

TWENTY QUESTIONS

A THESIS

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

The Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

By

Magali Blasdell

May/2021

Acknowledgements

This has been a strange, isolating year, which has made the people who were close by all the more important. I would not even be attending this school if it weren't for the love and support and respect I have received from my family throughout my life. I would like to thank Professor Natanya Pulley, and Professor Steven Hayward for helping me through the largest novel project I've ever attempted. Even if it's not quite done, I got much farther than I thought possible because of their encouragement and expertise. I want to thank Will Mallory for making the process a little easier with all the black coffee and biscuits he made, and his constant, steady support of my writing. I would also like to thank Po, my giant, slobbery, stubborn Covid rescue dog for coming into my life this past September. You forced me to realize that cold weather isn't so bad if you bundle up for it, and take in the world around you, and that with patience and structure any project can become a success.

And to my fellow senior fictioneers: it has been an honor and a privilege to work with you all, to see how you've grown as writers and hear the amazing stories you presented at this final curtain call of our time here. Top Cat!

Abstract

Twenty Questions is a superhero novel based in the modern world. Roxy “Precision” Greet is the strongest person alive. Once a symbol of the American way, now a discarded relic, she finds herself wrapped back into the world of heroics when an old enemy named Caesar appears, poking holes in the reality she was once so sure of. Come discover the Greet family dynamics, where their powers come from, and how it affects each member of the family. This novel explores what it means to be a hero, and how good and evil blur when justice is scrutinized.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	13
Chapter 3.....	20
Chapter 4.....	30
Chapter 5.....	39
Chapter 6.....	42
Chapter 7.....	50
Chapter 8.....	59
Chapter 9.....	66
Chapter 10.....	72
Chapter 11.....	74
Chapter 12.....	81
Chapter 13.....	94
Chapter 14.....	95
Chapter 15.....	99

Chapter 1

“We need you again.”

Precision doesn't pause in scraping old lasagna off a ceramic plate, pressing her thumb nail against the dried pasta. Wind blows through the open windows in front of her, light shining into her airy apartment. Plates are stacked against the side of the sink, drying in the wire grates of her dish rack. The wall is covered in posters of the Nuclear Family Four, news articles about her brother Robert “The Fist” Greet and her grandfather “Penance” Greet. Bartley eyes the TIME magazine framed in the middle, Precision sitting on the shoulders of her oldest brother Geoff. Psycho is what the press called him after he turned bad.

She's six and holding a barbie dream house above her head. “The Greet Family: Golden Age Heroes of the 1990s”. They are decked out in red plaid onesies, and it's hideous and endearing all at once. A lot of people think the ugliness of it is what persuaded the American people to let them get away with so much for so long. Over time, this issue became the cover of every E! News article and NBC reel once public opinion turned sour. The guys in Washington Defense used to joke about the tacky clown suits, but Penance always insisted they wear them, even when the entirety of Paris Fashion Week was sending prototype uniforms to their doorstep. Other than the tacky homage to her family legacy, Bartley thought it looked like a nice place to live.

“How can you afford this? Thought you couldn't get a job.”

“I have fans. Like PETA, but they're all about me. People for the Ethical Treatment of an Asshole.”

No one laughs.

Bartley grabs a sponge and joins Precision at the sink, picking up a bowl with dried yolk in it.

“Unemployed? Nothing to do?” He says.

She gives up using her thumbnail, and instead pulls out a fork and tries to slide it underneath the crusted pasta. She grins when it pops off the plate.

“I wouldn’t say nothing. I’ve been really getting into my Etsy account.”

“How much you making?”

“About thirty a month. Nothing crazy.” She turns and smiles. Bartley’s partner shifts, alarmed.

Her left front tooth is missing.

Precision’s hand trails up onto her scarred lips, and over her upper row of teeth.

“Oh, sorry. I only put in the fake tooth for the press.”

The dish clinks back into the sink, along with the fork. She turns and rests against the side of the table. Her eyes linger on the new agent, and he fidgets. There’s no name tag, no watch. No earpiece.

“Working for the Octagon again, Bartley? I thought we’d both moved past them.”

“My kid got into some small private college. Smart enough to get in, not smart enough for a subsidized tuition.”

Precision nods. “And you’re dumb enough with love to not crush their dreams.”

Bartley had been a messenger of the government for as long as Precision could remember. He was barely in his twenties when he was assigned the Codename Hermes, a messenger of the U.S. to the Greets. He was responsible for the good and the bad, and Penance hated him, until he crashed and burned from the stress of the job, and they brought in someone new.

“I won’t work with this one,” Penance said. “Bring back the pothead.”

“So, what is it exactly you ‘need’ me for? I’ve been ordered to stop helping.”

“Killing and destroying,” the new agent chimes in.

Precision’s fingers tighten around her forearms, and she squints hard at him. His hand slides to the gun against his hip. She smiles, big. His eyes focus on the razor sharp edge of her canines this time, the lack of a front tooth no longer of concern.

“Just who the fuck are you, huh rookie? I was serving America at twelve while you were, what, twenty five? And getting coffee for a team of assholes who still don’t give a shit about you,” she says.

Bartley holds a hand up in between them.

“We didn’t come here for the semantics. He’s come up out of his hole again.”

That gets Precision’s attention. Her eyes flick from the rookie back to Bartley.

He looks tired, that up close. Old and weary from all those years of chasing down the Greet.

“He’s the CEO of a hotel in the Alps.”

“What does he want?”

“What he always wants. Your family.”

She crosses her arms, “he’s harmless to the rest of you. What do you need me for?”

“He has some information we’re interested in, and he won’t talk to anyone but a Greet.”

“Did’ya try Bobby?”

Bartley shakes his head, “sent him already. Hasn’t come back.”

“Fine,” she says. “Where’s the jet.”

...

When Precision wakes up, it is in a steely room, with two chairs, one table and a mirror hanging from the wall. Attached to her wrists and neck are suction cups connected to a heart rate monitor placed on the table. She sits in one of the chairs, cuffed to steel bars.

“What I want to know,” someone says, “is why your heartbeat’s so damn steady.”

Footsteps grow louder, passing by her until a man stands in front of her.

“Caesar,” she states.

“Ooh, much more level-headed than your brother. He said my name with a snarl.”

Caesar has been largely accepted as the smartest person in the world. Perhaps if the internet didn’t exist, there would be a worthy opponent. But Caesar feeds off knowledge, just like Precision feeds off brawls to make herself smarter and stronger for the next fight.

Adrenaline rushes through Precision when she sees him, as always. Caesar, sickly thin and eyes that grew tired over the years. His hair, perfectly combed, teetering on the edge of slicked back. His smile, one side of his lip raised higher than the other. Crooked. It’s been so long since someone challenged her. Tucked away in her apartment, the government hasn’t called on her and, in her worst moments, afraid Caesar moved on as well. To see him so much the same sent electricity down her spine. She wants him to run, and to catch him.

“So, why am I here?” Precision asks.

He tuts. “Why should I just tell you? So boring. Let’s play 20 questions.”

Precision breaks away from the desk she’s chained to. She gets up, but Caesar holds up a finger. Her body resists the urge to crush him against the wall.

“Now, you know I hold someone’s life in my hands you very much care for. Don’t go running before I can tell you who!”

Precision is reminded of Geoff, the maniacal giggles he produced whenever she made a potato power a light bulb, or a circuit power a crane.

“It’s the simplest invention people underestimate, and it’s the one they never expect,” Geoff would say.

And when he’d come back two years later, drunk with power and the fear of losing it, he hadn’t expected her to be much stronger than he remembered.

“Gonna use that government training to take me down,” he had slurred. “Come on, I know all their tricks, their moves. Come at me with your best shot.”

Precision, Roxy at that time, had smashed her Barbie Jeep against him when he held her by the throat. It was the closest thing she could grab. She remembers the way his skull had caved in, and the edges of it jutted out of his skin. She remembers not screaming, even as he collapsed on top of her, hand still clinging to her throat. Mom and dad wouldn’t come home from Sam’s Club for another forty-five minutes. And when they did, there were black SUV’s loitering like crows around their parking lot. One of them was arguing with the neighbor, Mrs. Habershamp, who scolded the very large man from around the arms of Roxy, who grasped her old kneecaps in a feather-light touch. Roxy was working on her restraint.

