She did save his life, but why? Now, Jaclyn couldn’t recall at all, but all she could say was that she didn’t want his blood on her hands. Guilt did that to her. It *always* found a way to penetrate even the boldest.

A new thought slices through her mind. If Jaclyn was going to be this stubborn, she wouldn’t get too far in this situation. Being like her snarky self, she would eventually get killed from isolating herself, having no one to save her. It hurt to admit being weak and needing help, but it was better than losing your life. If Jaclyn wanted to live, she would have to put this all behind her. Jaclyn bites her lips softly with her canine teeth, and nods towards Boy. Boy nods back.

Jaclyn retracts her enhancements after skimming Boy’s emotions. There was no sign of attacking her. “We need to leave the city.” Boy urges after he falls in step next to her. Darris averts his eyes from her, though he follows them out of the library. Leaving the stench of death, Jaclyn wipes at her eyes, trying to take away the tears, but ends up smearing blood on her face. “I have something to do first.” Jaclyn says quietly, looking up at the sky. The sun was just rising. Jaclyn starts at a run, not waiting to see if the two boys were going to follow. Barefoot, Jaclyn tries to avoid stepping on broken glass or anything with a sharp tip. Even if she did step on something harsh, it didn’t have a huge impact on her as her shoulder started to burn. The bleeding had slowed to a stop since she ripped her stitches, but it didn’t stop it from radiating harsh barks of pain. She moans, and hopes that the two didn’t hear her. But in fact, they were far behind her. Was she running too fast? Jaclyn slows her pace and rounds the intersection to where the apartment was. She goes inside, stopping her running, and walks cautiously. Taking the steps slowly, Jaclyn opens the door to the apartment.

Tai’s body was visible on the couch. Her head snaps up from the door creaking open in alarm, but Jaclyn waves her hand in dismissal. “The fuck you’ve been?!” Tai immediately yells. The first thing Jaclyn notices besides her was the absence of Chris. “Where is he?” Her mood darkens. Tai’s eyes glimmer.

“He went looking for you.” Was all she could manage to express. “We heard what happened, and when we came out of the room, you were gone.”

“Do you know where he went?” Jaclyn asks as a dark cloud hovers over her head. Tai shakes her head. Jaclyn plunges into her head, looking for the presence, but it was nowhere in sight. Chris was *really* gone. “I can’t feel him.” Jaclyn gasps. Tai’s eyes go wide as Darris and Boy approach. “Jaclyn!” Tai shrieks, thinking they were a threat. Jaclyn raises her hands to calm Tai. “It’s okay. There with us.”

“Us?!” Tai demands. Jaclyn takes a deep breath. “What the hell is happening?! You disappear one night and come back bloodied and bruised, then the next night you run away and come back in blood not your own! And then Chris never comes back!” Tai yells. A pang of sympathy courses through Jaclyn. Tai was only so young, and under this stress and death, it was hard for her to cope with anything now.

“Look, I know what you’re dealing with. Okay? I know what it is like to lose people. Everyone has. To be deceived by your closest ones, and it breaks you in half. I know what it’s like. Remember Ian? Remember what I told you?” Jaclyn tries to say the words on her mind all at once, but it didn’t come out the way she wanted. “The world is a shithole and no one seems to mind it. And look at them now? No one knows what to do in life now.” Jaclyn lowers her voice, “But we got to stay alive, right? We have to be strong. Look, I know I’ve done some things you wouldn’t like, and I take the full blame. But right now, you have to trust me one this one. If we dwell on this, we may never find Chris, okay?” Jaclyn stares deeply into Tai’s eyes. After a moment of reluctance, Tai nods her understanding. “Pack your stuff. We’re leaving.”

“Where?” Tai asks.

“Somewhere not here.” Jaclyn replies, not bothering to answer in detail. In truth, she didn’t know where they were heading, but the first thing set engraved was that it couldn’t be here. Tai scrambles to pack her belongings as Jaclyn makes a beeline for the room full of clothes, not caring if Boy and Darris followed inside. She strips her clothes off, making it hard since everything was sticky with blood and sweat. Jaclyn lets out a shaky breath as she tries hard not to focus on her shoulder. Grabbing a bathroom towel, Jaclyn wipes off the excess blood on her body, scrubbing until her skin was raw.

Finding it worthless to use the blood soaked towel, Jaclyn tosses it to the ground. As she grabs a pair of clothes and tentatively puts on a fresh pair of clothes as she senses someone in the doorway. “What?” She calls behind her. Boy clears his throat, “Where you from?” He asks, his voice light. “Why do you ask me this? Why are you so friendly to me now?” Jaclyn asks, trying to keep her voice emotionless.

“Because you need someone like that. I can see it.” Boy says, a warm smile finding his lips. Jaclyn went silent, hoping that his answer was wrong. She didn’t need people’s sympathy. “I already had someone like that, but they’re gone now.” Jaclyn turns around to face Boy.

“Why don’t you trust me? The world is screwed up and there’s bound to be people like that too. *I’m* one of those people. I screwed up, and I’m sorry. To everyone.” He adds quietly. Jaclyn looks into his eyes, seeing nothing but pain in them, and his scar was paler than his skin. Jaclyn holds the gaze with him. “I don’t trust people because I don’t want to be disappointed when they turn on me. I don’t trust people,” Jaclyn hisses, “because I want to save myself from the pain. I’ve already had enough of it.” Jaclyn brushes past Boy as she storms out of the room. *Maybe* he was right, that she needed someone, and that was true. But Jaclyn didn’t *want* someone, because the last person whipped her to death. That person, killed everything that was alive inside of her, and still managed to call the empty corpse his daughter.

“Wait,” Boy calls. Jaclyn didn’t slow, grabbing another backpack from the closet and packing it with anything her eyes laid on. It kept her from thinking about Ian, though her hands shook viciously. She was a mess. Heart heavy, Jaclyn tries to concentrate on anything but her depressed thoughts. “Jaclyn,” Boy says. She didn’t acknowledge the fact that he knew her name. He grabs her shoulder, hard. “What the hell do you want, Boy? What do you want to say? To say everything is okay? It’s not. Nothing’s okay, and there’s not a single shit you could do to fix that. I barely know you anyway.” Jaclyn spits. Boy’s face falls in sympathy, and it made her blood boil. She had to restrain herself to keep from lashing out at him. “Shade,” Boy says.

“What?”

“My name is Shade.” Shade says, his body rigid and tense. Jaclyn didn’t say anything, trying to keep from having a breakdown in front of him. Right now, it was unbearable.

Everything was so stressful. Everything was broken to pieces. Everything was *gone*. Her life, her childhood, her *father*, and even herself. Chris was nowhere in sight, she was a raging monster that craved blood when it spills, and she didn’t feel anything inside. Only the sadness, rage, and grief. That was something she came all too familiar with in her life. What was the point?

Jaclyn lets out a stuttered sob, and her hands shake like an earthquake. She couldn’t grip anything, so she buries her bloody hands in her face. Tears fall from her face, and her body shakes uncontrollably. She cries out, wailing. What was the point to live? Why was she even here? It happened so quickly. From being okay to a mess. She knew why though: the thought of acknowledging her life from a different point of view, and seeing how screwed up it was. The thought reopened old wounds in her head, and there was no salve to ease it away.

“Why me?” Jaclyn sobs quietly, and could feel hands on her shoulders. She let them be there. Jaclyn grabs the nearest thing by her: A kitchen knife. She tries to end her life, to get rid of her burden to the others, to stop the pain. But strong hands grip them, wrestling with her weak, but enhanced, strength. She pushes harder, trying to get her grip out of Shade’s, but her shaking hands wouldn’t help. A pathetic wail escapes her lips as her grip loosens on the knife, causing it to fly out of her hands as the blade skims her wrist. She wished the pain in her wrist was unbearable, but it wasn’t and that made it hurt even more than the wound itself. She honestly didn’t want to end her life. She didn’t want any of it. But what Jaclyn wanted was the pain to end. To end it was something she would normally think twice about, but now, she didn’t even need to think. Being too desperate was hurting her too. And the problem with not being too ignorant in her mind is that she acknowledges her pain of being so desperate, and it calls the voices. Good or bad, she couldn’t tell. Telling herself she was weak, she was pathetic, she was worthless, caused even more pain inside. It was a never-ending cycle of pain and self-cruelty. What a mess she was as Jaclyn looks inside of her torn and shattered body. All she found was a broken cloak in a vast emptiness. And *it* was roaming free. It was gone, yet it was still there engraved in her gut. Looking in the horizon of her dead childhood, Jaclyn feels a sharp pain in her head. It knocks her back, stumbling in the darkness as another blow comes to stomach, knocking all the air out of her lungs.