Caesar snaps his fingers in front of Precision’s face. She bites at them. He glares, rubbing his other hand across his intact digits.

“Any guesses as to who it is, beastly Greet?”

“My mom.”

“Less Oedipus, more Electra.”

“Dad?”

“Ding ding ding. Eighteen questions to go.”

Precision blinks, the dryness of the air around them irritating her eyes. He looks far more tired than she remembers. The bags under his eyes are darker, and his hair reaches the tips of his ears instead of being buzzed less than an inch from his scalp. His clothes are immaculate, and they fit him to the millimeter, she’s sure.

“Why have you come out of hiding?” Why did you leave me alone in the normal world, she thinks.

He tuts, “You know I don’t hide. I observe. It’s nice to see what the world does when it thinks you’re not watching. Seventeen.”

“What do you want from me?”

“To know you, Roxy-girl. That’s all I’ve ever wanted,” he pouts his lips. They are dark and discolored on the inside. “Sixteen.”

Something isn’t right. If Precision knows anything, it’s bruise marks. Caesar’s face doesn’t change, but he knows what he’s shown her. If she only has sixteen verbal questions to get answers to, she’ll have to find room for more answers in between them.

“Alright. Where’s my brother, Bobby? You said you saw him.”

“Yes, well. I see a lot of people whenever I want. He’s been let go.”

Caesar trains his eyes on Precision. He leans into the chair across from hers, his right hip sitting harder into the chair than usual. There had been no visual sign of breakage in his walk. Perhaps a dislocation that was recently fixed.

“Where are we?”

“Underground.”

“That’s not fair.”

“Life isn’t fair. Fourteen.”

“Who ordered you to do this?”

“Uh uh uh,” Caesar wags his finger. “That question is off-limits. I’ll have to add the head to the proverbial hangman.” He drags his finger across the steel table in front of him, completing an imaginary circle.

“And so, what? You’re going to just make me keep guessing until I reach twenty?”

“Eleven. First, asking ‘so what’ is a terrible waste of the twenty questions I gave you. And second, hopefully not, but it depends.”

“That’s not an answer.”

“It is if you use your head.” Caesar knocks on the top of her head.

There’s a series of bangs against the door. They’re frantic and scattered. Precision tenses her muscles.

Caesar smiles. “Don’t worry about that. Worry about me.”

“Are they trying to get in here, or get out?”

Muffled shouts can be heard from the other side of the metal wall. Another bang. That was definitely a gunshot.

“If I’m going to live, in. If not, questions are of no consequence. And to be fair, I’ll answer your last question. We are where your dear old friend Bartley took you. And where I’ve been stuck for quite some time.”

Caesar pauses.

“Well, it seems like I am getting out of here. I’m not dead.”

And then he laughs. A wierd, horrible, stinking laugh that reminds her of Geoff. Guilt eats at her stomach like a parasite.

“Don’t look so sad, Roxy-girl. Here, I’ll tell you what. The last ten questions are redeemable at any time. If you can find me.”

The steel door crunches open from the outside, and Caesar’s chair scrapes along the floor and strides out the new exit. Precision can see the tell-tale hallways of the sub-five floor of the Octagon. Her stomach roils at the sight of dead agents and arms for hire, here to free Caesar and, consequently, her. It’s quiet. No more gunshots.

Footsteps hasten back, and Caesar’s head pops through the hole.

“Ah, one last thing. I’ll give you a freebie you didn’t have the chance to ask: ‘what did you do with my family? Where have you hidden them?’” He smiles. “And why did they do the same to Geoff?”

“I thought you said Bartley brought you here.” She stands up from her seat. “You’re bluffing.”

“A question for both of us to end this little soirée, then: Am I?”

And as she's about to chase him down, shove him against the floor and choke the words out of him, he throws a man into the cell inflicted with a slit throat, bleeding out but alive. Precision considers leaving him, it's the rookie from before.

"Killing and Destroying," she mimics his voice and drops to her knees. She applies pressure to the wound and waits for help to come.

Chapter 2

When help comes, as always Agent Bartley is there to watch them sweep up the mess. Precision wonders if the guard will be okay, or if there's something terribly wrong with them and she was too late. She wonders if their family will even know that they are gone. Her brain itches on the question "why did they do the same to Geoff?" Geoff was home, and then he was a villain before coming home again. Her family didn't send him anywhere.

You are projecting, she tells herself. Focus up.

"I'll find Bobby first," she tells Bartley. "He always leaves a paper trail. With his help, we can get mom and dad back, and find grandpa." She laughs. "I doubt even Caesar got a hold of grandpa. Remember what he did to you when you tried to take us out of state for Halloween?"

Bartley did not laugh. "Yes."

The thought of the Greets being back, of being a part of the action once more excites her. There's only so much Precision can do alone. But first, she'll have to get out of The Octagon. If the organization hasn't changed locations, that means she's in Oregon.

Bartley stands against the wall, texting rapidly on his cell phone, until Precision bumps against him.

“Watch it.”

She mutters an apology.

“Bartley,” Precision says.

He puts his phone away. “Yeah.”

“I’m heading out.”

Bartley keeps running a finger over a wrinkle on his suit jacket. It pops up, over and over as he keeps grooming himself. Precision forgot that he used to do that when he was nervous.

“I think we should wait until the director gets here. He’ll want to hear what you have to say.”

“You guys have it all on tape, I’m out of here.” Precision tries to move past Bartley, and he catches her by the arm.

“I really have to advise you to wait.”

Precision’s eyes move to the thickness of the walls. The slots through which something dangerous can slip through. Darts, maybe gas cannisters. Something that can hurt her.

“These walls weren’t built for Caesar, Bartley.”

The agent freezes, then his body relaxes again. He thumbs his wrinkled jacket, looking for a joint.

“You’re still a U.S. patriot, Precision. Don’t make yourself an enemy. If not for us, then your family.”

“Apparently, something or someone has put them in the line of fire. So, I’m going to have to ask you to step aside.”

Bartley huffs. “You know they sent me as an emotional ploy. Don’t do it, I just got this job.”

“Will you tell me why they want to keep me here?”

Silence. He pinches the crease.

“You can get another job,” she says.

Precision runs past Bartley, directing her shoulder at the door and denting the metal to burst the moment she puts her whole weight onto the metal slat. She stumbles and hits the next wall, making a human-sized hole. She pops herself out of the wall, and looks at the dirt pouring out of the hole. The way out has to be up.

“Freeze!”

She turns and runs straight at the men lined up with shields and guns at the end of the hall. If they had been smart, they wouldn't have given her a warning at all. She screams, but they don't move out of the way. The shields get closer, and when she sees the eyes of one of the guards, she dives over their heads, and hisses when an electrified baton skims over her left arm. Before they can swivel around to attack, she grabs the closest guard by the nape of his suit. Pulling back, she puts herself in the middle of them all, and swings the one she grabbed around and around. The armor can take it, and it disorients the other guards enough that they fall to the ground, unconscious.

The sirens are blaring. Precision is sure there will be guards on the other side of that elevator, and she has to think quick. Taking a guard, she puts them both in the lift, and proceeds to switch their clothes.

“How many layers are on you? Jesus.”

Precision made the mistake of undressing herself first. So when the doors of the elevator open before the ground floor, she was left in her underwear at sublevel 1, holding Kevlar.

“Hey,” she says to the squad in front of her. She hears a taser come to life.

Moving quick, she hopes the speed will keep her one step ahead of them until she can get a key card. Uppercutting the closest guard, she swipes his plastic shield and raises it against herself. She moves back, back facing the elevator she just came from. Squatting, using her thighs to stay low and surge, she pushes forward into the hallway. Yelling, she runs towards them. Some of their shields falter.

Precision is careful not to push too hard that ribs break, but hard enough that she can plow through. There’s still a resounding crack, then another, and another until they sound like applause. Broken arms. She spins when she sees a gap, and presses her body up against a hallway wall. A few of the armed guards had stepped back, and now aim their guns at Precision.

“Come on, guys. You let Caesar get away, and I’m left with all the dramatics?”

They fire tranquilizers. The only one that gets her is on the ankle, and it’s out before all of it can enter her system.

“Woo, is this ketamine? Haven’t had this since I was in Berlin.”

She is nervous. There is an unknown dosage now in her body, and she’ll have to move quicker. She takes the rest of the guards out, and puts on clothes before using a key card to use the elevator again. When the doors open, it is initial security that meets her. Civilian guards. This time, when she barrels towards them, they move out of the way. Crashing through the glass doors, Precision makes a break for the parking lot. Maybe she can hotwire a car, and drive off until she can escape into the woods. She takes in a deep breath, and knows she is in Oregon. The wetness of the air mixed with the pine is reminiscent of coming here to train, or for missions.

“You give the rest of us a bad name,” someone sneers.

Precision is surrounded by a group of soldiers. Their uniforms are sleeker, and noticeably outfitted with more red white and blue.

“Can I help you,” Precision says.

“You have not been authorized to leave the premises. You shall not leave the premises. We have been authorized to use force to keep you here, if necessary.”

If necessary. Precision wishes she had stretched this morning. She moves into stance.

“Take your time,” she says. “Really.”

The agents mirror her, moving into an offensive position around her.

“I bet they think I don’t notice the ones behind me.” she thinks. She remembers practicing the same formation with her brothers, when she was weaker, and new to all of this. She would always come from behind, while her brothers attacked from the front. One time she even bit a man on the neck, before she was scolded and told to never do that again.

“Don’t listen to them, biting a neck might save your own someday,” Her grandpa says. He gave her a pink starburst for a job well done.

The one to her right swings first. They aren’t taking cues from a leader anywhere on the field, but they move in sync, like they have a plan. Precision dodges, easily. The others joined with the first swing, and they move well, but not smart. They aren’t creative, they are repetitive. Sloppy. Out of sync. But, they move with force behind their punches, and she wonders how they got this strong. Only her family was this strong.

“Are you supposed to be the new all Americans?” Precision says. She wonders if she shares any stolen DNA with them.

They don't respond. The talkative one lets out a yell, and surges towards her. She moves well, Precision will say that. She goes for pressure points, but her body gives away which way she's going to move, and where she's aiming.

"Shit," Precision hisses.

One of the others has jabbed her in the neck, causing her to lose feeling in her left arm. They move like buffalo, these new recruits. Brash and predictable and hard. But she is outnumbered, and their moves aren't always in her line of sight. Some of them hang back, armed with more tranquilizers. Precision leaps past an offensive fighter to one with a gun. Smacking him upside the head, she grabs the gun and aims it at two of the soldiers. Two are left. She is relieved they are cheap copies of her. Bad replacements who can't take down the real thing, even with the odds stacked against her. After all this is said and done, she'll destroy the test tubes and doctors they came from, but Caesar comes first.

Precision moves up on them, and breaks the leg of the woman who told her she couldn't leave. The soldier lets out a scream, and her comrade goes to her side. The bone is broken, clean. It wouldn't do any good for her to be unable to serve the U.S. at all. Just a few months of rehab.

Precision stands over them and looks down at them. "You're all young and full of hope. Come talk to me when they treat you like they treat me."

"You're twenty-nine. I'm older than you."

"Hm," Precision taps her chin. "That should scare you."

Precision runs off into the woods, the parking lot is no longer an option. There's five minutes until choppers are in the air, and only about an hour or two until another government facility flies in with reinforcements. She doesn't notice that her movements are slowing down until she tries to leap

over a fallen tree and fails. It's the tranquilizer from before. Running away gets her blood pumping, and she doesn't know how long until it affects her to the point where she can't move. She'd have to find somewhere to hide.

Choppers whirl overhead. So do clouds, however. And the forest she is in is old, with knotted trees and hidden holes big enough to hide in. She crawls under the tree she couldn't hop over, and moves towards where she knows older trees lie.

She wishes someone could tell her why the fast pace of a bullet can't hurt her, but the slice of a knife or the injection of a foreign object hurts her. Trainers once joked that her body was made for a lab. Bobby stood in front of her in those instances, and hit the trainers extra hard. Him and Grandpa both reacted strongly to comments about her body, as most started up after puberty. They should know better than anyone she can take care of herself.

"C'mon, c'mon," she mumbles. She wandered these forests with her brothers all the time. She trained here, she knows the kinds of moss that grow and, more importantly, the biggest hiding holes lie. Bobby used to sing,

"Roxy-Roe, Roxy-Roe, I am coming to find you."

Geoff had always found her first, and hid until Bobby found them both. They'd giggle under the shade of a large willow tree, so out of place within the tall oaks and pines. That was the tree she would hide under.

When she sees it, it's smaller than she remembers. The hole, too, when she slides inside, mud slicking her way in. The rain has come. She's thankful for it, even when the drizzles slip into her shoes. Copters can't fly in the rain, here. The fog is too dense and they have to rely purely on the radar. They

will have to come back later. The fog seeps into her hiding hole too, however, and her hands whirl around, searching for a lunchbox she hopes is still there. It is rusted, and the Pokéball on the front is only recognizable because it is surrounded by the phrase “Gotta Catch ‘Em All”. She pries the thing open, and lying inside is an old radio and a walkie talkie. Geoff had made it when he was eight, so he could talk to the family wherever he was in the world, or in danger. There were three buttons: HOME, 911, and G-PA. Precision presses the yellow one labeled G-PA. Her eyelids feel heavy, and even as the choppers roll away, she knows she is still in danger. The button might not work, and grandpa Greet might never get the message. More importantly, she is tired, and the fog feels like a blanket and a nightlight all at once. She curls into the knot in the tree she knows is the comfiest, and closes her eyes. Jeeps whirl into the woods, looking for her.

Chapter 3

When Precision wakes up, it is to the taste of copper and a dry throat.

“Well, when you sleep, you sleep.”

She grunts, wiping drool off the corner of her mouth.

“Hi, grandpa.”

Grandpa Greet is a short man, with leathery skin and a full head of gray hair. Precision reaches up to touch his hair, but he smacks her hand away.

“You’ve cut your hair.”

“So have you.”

The likeness of their haircuts is uncanny, both cropped above the ears yet full and shiny. She tugs at the ends of her hair to make them feel longer. She pulls her feet off the cot she’s on, and looks

around at the cave she's in. It's clearly lived in, with a cot, spare linens on a shelf in the corner, and a mini fridge. The walls are somewhat damp, but there are no spiders or rats sharing the space.

"Come on. Mandy's made coffee." Grandpa Greet says. "The guest bedroom is being used, so I put you in the humble room. Come on, kitchen is this way."

All around them are scaffolding poles, half-finished walls and misplaced building supplies. Precision hops over some marble slabs, eyeing the careful hops her grandfather does into empty spots as they move through what could be a living room, if it weren't for the lack of furniture and abundance of shrapnel.

"Mandy," Precision nods her way as they enter the kitchen.

Mandy looks the same as always, tall and beautiful and cold as ice.

"Ms. Greet." She responds. She puts a cup of sludge in front of her. "Drink up."

Precision gags at the smell, but covers it with a cough when her grandfather gives her The Look.

"Sorry," Precision says. "Still not feeling great after my run in with some old friends."

"Tch," Grandpa says. "Friends. When you have friends like that, who needs enemies. What the hell did you do to set them off this time?"

"It's not my fault!"

"That's what you said in Grenada, and I believed you. What did you do?"

She huffs.

Precision had a decision to make. Telling Grandpa Greet could help her capture Caesar quicker, but it also meant having to swallow her pride and ask for his help. After declaring herself better than him and telling him he owed her mom an apology for treating her like shit all those years.

But Bobby's life was at stake, and it was her job to keep the world safe, U.S. backed or not.

"Grandpa, Caesar's back," she says.

"Oh?" He doesn't look up from his own cup of sludge.

"And he says he has a secret."

Grandpa Greet takes a sip of his coffee. "What do you want me to do about it."

"What do I—? Grandpa, I need your help. He's threatening the family."

"The family can watch itself. I'll bandage you up. You make peace with the Americans when you get out of here."

"I don't know how."

"Well how do you not know?"

"Because, Grandpa, they didn't tell me why they were trying to keep me prisoner. There wasn't really time for a run-down before they tried to shoot me off the earth."

"Well, that's your first mistake. You didn't take a hostage."

Precision's hand grips her cup of coffee tighter. "There wasn't anyone high up near me, no one they wouldn't have shot."

"Then you go back in, fight like a Greet, and get the guy hiding in the highest security office. Roxy!"

Grandpa slams his mug down, chunky bits of their mud-coffee slowly crawling down the sides. He looks directly at her for the first time since she woke up. His hard, black eyes are furrowed, his veins pulsing along his forearms. Mandy leaves the room with barely a padding of her feet.