Jaclyn’s head spins as she falls to her knees, another blow causing her vision to blur. The sharp and clean sound of bone snapping makes Jaclyn’s vast world spin, until her sight matched the darkness of her world. Complete darkness surges to light like a small flame in a tunnel. Everything coming back with a stumble and spin, Jaclyn looks around in reality. She could feel blood in her mouth, and her head hurt so bad that she thought she might black out again. Jaclyn tries to breathe but found she couldn’t, panic making her gasp for air now. Vision blurry with blood, Jaclyn makes out a distinct figure on top of her. Choking her.

She gasps for another gulp of air as her flight or die instincts kick in. Kicking blindly, her foot makes contact and could feel the hands on her windpipe loosen. She pushes her attacker off of her, barely realizing her hands were claws as they break skin through clothing. She snarls, though her mouth wasn’t her own anymore. She couldn’t do anything as her body becomes stiff, her legs and arms not listening to her commands to move. She gives out a startled scream as her body disconnects from her brain, sending sharp, throbbing pains in her head, bouncing off the walls to be free. Her mouth shuts abruptly, her vocal cords paralyzed and dead from her commands. She couldn’t move a thing; her body not her own anymore. A fresh wave of black fear pushes it way free from her head, making her eyes go wide and sweat to pour down her face. Her body goes numb, and could be only damned to watch now.

Jaclyn could barely feel her body as it moves swiftly, faster than she could have. It grabs her dazed attacker by the throat and lifts him off the ground like nothing, possessing strength she didn’t even know she had. Another wave of fear, bigger than the last, pierces her heart as her bloody vision sees her attacker’s face. *No, no, no, no, no.* Shade’s wide-eyes stare into her own, his face one of surprise by her swift attack. She could feel her nails pierce skin as they tighten on his neck, a growl emitting from her throat.

*Shade!* Was all Jaclyn could do in her mind. Hoping her possessed body wouldn’t kill him, Jaclyn plunges into the water, trying to fight her own mind. It was no use; she couldn’t produce enough fight to do it, let alone *know* how to do it. All she could do was watch in horror as Shade’s life drains each second.

Though her body was numb, it didn’t condemn her to feel strong hands throwing her back. Caught off guard, Jaclyn’s body stumbles backwards, and her grip on Shade gives. Then it all came down in that moment. Shade stumbles and falls to his knees, gasping for air as blood slowly trickles down his throat; a series of dulled, but powerful punches make contact with her body; and then a sharp pain in her head. Her mouth opens up and screeches, and realizes it was *her* this time. She catches a glimpse of black tendrils moving down her arms, wriggling in life. But she couldn’t watch as she shuts her un-paralyzed eyes and screeches again, her head a ringing bell. The sound and pain engulfed reality, and she covers her ears, digging her claws in her scalp. She barely registered the latter pain; the pain so consuming it almost made her black out. But she fights to hang on the shoestring of reality, her grip firm.

After what seems like minutes of never-ending pain, it stops. So eerily, it stops abruptly, and then she was left with reality. Her head was spinning, and she couldn’t even register which way was up or down. Her head was scrambled, and Jaclyn couldn’t match three faces to her mind. Her instincts kick in, and she scrambles to run out of a un-recognizable room. She was captured; her mind though, supplying ideas of how she got there. She runs to the front door of the room, so quick she was a blur of movement. Yanking the door open, she bolts down the hallway, not knowing where the stairs were. Jaclyn could hear wild footsteps in pursuit.

“Hey! Get back here!” A male’s voice yells. She looks frantically, but gives up in finding an exit. She could handle a fight; after all, she almost took down one of them. Jaclyn faces the man, his features sharp and cutting with black hair. Another male comes up behind him, with blonde hair and a nasty scar trailing down his forehead to right below his eye, the eye clouded and gray. There was no sign of the third person. Backing up against the end of the hallway, Jaclyn tries to swallow her fear. “Who are you?!” She demands in a meek voice. There was no reaction on the guys’ faces. “What do you want with me?!” She asks again, trying to steady her breathing. This time, the two guys share a glance of confusion, but the black haired guy’s face turns to rage once he turns back to her. Blonde Head’s face goes back to clouded confusion. “Please,” Jaclyn pleads, seeing no way but to face the two. “I’m warning you!” Her voice bites back, trying to strike fear in them. After all, she had her claws and teeth. She looks down at her arms, trying to see what the two were staring at. Her blood turns to ice, and could smell the sickly, sweet scent of fear. Her skin was pulsing with black, trailing up from her wrists to her neck. She lets out a blood curdling scream as she realizes what was happening.