“I taught you to be strong. To think of the best solution in the worst of situations. And you’re telling me they. Had you trapped in a building you’ve had the highest clearance in for several years, didn’t think of capturing the guy in charge, and made it out of there heavily sedated and bruised to the bone? Who have you become?”

Precision’s chin turns down. She’s not going to cry, because crying is something weak people do, and he didn’t raise her to be weak.

“I was worried about the family.” She pauses. “And Caesar said something about Geoff being taken somewhere.”

“Oh, were you? And did you think that maybe Caesar was just messing with you? That maybe he was bait, and he was working with the government to get you down there so he could get some crimes wiped off his own record.”

A beat.

“No, you didn’t. Roxy, you’re smarter than that. Don’t think you can act like Bobby and everything will be fine.”

Precision rolled her eyes. She knew better than anyone that she couldn’t act like Bobby. “The way he said it, it was like he was giving me a secret, though.”

“You’re staying here, for now. Clearly you need a reminder of who you are representing.”

Grandpa ignored her admission of suspicion of the family. She felt guilt creep up her neck for questioning his unwavering confidence, and let the question leave her mind for the moment.

“The United States has turned against me, remember?” She said, instead of “why won’t you directly answer my question?”

“I meant me, Roxy. You need to remember what you come from.”

That was an ironic statement for her. Grandpa Greet never told them where they were from. When asked about his ethnicity, he would always say,

“Don’t ask questions I’m not giving you the answer to.”

And then he would bonk whoever asked on the head. It bothered Precision’s mother most of all. She wishes her family was one of those that could talk about pain, rather than cover it with a rug.

“It’s very American to not know what you are,” mom would say. “That’s what makes this country great.”

World class bullshit.

“We start at sundown. There are extra jackets in the closet, but Mandy will bring them to you,” Grandpa says.

Precision is left in the kitchen alone, stirring the coagulating and cold coffee substance. She wonders if grandpa knows what she actually needs, or if this is punishment. Penance.

Precision sniffs the mug, and takes a sip. Gagging, she sets the drink down.

“There’s real coffee, if you want me to make you some.” Mandy smiles, no teeth. “Your grandfather prefers the stuff he makes himself. But I have some Caribou Coffee hidden in the back cabinet.”

Precision sighs. “Thanks, Mandy.”

Precision has taken to stacking the discarded building materials in the living room. Everything had its place after all, and even if it wasn’t here, she could at least separate them by type. She straightens out slabs of marble, matching them corner to corner when Mandy enters the room. She’s rattled, and her chest heaves as if she ran here.

“Your grandfather will no longer be coming to train. Something’s come up.”

Precision wipes her hands on her pants. “what’s wrong?”

“Nothing but the usual. I’ll be driving you to your next destination.”

Mandy’s eyes flit around, and there’s a rumble through the house then a shout. Grandpa Greet was having another training session. Or as Bobby called them, a rage session. He tends to slip out of his right mind, forgetting how old he is or how many kids he has. Sometimes he says one, and other times he says ten.

The kids were eight, ten and thirteen respectively when they were there during a particularly bad one. Precision remembers the puffs of her breath, and pretending to smoke a twig with Geoff while Bobby told them that wasn’t right.

“Smoking is bad for you, guys, don’t do it!” He cried, tears in his eyes. The other two giggled.

“It’s not real, Bobby.”

“It’s the principle!”

Bobby pushes Roxy over into the snow, and she pulls him down by his scarf. Distracted by their roughhousing, Geoff is the only one who notices the change in their grandfather.

“Grandpa? What’s wrong,” he says.

Grandpa breathes harshly, before letting out a scream, and running into the woods. Geoff turns and sees his younger siblings still fighting one another.

“Dumbasses! Cut it out.”

He doesn’t try to step between them, as both could easily break his bones. Nevertheless, they listen to their big brother, and step apart. Bobby scratches his head.

“Where did grandpa go off to? I thought he was just here.”

“Into the woods,” Geoff points. “But I don’t think we should follow. Something was off about him, I don’t know what...where’s Roxy?”

“Grandpa!!” She yells, descending into the underbrush to find him. Her tiny snow boots rise up to her chest to take steps over the mounds of snow.

The forest is filled with chirping, with trees so tall that Roxy can’t see their tops. Nature was one of her favorite things about her outings with her grandfather. He promised to teach her to find her way home by the moss on the trees, and survive for weeks on end, even in the dead of winter.

An enraged scream echoes through the forest, and the birds stop chirping. Roxy is afraid until she realizes it’s probably grandpa, and he’s just pretending to be scary to make the survival game more realistic. She is especially encouraged by the appearance of his footsteps, which make it much easier for her to walk in the snowfall.

It's golden hour when she finds him. The snow is gone from around him, and he sits on the wet mud underneath, meditating. Instead of deep breaths, his body shudders, and he gasps in his breaths. Roxy guesses that it's a breathing technique to keep him warm in the cold. She is about to step into the open space when Geoff pulls her back. She is about to protest, but sees the look on his face. He signs to her,

'Turn back. Grandpa Danger.'

Puzzled, she signs back, 'In Danger? Help.'

'No. Danger.'

Geoff then signs something much more complicated to Bobby, who nods and picks up Roxy.

"Hey!" She protests.

"Geoff."

"Got it."

And then Geoff swings Roxy over his shoulder and Bobby is making as much noise as he can. Grandpa runs over to him, but he doesn't look like grandpa, no. He looks like an animal, his pupils dilated and far away.

Roxy's vision bounces atop Geoff's shoulder. She sees her grandfather barrel towards Bobby, who jumps away. The tree he crashes into shudders, and drops a pile of snow on top of him, and Bobby turns and runs back towards his siblings.

"What's wrong with Grandpa?" Roxy says, voice shaking.

"I don't know, Roxy, but we'll have to wait it out until he comes out of it."

"When will that be?"

“I need you to be quiet. Mission mode.”

Roxy nodded.

Geoff had found a quiet, small area surrounded by trees, and him and Bobby laid traps. He finished the final slip knot around the trunk of a tree and returned to where they lie in wait, under the particularly large root of a surrounding tree. People always think being in the middle of surrounding traps is the safest, when in reality it is best to hide amongst them. Above them is a net, and a tripwire lies in front of them.

“Roxy, you and Bobby run as fast as you can if he comes up. I’ll lead him through the traps.”

“I know, geez. I’m not stupid.”

“Roxy, quiet.”

“You be quiet!”

“Shh!” Bobby says. The forest is silent, but then there’s a rustle from above. A shadow drops down from the trees, and at the same time Bobby grabs his sister and takes off to the right. The snow crunches under his tiny footfalls, and there’s silence behind them.

“Wait!” Bobby cries out, but it’s too late. Their enraged grandfather is in front of them, and what had dropped from the trees was mere snow. Bobby tosses Roxy to the side, taking the brunt of a clawed hand to his shoulder. His body spins in the air, landing soft in the thick blanket of snow. He doesn’t get back up.

“Roxy, come back!” Bobby yells behind her.

She feels tears coming into her eyes, and stuck in place. “I don’t remember the sequence. I forgot where the traps are.”

“You can do it, come on Roxy, hurry. This isn’t a game.”

“I know,” she wails.

She’s too small to remember, that’s why Bobby was there. She hadn’t counted on Bobby leaving her alone.

Grandpa Greet yells something in a language they’ve never heard and throws a fist out at Roxy. She yelps in pain as she jumps away. He’s skimmed her shoulder, and torn the side of her puffy jacket. Bobby is moving through the traps as fast as he can, but he isn’t faster than his grandfather, who was born in the snow and moves through it like shallow waters. When his foot reaches out to kick down on her head, Roxy grabs it and twists, just like she was taught on the mannequin. But this doesn’t sound like splintering wood, but instead like the crushing of sticks underfoot. Grandpa yells and retreats backwards, before coming forward again with an outstretched hand, aiming for her throat. Roxy loses her compassion in this moment, and it is replaced by a cold stare and a tiny fist grabbing the hand in front of her, and crushing it within her own. He yowls, high pitched and cursing. With her tiny foot, she uses his own weight to carry her up to where his head is, and claps her hands around his ears. Dazed, she looks around desperately for her brothers. Geoff is behind her, eyes wide. He shakes his head, and that sharp gleam returns to his eyes.

“Let’s grab Bobby.”

They stay nearby, dropping rations near their grandfather before scurrying off to another part of the forest. They keep tabs on him, staying far enough away that he can’t hurt them, but close enough to keep him safe. They are there for 3 days before help comes.

And when the help comes, grandpa has already come out of his maddened state, and has told the kids not to tell a soul. The official story is that Roxy hadn't controlled her strength enough, and hurt grandpa in the process.

...

"Alright, let's get out of here."

This time, it is Precision leading the way, paying attention to the echoes of her grandfather's rage, keeping Mandy close to her side should they stumble across him.

"How often has it been getting this bad?"

Mandy's composure is slipping, and snaps her head to behind them when they hear a crash. A closer one.

"They've been more frequent, as of late. His dementia has been getting much worse, and when he gets angry like this..." Mandy's voice trails off when the foundation of the house rumbles.

"You go for a drive," Precision finishes. "And a drive we'll take. I need you to take me to Ohio."

Chapter 4

Precision took the opportunity to sleep while Mandy drove across state lines. She only woke up when they stopped at a motel. Mandy had re-pinned her ponytail and her face returned to a look of complete control. She was ever the perfect driver, barely jolting even over the potholes.

"We're here."

The motel was vacant, save for one car in front of the office desk.

"This is one of Mr. Greet's favorite spots. No one ever expects someone of his caliber to be here, and the U.S. government is keeping your little incident under wraps. News outlets are silent."

In other words, they were just as embarrassed as she was. Precision grabs the duffel bag of clothes and equipment she took out of her grandfather's foyer closet. She has until they find her again, and label her to some accident or another before the manhunt begins. As long as she can make sure her parents are okay by then, she'll be fine. If she goes rogue, her mom is too active on Facebook for her parents to be dragged into this. Once she had complained about the way agents had descended on their house during thanksgiving when Bobby was charged with major arson, and she had taken blurry pictures that had millions of re-posts from ride or die Greet fans. The president had issued an apology that he was unaware of the raid, and a few staff members would be "investigated".

She hadn't shut up about it for a month.

Mandy returned with a key, '14' written on the side.

"We'll get to your parents by tomorrow. Your mom just posted a picture of some Pinot Grigio, so I'm sure they're fine. We leave at 3:30, so get some more rest."

Precision entered the room, put on gloves, and checked the lining of the floor, chandelier wallpaper. She slid her fingers across the lining, and while the carpet wasn't connected all the way, it was also bug-free. Mandy checked the bathroom for bugs, and found nothing.

"Clear."

"Clear. Wanna order pizza?"

When Precision lay in bed, she thought about Caesar and where he could be. Her fingers drummed impatiently against her thighs. She wanted to find him, punch him, and get this over with. She was sure that the FBI would take him without question, and if it were public enough she would have the American people on her side. She thumbs the scars on her arms, wondering who ordered her

to be captured. If Agent Bartley knew. And where those knockoff copies of her and her family came from. She would have to move carefully and quietly. As her mind filled with plans of action, the thoughts jumbled together, and sleep ushered in a quiet mind.

The dawn of day wakes Precision, and she doesn't give Mandy time to shower before demanding she re-enter the car. It's another ten hours before they reach Ohio, and when they reach their uniform cul de sac, Precision is still asleep. Mandy rolls her eyes next to her, and puts the brakes on the car, her face never moving from a position of aloofness.

The jolt wakes Precision, and she sits up, head looking around for any danger. She slumps when she sees the red-brick house to her right.

"Right. We're here. See you around, Mandy."

Mandy grabs Precision's duffel bag from the back, and hands it to her.

"I'll be driving back to Washington, now."

"Let me know if Grandpa gets too bad. I can take him down for you." Precision hops out of the car, and closes the door, the car window still open. She pulls her hood up to hide her face. "He can be quite the asshole."

"That's not a very nice thing to say about your grandfather."

"He's not a very nice man."

Mandy rolls the window up, and drives away. Precision hikes her duffel strap higher up onto her shoulder, and hurries to the front door. She knocks, and it swings open to her mother's face.

"Roxy!"

Her mother ushers her in, her pearly white teeth showing as she fusses over her daughter.

“Oh, now why are you wearing all black? Is there a funeral?” She gasps. “Did something happen at work?”

“No funeral, mom.”

Precision’s blood pressure rises and she takes a deep breath to slow her heart. Being rushed at the door did nothing to help her sort her thoughts.

“Oh, well, that’s fine, dear. I’m just so glad that you’re visiting, it seems like all my kids are too busy to come see their parents these days. Always on their phones.”

Precision wanted to ask what cellphones had to do with not staying connected to your parents, but she kept her mouth shut.

“I’m here on sort of urgent business, mom. Is dad home?”

“No, not right now. But later! Definitely later.”

Precision hoped to be gone by later.

The house looked much the same as it did when Precision was a child. There were pictures of Time Magazine, People, and other assorted magazine covers everywhere. There were mirrors everywhere too, different sizes and shapes but there were at least three in every room. The steps at the front of the house lead up to their childhood bedrooms. Bobby’s room was the only one that remained intact, and Precision’s had been turned into a pilates room. There is another room, one that had once belonged to her brother Geoff, but they didn’t talk about him anymore.

“I’m thinking of organizing the magazine covers by year released, instead of by color next week. What do you think?”

“I think whatever you choose will look great.” Precision replies.

“Do you want any coffee cake? Coffee? I have gluten-free toast and dairy-free butter as well.”

Her mother looked her up and down, and Precision positioned the duffel bag in front of her, snapping her mom out of her assessment.

“You know, most girls your age would die to be able to eat as much cake as you. But instead you’ve bulked up! A little slice will do you good.” Her mother purses her lips, looking disapprovingly at the definitive, hard edge of the muscles in her arms.

Precision pulls at the sleeves of her zip up, trying to hide it. “I’m good on cake, but I wouldn’t mind some coffee and eggs. Are there some in the fridge?”

“Oh, I’ll make you eggs. It’s so rare that I get to cook my children anything these days, you two are so busy.”

Precision rolls her eyes. She sits at the dining room table, long, wooden and with handcrafted chairs at each sitting place. She probably has an hour at most before they find her here.

“Mom, you know what? Forget the eggs. Why don’t you come sit down with me, and we can talk about matters of national security.”

Her mother scoffs, “Matters of national security. National security can wait until you’ve had your breakfast.”

Mrs. Greet had kept her father’s last name when she married Precision’s father. Mr. Thomas Richards had a problem with this, but once meeting Grandpa Greet, he had a change of heart, and a change of underwear.

“Here you are, eggs and bacon. Just how you like, darling. And the slice of cake.” Mrs. Greet winked at her daughter. “My treat.”

Precision ate everything, save the slice of cake. She can feel her mother's eyes staring her down. The empty plate of eggs suddenly became the most interesting thing in the world.

"Well, I'll eat it if you won't. Honestly, there's nothing wrong with a bit of indulgence every once and a while."

"I agree." Precision leans across the wooden table, closer to her mother.

Mrs. Greet pushes her chair back from the table, picks up the clean plates, and heads over to the sink to wash them.

"Mom, have you heard from Bobby recently? I've had a run in with an old enemy."

"Oh? Would I know him?"

"Caesar."

The scrubbing stops. Then, in slower circles, she continues. "I thought he was done with our family."

"Well, I thought so too. Yet here he is, alive and kicking."

"Degenerates can't seem to leave our family alone," her mother spits.

Precision isn't surprised by her anger. He was the scariest of the bad guys her mother knew about, and he had been bothering Geoff and Grandpa long before the two youngest were around. He was vile to her.

"Bobby wouldn't dare go near him on his own."

"Caesar seems to be seeking us out."

Her mother scrubs harder. Precision considers stopping but she can't this time.

“I don’t know why, but it seems like he wants me to solve a riddle, mom. He’s playing a game with me.”

“Roxy, please. This is so unpleasant, why don’t we talk about something else.”

“You have to move, mom. It will be temporary, but you can’t stay here.”

“Roxy.”

“I know you don’t want to, but it’s the safest thing you can do at this point-“

“ROXY. I will not be leaving my home because of something you did. This is my house, and I won’t be moving.”