The scream seemed to send Black Hair into action. He lunges at her, something shiny in his hand. Her instincts weren’t going to let her die after all she went through, though; Jaclyn dodges to the left faster than she could have done before, and when she looks at Black Hair, he was still lunging towards her original spot. She takes no time, grabbing his hand and twisting, sending the shiny object flying out of his hand. She lashes out at him, craving blood, but she misjudged her timing. He twists and her hand narrowly misses his head. Jaclyn lets out a crazed snarl as the decision was made to fight.

Snapping back into slow motion, Jaclyn lashes out at Black Hair, missing once more. She screams in frustration. “Jaclyn!” The other male yells. She snaps her head up, looking for answers, but that was a mistake. A foot connects with her chin, and her teeth snap shut, cutting her tongue. Jaclyn spits, a huge glob of blood spurting out. “It’s me Shade,” The other male says, trying to get her attention. “Shut up, Shade!” Black Hair yells, then sends another kick at her head, her evading the blow swiftly. “Jaclyn, remember me? Remember Chris?” The one called Shade yells out, trying to be heard by her tunnel-hearing. Her head snaps up again at the familiar mention of Chris, a blurred vision of his face popping back in her vision. But that was all the time Black Hair needed; using all the strength he had, he kicks at her head, a solid connection. Jaclyn’s head cracks, and a spurt of blood escapes her lips as her stumbles to the ground, dazed.

And it was like her memories rushed back to her in that moment. Jaclyn looks around, trying to get a sense of why she was in the hallway. She remembers her possessed body, her veins, the fight with Darris and Shade trying to bring back her memories, and the haze wrapping her mind clears. She looks up at Shade, who was restrained by Darris, his throat bleeding slightly. “S-Shade?” She croaks, looking around. Darris looks at her with blinding rage, his eyes slits. “Don’t make me kill you!” Darris blurts, staring down at her. Jaclyn gets to her feet shakily, putting a normal hand to her bleeding head. She darts her eyes around, debating a wild idea in her head. Darris wants her dead; Tai is nowhere in sight and is probably scared of her; Chris is gone; Shade trying to protect her; and her looking like a Freak, and not just with her enhancements. She locks eyes with Shade, sending a message to him and praying it will work without Chris’ powers.

*I’m sorry.* She says mentally, then bolts down the stairs, running past them before they noticed her absence in air. She made this decision herself, and knew she wouldn’t regret it. She *couldn’t*. Running out into the morning, Jaclyn sprints down the road until she couldn’t hear anything but the wind in her bleeding ears.

**Chapter 14: Ian**

Drake lets out a startled yelp as the warehouse shakes from the force. Groans reach Ian’s ears, and his body bolts into action again. Grabbing Drake by the neck, he squeezes with fine-tuned strength, his attacking arm twitching as his black veins sing with electricity. Drake doesn’t even bother to claw at Ian’s hand; he swings at Ian’s head, earning a connecting blow. Stunned, he stumbles back, releasing his grip on Drake. New-fueled rage makes him propel with a grunt, his speech becoming paralyzed. Ian lashes out, landing a few good hits before Drake had enough and throws him across the room, his lungs getting the air knocked out of them. The two men were in the same boat, and it made no sense for them to fight. Even if one became triumphant, the whole warehouse was flooded with Infected by now. Screams bubble up from down the hallway. They were too close, and advancing to them. Ian was sure of it.

Drake wasting no time like the man he was, charges towards Ian’s slumped body, him only being able to take another breath before the blow of Drake came. His body collides with his, and a wild, animal like grunt escapes from Ian’s pursed lips. Several blows came to his head, and Ian’s paralyzed body did nothing to defend itself from the attack. It made his fury turn into a blinding rage. His veins pulse faster as Ian wills the parasites to attack. He could feel the life draining out of him, and if his body didn’t do something quick, he would lose everything.

The sweaty tang of fear emitted from the hallway, causing the office to have a heavy and humid feel to it. The temperature dropped, and Ian could smell death as if it were freshly baked cookies. Drake’s blows came, one after another, and Ian could smell his own death mix with the others.

His mind started to blister with energy. He needed to release it, but his body was far beyond numb. He felt like he was going to explode with each pound to his head, his body felt like a ton of pressure was perched on top of it. Finally, his mind snapped.