Precision feels her blood boil. “You always bring this up. You know I didn’t mean to hurt that boy.” She swallows the thickness in her throat. “You know I didn’t know I was that strong.”

“You broke his arm, the neighbor thought you were a little psychopath. Good thing your grandfather and brothers are who they are, or you would have been in juvy.”

Precision wants to scream at her, that she is stronger than all the men in their family combined. That if she didn’t love them and hadn’t trained day in and day out to make sure she had perfect control over her body, she could kill them all. It would be so easy, but she loves her family.

Instead, she says “I’m not here to argue anymore, mom. I’ll be gone awhile, looking for Bobby.”

“I’m home, dear.”

Her mother’s face changes into a smile, and Precision slumps at the entrance of her father.

Her father is a stout man, with glasses without frames and a bald patch forming at the center of his wispy head.

“Well, hey there stranger.”

“Hi, dad.”

He hugs her, and Precision pats his back with one hand.

Precision’s father runs a local, private construction business that employs local men to lay down lawns, fix roofs and other small projects.

“You should really visit your mom more often, Precision. She gets lonely when I’m out all day.”

“Mm.”

“Have you reconsidered being the face of my home repair company?”

“No, dad.”

Her father looks down at the ground, face red with anger.

“I’m going to go change out of my work clothes.”

He scuffles off into his room, and mom turns back towards Precision.

“You could give back to this family a little more, you know. Your dad raised you.”

“You know I can’t sponsor his business, mom. It’s a federal crime! Why do you always seem to forget that it’s a federal crime.”

When The Greets became a symbol for the U.S.A., they were flooded with sponsorship opportunities which were squashed by those invested in them staying bipartisan. If The Greets blew up a town in Maryland, then Charmin or Lysol would have to publicly condemn them in the media, taking the power to control their press out of the hands of those in charge of their regulation.

Mom sniffs. “Well, maybe you should try a little harder to change that law.”

When her dad comes back from the back room, he’s in a t shirt and sweats.

“You heard from your grandpa recently?”

Precision shrugs. “A little, but nothing crazy.”

A lie. Precision felt it was a necessary one, because a big ask was about to be sent her way, she was sure. Her father nodded, visibly exerting effort to act calm and casual in this poor investigation.

“Your mother hasn’t heard from him in a while.”

“Doesn’t sound like anything out of the ordinary,” Precision grins.

Grandpa Greet had never been one to talk, especially to her mother. The grandkids had always gotten plenty of attention because they inherited his superhuman genes.

“Don’t talk like what?”

“You know.” Her father’s voice goes up an octave.

“Actually, I stayed with him for a few days, up in the mountains. His new place is nice, and Mandy is helpful as always.”

Dad’s nostrils flare, and his eyes widen before lowering to the floor once more. “I’m going for a run.”

“Oh dear, please wait,” her mother calls out. She runs out after him, and the two argue in the front yard, Precision’s father gesturing repeatedly and aggressively at where Precision stands in the doorway.

Precision feels the twinge of guilt in her gut for upsetting her father, even though

A) she doesn’t know what she did, and

B) her dad probably deserved it anyway.

Precision leaves without a hug, and her mother doesn't offer one. She stomps along the sleek concrete path. She'll catch a greyhound on the stop an hour away. She needed the walk.

The front door creaks open.

"You know, you used to be so full of life. What happened, Roxy?"

Precision turns, her eyes cold. "I hate what you did to me."

She runs down the street, wanting the last word for once. She had 20 hours on a bus to New York, and she wanted to have something satisfying to think about on the way there.

Chapter 5

The greyhound to New York City was as gross as one could imagine. It had the visage of a somewhat clean public transport, but Precision was sure if you put a black light against the carpeted everything it would glow like a bowling alley.

The patrons were as colorful, a family of five who had missed their flight, and a troupe of runaway kids who hid under their hoods. Precision sat near them, and turned up her own hood. Under her baggy clothes, she could pass as one of them if no one looked too close. She used to mimic the different ways kids her age would sit. Slouched, spine straight, eyes trained on the floor, or staring straight ahead, daring someone to look at them. One of the girls with them tucks a bright streak of pink hair behind her ear, and Precision feels an uncomfortable envy in her stomach. Why did she get to live a normal life? She bet the girl got to go to school, sit with her friends and commiserate over the fact that parents never understood. The girl on her other side, with fading green in her blonde hair, grabbed the pink girl's hand. She stares hard at the conjoined fingers, the blatant expression of self. Once she had tried to hold her brother's hand, and the secretary of defense scolded her for the show of affection.

“We are women of power,” she said. “We can’t afford to be seen as girls.”

“Did you see this? The Fist went haywire in Ireland and destroyed a whole bar.”

“Bet he’ll get away with it too. Fucking government pets get to do whatever they want.”

“You’re just mad that you got expelled for smashing mailboxes, Melvin.”

“Snake! My name is Snake.”

The conversation dissolves from there, but Precision grows nervous. If she was in trouble with the government, that definitely meant that Bobby wasn’t a favorite either, and they wouldn’t be waiving so many of his destruction of property incidents. The seat next to her shifts. Precision looks up from the corner of her eye to see the father of that family who missed their flights, and he’s sweating bullets.

“Can I help you,” she says.

“He-he wants you to have this.” Shakily, the man’s hand extends an envelope towards her.

Precision snatches it from him and rips it open. Inside is a ticket to Ireland and a note that says “Enjoy the views.”

[author note] (He was in Ireland bc grandpa greet sent him there to ‘find himself’)

“R-read that back,” the dad says.

Precision flips it over.

‘Black suitcase with pink ribbon on it has a present. Enjoy.’

Precision shoots out of her chair, and haphazardly opens the overhead.

“Hey!” The bus driver’s sunglasses frown at Precision through the rear view mirror. “The bus is moving, which means ass in your seat and luggage stowed.”

Ignoring the shouts, she continues to look, and finds the suitcase above the crying mother. Precision places it on an empty seat and opens it up. Inside is a large, brown bomber jacket. It smells musty, and Precision sneezes.

Pulling it aside, she looks inside for anything else, but there's nothing. She feels the lining, and feels a catch near the bottom corner of the case. Once again she feels a shameful dose of dopamine hit her. She wonders what he left in here for her. Pulling back the scratchy material of the suitcase, she finds a voucher. It reads One Free Flight, courtesy of International Airways.

Precision's heart pumps with excitement. She turns back to the dad, suppressing a competitive grin. It's uncouth.

“Is there anything else?”

He shakes his head and stumbles back to sit with his family. He takes the baby from his wife's hand and kisses his bald head. Caesar wants them to make it there alive, so they had no reason to fear the bus exploding. Civvies won't understand that, though.

Precision enjoys the silence of her mind. Working a case clears her head, and the adrenaline keeps her from reflecting on anything but what she has to fight against, and how she can do it.

Caesar's motives were unclear, that much was true. In fact, so unclear that all Precision can do is play along until he leaks information. No one in her family has ever had the chance to play what felt like such an intimate game with Caesar. There were puppets on strings, of course. The family, and there were sure to be hitmen. The clues made it different, though. He seemed to think she was smart enough to play a game Bobby and Grandpa had no right to be a part of. Butterflies flutter in her stomach, bright blue ones.

The long stretch of nothing was ruined by the appearance of SUV's. They were all different brands and colors, but Precision recognized the formation immediately. Two went in front of the greyhound, one in the back, and there was another to the left.

“Hey, you got Instagram?”

The kid with one pearl earring answered. “Uh, yeah. Who's asking?”

“Can I log in?”

“No. I don't know you.” The teen's answer is cold, and defensive. His friends whisper, and one holds up her phone to record. Precision pulls down her hood, and their faces clam in recognition.

“I have to make a little announcement, if you don't mind.”

He hands over the phone.

Precision streams on her account, and watches as the black cars around her recede from her peripheral.

“Hi America. It's been a while. Logging on just to say that I'll be visiting New York City in a few hours, and I hope to see some of you there! As always, your support is what carries the Greet family to keep protecting this great country. God bless.”

Precision stops recording and hands the phone back.

“Thanks,” she says.

Chapter 6

Precision sits in an airport, waiting for her flight. The seats are blue, crackled rubber covered in bits of crumb. The place reeks of plane gas and sickly sweet pancake preserve. Precision drinks a black coffee and eats a granola bar. She sees a mother usher a child over.

“Excuse me, but are you Precision?”

Precision smiles. This time, she does not disguise herself with hats and glasses. No, she is taking pictures and signing boarding passes and making a big scene of it.

“Yes, it’s nice to meet you.”

“Oh, my brother and I used to make YouTube clips of you and your siblings fighting for our country. There’s some things I’ve always wanted to know. How did you guys learn to fight? Who is your hero? How does...”

Soon word spreads that she is answering questions, and letting people take pictures and talk to her. The Greets trends online, and Hello U.S.A reporter Lina Lopez just so happens to be heading onto her own international flight.

“So, why now, why bring the limelight onto yourself again?”

“Well, we all need to travel by plane sometimes,” she replies.

“Yes, but no offense. You’re not exactly a normal U.S. citizen.”

The people around them chuckle. Precision senses civilians making fools of themselves on camera behind her.

“Sometimes Air Force One actually has to fly the president.”

Everyone laughs.

“Yes, but i would assume you have friends to whom you could call in favors.”

“You’d be surprised Lisa. Every once and a while, it’s just us. That’s why family and nation is so important to stick close to.”

By the time Precision notes the amount of soldiers in casual uniform, it's too late for them to do anything. The whole world is watching this plane to Ireland, and the best they can do now is make sure no one shoots it down.

Precision sees the ambassadors in Ireland first. One who is of strong frame approaches her first. He grabs her hand in both of his and shakes it up and down.

“Ms. Greet, it's a pleasure to have you here. A pleasure.”

The other one, a stout woman with a striking resemblance to the man she is with. Twins, maybe.

“If you'll come this way, please.”

They usher her through the airport into a town car, which smoothly pulls away from the roundabout.

The male ambassador turns a polite smile onto Precision. “So, what brings you to Ireland?”

“I think we both know,” she replies.

He slumps over, rubbing a leathery hand over the bridge of his nose.

“We have been told not to comment on anything ourselves, so I'll just say this: your brother is very lucky you are the first one to come and stop him.”

Precision doesn't reply. She presses her palms into her dry, red eyes and lets out a deep sigh.

“I assume we're going to see him right now?”

“Yes, it's a bit of a drive, but he's been harassing some sheep on the Aran islands.” The man's eyes light up at his own words. “Have you been there, Precision? Lovely, the craftsmen deserve three times what they get.”

Silence reigns over the car when the woman next to them both clears her throat.

“While we value our relationship with the Greet family, I think it’s important to remind you that we aren’t very keen on our country being pissed on.”

“Literally and figuratively,” he chimes in.

The woman rolls her eyes. “Right. Control your brother, and think about whether or not it’s a good idea to visit Ireland again.”

Precision’s heart clenches. “Was it that bad?”

“I can’t speak for American standards, but yes.”

Maybe she does need a break before going to see him. She looks out the window to views of muggy skies and bright, near fluorescent grass in between houses made of wood and stone. The lampposts move by in a blur, but the tops of the homes ahead move slowly into view. When the road turns to stone, Ireland forces her to take her time.

By the time they reach the docks, the wind has picked up into a biting whip. Precision’s ears are red against the cold blue air, and she craves the numb feeling. It reminds her of the biting sting before combat training. She can’t tell if the adrenaline kicks in from the nostalgia, or the anticipation of seeing her brother. Caesar had probably talked to him by now, and that was why he was belligerent around the world. Once she solved Caesar’s puzzle, everything would be normal. She would wait for his next scheme, and it will all happen again.

“The ferry awaits, Miss Precision,” the chirpy ambassador says.

“Just Precision, actually.”

“Right. Of course, right.”

The dock they are at is gloomy, and the water is choppy. The boat looks fairly new, as if it were kept in a shed, saving it for a special occasion.

The tourist boat was empty, and Precision took to standing at the bow. Her hands grasped the chilled metal bar separating her from the sea, and salt whipped her face, already stung from the cold. The last of the mainland fades behind her as the boat rocks steadily towards the aran islands.

When she reaches shore, the path to her brother is clear. The whole island has been evacuated to the docks, and police stand in front of orange tape that leads into an open field, filled with livestock.

They wordlessly let Precision through, and offer no information as to where Bobby might be.

She pulls gauze out of her pockets, wrapping it carefully around her knuckles, before looping back around the palm of her hands. She clenches her fist around the already sweaty material. It should keep her skin from getting too bruised. She makes her way further into the fields, passing a scant sheep or two before coming across an entire flock. A cough from inside the circle halts her steps, and her feet pivot to face the dusty white sheep. Thin white smoke spins upwards from the middle of the herd.

“Bobby? You in there?” She says.

No reply.

“You’re not gonna try to kill me, are you?”

Precision pushes the sheep to either side of her, moving further into the pile of life.

“Grandpa?”

“Roxy.”

In the center sits Grandpa Greet, meditating as the sheep look dubiously on.

“Do you like this sweater? Made from some of the sheep from this island. I just bought it off a local.”

Precision sighs. “Grandpa, what are you doing here?”

“Your mother left another voicemail, saying that you were off searching for Bobby,” he raised his voice a few octaves, “and if my son is in mortal danger, the least you could do was call!” He snorts, picking at the grass around his feet. “They don’t understand what we do.”

Precision’s skin prickles, “that’s your daughter, grandpa. And my mom.”

“Oh, don’t think she left what you said to her out of the voicemail, Precision. I heard about it all.”

Grandpa Greet pats the spot next to him, prompting Precision to plop down next to him. She sighs, her chest heaving out the stress of the plane ride, and the exhaustion of her unanswered questions. Bobby wasn’t in sight, and neither was Caesar. Had he taken him?

“He’s not here. He’s gone off somewhere else, somewhere east.”

“And what are you doing here?”

Grandpa Greet sighs. He turns his back to Precision.

“Caesar is going to try to turn a big secret of mine into some big reveal. And he’s gonna leave out some details that you should know. He’s gonna make it seem like everything you know about me is a lie.”

“Okay.”

Precision is nervous to say more. What could be so, so bad?

Grandpa Greet takes a deep breath. “I really wish the rest of the world would leave us alone, you know? Bobby had it right, coming all the way out here, it’s quiet.”

He snuffs his cigar out in the dirt below him. The green grass fades to black under the pressure of his fire.

“I am 285,000 years old.”

Silence.

“Approximately. It’s hard to remember the beginning. But I have been here for as long as humans have walked the earth,abouts.”

“I thought you said you didn’t know where your powers came from?”

“When did I say I did,” he snapped. “Listen. I am very old, and as far as I know, my body doesn’t know how to die.”

Wind whisks over their heads. The sheep bleat, and move from where family sits opposite one another. Grandpa Greet has seen the world, Precision realizes then. He’s seen the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, the downfall of horse driven caravans and the rise of RVs. Perhaps he didn’t know where he came from, either.

“I only have memories from the age of fifteen onwards, before you ask about my parents. For some reason, my children can’t inherit my strength. But it skips a generation. Still don’t know why,” he chuckles, “it’s always rubbed your mom the wrong way how easily you and your brothers found my attention. She was an average spawn. Quick to envy. But you and your brothers,” he whistles. “Beyond my expectations. Geoff was a genius, Bobby is incredibly powerful, and you? You’re Strong. Stronger than I’ve ever been.”

“Archaically powerful,” Precision notes.

Grandpa Greet looks at her strangely, “where did you hear that?”

She curls up in the grass, facing away from him. “You used to say it when I was little. You probably don’t remember it much.”

“That’s another thing you can’t avoid,” he says. “With old age comes dementia, depression, aches of the body and of the mind. Sometimes I forget where I am, and wake up surrounded by destruction. And some of that chaos gets passed down.”

Precision’s spine tenses. “What does that mean.”

“You know,” her grandfather almost scolds her for asking. Like she should be the one to say it aloud. “And I don’t do it on purpose either, you know. My body simply expels what it deems unnecessary to survival. Bobby got my alcoholism. Geoff received my paranoia from the war. You? I don’t know, yet. But I think you might’ve split my unnecessary reproduction desires with your eldest brother. You play things close to your chest, though. Maybe you inherited my mystery.”

“That’s not a disease.”

“Your mother would disagree.”

She turns around to face her grandfather. His eyes aren’t as old as they should be.

“Are you a god?”

“Are you?” he says.

The whine of police sirens grows closer.

“That’s my cue, I suppose,” Grandpa Greet says. “You’ll have to deal with the police. I brought a boat for one.”