Grabbing Drake’s hand in mid-strike, Ian was amazed as how the parasites worked with him in his thoughts. He throws Drake off of him with super human strength, and watches himself bolt wildly out of the office before Drake could realize what was happening. His brain a bloody pulp, Ian watches as his body jerkily moves towards the engraved exit. He had no fear as he bumps into other infected, them paying no attention to him as they hastily track down Drake’s blood. It was a horde of the; fresh or old, dozens of them filled the hallways to where Ian’s body couldn’t move at all. The stench was horrendous; filling his nostrils with a suffocating wave of gangrene and infected wounds. Ian tries not to breathe as blood drips down his head and into his eyes. He needed to get out of here, from Drake, and from the Infected before he got his servings of death. Trying to fight the will of the virus was like trying to fight a tiger with a flip-flop; you might as well just curl up and die. Ian hated to admit he had the weaker mind, but the parasites were too strong.

His twitchy body reaches the exit, and stumbles down the stairs with uncontrolled speed. And then he was free. Sunlight pours down and illuminates the road, a haze of smoke covers the ground in delicate wisps. The air was crisp and fresh, smelling like morning dew. Ian licks his bloody lips, tasting blood and sending his senses into overdrive for more.

Ian’s body starts to shut down as he walks in the middle of the road, searching for something he knew wasn’t there. The veins start to retreat back to their hiding place as Ian’s steps become more and more controlled. His head starts to spin, and a heavy migraine sneaks into the back of his head, pounding away. Pain emits from his bleeding head, but Ian barely registered it as he walks away from his life’s work. He would come back, but not know, when the entire warehouse was infested. Walking casually in the street, Ian thinks about Jaclyn, and it gives him fueled energy to go find her. Wherever she was, Ian needed to get to her. She needed to pay, for everything. He couldn’t kill his daughter before, but now, he could with no government or laws.

But before he ignited his plans, he needed to find a med kit before he died of blood poisoning.

**Chapter 14: DI Miller**

Grace’s sister cries while holding the gun at Miller’s head. The icy words die in the air, and Miller barely registered them as new memories of Grace pop back up again. Her lifeless and slumped body. Her torn and lacerated face, covered in blood, all came like a blow to DI Miller’s head. “Why’d you kill her? Why’d you do it? After your thirty years of marriage and love, why’d you murder her?”

“Talia,” He says, trying to calm her stress levels. He knew Talia well, when they laughed and hung out on holidays, occasionally coming over when she felt like it. She looked too much like Grace, and it made Miller’s stomach turn. The world was crashing down at that moment. Talia wanted to avenge her sister by murdering him, but he never murdered her. She was losing her mind. Just weeks ago, Talia and him mourned Grace’s death, and not one day was when she accused him of her death. She was at his side, covered in black, and gripping his arm too tightly the day of the funeral. “Why’d you do it Miller? After every damn time I decided to spend time with you guys when I was going through my most exhausting project in the office. After I got fired from work, I thought you would be there for *us*. For Grace and I.”

“Talia, I never killed her. Remember the last man I told you about over Christmas? When I told you how he followed Grace home after she supposedly witnessed his crime? In the club? Remember?” Miller lets his words tumble out, hoping they could change the woman’s mind. “But how am I supposed to believe you!” Talia cries, the gun shaking in her sweaty hand. “Look, Talia, Grace told you about the crime she saw on the spot. Right?” Recognition flickers in her eyes, but it was quickly clouded over with hatred and grief. Miller decided he didn’t see it. “I was at work, in my office looking for that man after he murdered the twenty-something girl in the club. Grace ran away. She called me, and by the time I rushed home, she was dead in the kitchen. She was smart enough to call me and you, to warn us, but it was no use.”

“How do I know you’re not lying to me?” Talia sobs, her tear streaked face paling in color as she pronounced the words. The gun in her hand shook with her movement, and tiny beads of sweat appeared on Miller’s face. “How do you know *I’m* lying?” Miller counterattacks, trying to change the poor woman’s mind.

“When Grace called me, she told me that a man that looked like you followed her. She couldn’t see properly in the lighting of the club, given she was a couple tables away from the secluded table. The man, he,” Talia chokes, but finds the courage to go on. “murdered her. Caught her looking at him and she ran, got in her car, and drove away. She knew he was coming after her.” Miller was taken aback by her reasoning. The man looked like him? Miller didn’t see a similarity at all,