“No, you’re not. I have way more questions. Do I have cousins? Why does Caesar know this?”

“Roxy. Hush.”

Grandpa Greet hops off the edge of the cliff, clawing his fingers into the side of the rock to slow his descent towards the water. Precision watches as his boat motors away across the choppy waters.

Her mind whirs with the information presented to her. Her grandpa was old. Immortal, maybe. Was she immortal? If her whole family was descendents of this eternal man, then were they destined to live forever as well? She imagines what it must be like, to have an ever-extending road ahead of you, your body and mind unchanging and incapable of growing or decaying, stuck in a stasis of forever. The image is blurry and uncertain, but she sees a long cement road with plains of nothing around her. There would never be a finale for your goals and your legacy, just things people around you forget, and memories you share with no one. Next time she sees him, she’ll ask what he thinks of Dorian Gray.

The sirens sound from ten feet away, and she doesn’t run. She moves into the cop car robotically, without purpose into the back as they escort her wherever they please.

Chapter 7

They drop her off at a hotel with a vacant suite. The trip back is a blur of greenery and passing cloud hang. The sun came out just as it was setting behind the horizon.

Precision throws the suitcase from Caesar into the corner, and lays back on her soft bed. There’s no reason to be freaking out, she thinks. Grandparents have secrets all the time. A lot of them have sadder ones, too. She’s lucky that it’s just immortality.

Groaning, she rubs her hand over her face before collapsing onto the king size bed. Her hands fumble for the tv remote, determined to put on something meaningless and cheerful. Something mind numbingly untrue.

The TV clicks on and shows several streaming services available for viewing. She clicks one of them, hoping to find Friends or Cheers available.

“Strange,” she mumbles. The TV only has one option, and that’s a show about sheep shearing. Ireland needs to get a wider variety of shows. Static overtakes the tv as Caesar comes on live, smiling at the camera.

“Hello there world. I come to interrupt your unscheduled binging to deliver a riddle to a very special someone out there. Someone who undoubtedly needs to take a break from the hum drum of everyday life.”

Precision snarls. She hasn’t slept in a day, and now wasn’t the time for games.

“It seems Precision Greet has forgotten her role in the world. Isn’t that sad?”

A track of people aww-ing plays over the speakers.

“I know, tragic. But don’t worry, viewers. We’ll get her right back on track, with one of her favorites, a riddle:

‘What is pink, near dead, and hanging overhead?’ You have fifteen minutes, Precision. Make it count.”

Caesar’s image disappears from the TV, replaced by a news story about a new young governor being kidnapped from family vacation in Ireland.

“Oh, fuck,” she mutters.

He was forcing her to act in the public eye. No matter if she saved him or not, newspapers from all over would be titled “What Really Happened to the Governor” and “How the Greets Created Tragedy Again”.

Good thing she brought her working boots. She puts on a sturdier pair of the black Greet ensemble she took from her Grandfather’s house. A golden ‘G’ sits against the right side of her chest. She tightens the kevlar corset that lays under the loose black t-shirt, which is more to save her from accidental nudity than protection of her own skin.

She sets off from the hotel room, ignoring the staff and security that try to stop her for an autograph.

“Excuse me, I know you’re busy on a mission, we all saw the broadcast,” one bellhop says. “But I’d really appreciate it if could sign—”

She bumps his shoulder out of the way, rushing into the cold air through the door he blocked. There was no one in front of her, but a crowd that was screaming and yelling a few blocks away. The town square.

The funny thing about running when you’re incredibly strong, is that you can’t actually go that fast. If your feet pound against the pavement, the pavement will break. So Precision runs at an average pace towards the town square, careful not to press too hard on the individual stone path laid beneath her feet.

As promised, the governor is high above the crowd. With each tick of the large clock on a building nearby, his body is raised by his neck, further away from the chair underneath him. Precision rolls her eyes at the theatrics before stepping out of the shadowed alleyway. As the light of the

streetlamps blankets her body, she puffs out her chest, her strides become longer, slower. Her shoulders stand tall, and her head tilts upwards. No longer is she slouching and lurking in the shadows. The world is watching, and she has to perform.

“Caesar!” she yells into the audience. A hush falls over the crowd. “Let him go.”

No response from anywhere, until a static sound comes from the body hanging overhead.

“Get him yourself. I left you a gift in his right coat pocket, you’ll be needing it.”

Precision looked at the time. There were ten more clicks of the tiniest hand before Governor Phil would be choking, and there was no way to get through the crowd in the next ten seconds.

Property damage was inevitable.

She eyed the building around her, looking for an edge that would give her a boost. None of them were tall enough to take her right up to the governor, but they could boost her over the crowd.

She took a running leap, letting go of caution and crumbling rocks in the process. When she pushed, she felt the foundation crumble under her, and she lept backwards over the crowd. Below her, she could see their shocked faces. A world upside down.

Her feet hit the pavement hard, and she quickly whips around to face the statue from which the governor hangs. Grabbing on to bits of stone robe and tassel that protrude from the statue, she launches herself upwards, grappling onto the space right above the governor. She leans over, grabbing him by the middle and hoisting him upwards next to her. The familiar stench of urine is in the air around him.

“Don’t worry governor,” she says. “I’ve got you now.”

The way she speaks often makes people feel like they're in a movie. Like she's from another world, another class of humanity. Governor Phil is a victim to charm like anyone else she's ever saved from peril. The governor's eyes are wide, and glistening like a child. He is wrapped up in her arms, and looks so small to the crowd below, despite being taller than Precision. She hops off the statue, holding the governor close to her chest so as not to jostle any possibly broken bones. The paramedics are, uselessly, still trying to pry the crowd apart to get to her. They part for her, though. The long strides, unblinking gaze as she heads towards the nearest gurney. On her part, Precision does her best not to run, to put him down so she can search his jacket for what Caesar left.

When she puts him down, she slips an envelope out of his pocket with gentle, practiced hands.

"Take care," she says, before jogging back down the alleyway. People once again try to stop her, but she pushes through them, more gently than she did with the bellhop because there are cameras and news crews spattered across the crowd.

Recklessly, Precision doesn't check for any changes in her room before opening the envelope.

'Roxy,' it reads,

'Congratulations on saving the mayor. I knew you could do it. I am very proud of you. That catalyst will now send you tumbling down a rabbit hole of mystery and espionage that I have carefully crafted for you. I hope you are excited, because I am.

Do you wonder why I write to you? Why I put so much effort into playing games. I promise you'll find out if you keep going. You might also get to find out where your brother is, who you and your family really are. I saw that the patron of the Greets came to say hello in Ireland. I do wish he

hadn't spoiled your family lineage for you before I could, but was pleased to see he didn't say it all. The Greets are very talented in half-truths, it seems.

You still have some questions left to ask me. I wonder what they'll be. Even the most mundane of them can reveal exciting answers, I assure you.'

"So many I's," Precision thinks. "The ego on this man."

'I do wish Bobby hadn't run away from you when you got to the island, I wonder what he's so afraid of? Family is family, after all. Looks like you'll have to find him on your own, again. They're searching for you too, you know. The Octagon. I hope they don't find you before you finish the adventure I've made you. It seems they're thinking of laying down the law after your brother's stint in Ireland. Watch the news for signs of me, I'll be finding volunteers to help you with your tasks.

-The One and Only'

Precision folds the letter back into neat creases, before putting it next to the Kevlar against her chest.

She would focus on finding Bobby first. There was no reason to believe that it wasn't part of Caesar's plan. Family was her focus.

'In latest news, it appears the POTUS is in the middle of denouncing the Greet family, saying they have gone too far in their recent attack in Ireland. This news comes just hours after Precision Greet has saved Governor Phil, a Louisiana elector who is anti-enhancement, the U.S. program that is trying to recreate the superhuman capabilities of the Greet family.'

"I believe tonight is proof that the Greets only attract trouble," the President's voice blares over the TV. "The governor was captured in a game between forces that aren't under national control. The

Greets were asked to politely step down, and they keep endangering lives. If this keeps up, the U.S. will be holding them accountable for the damages caused.”

Her face grows hot as she stares at the face of the man who once asked her to guard his children, and whose office asked her to complete so many of the missions they now call ‘damaging’. So impermanent, their loyalty.

“The citizens of the world once asked them to stand down, and now it is time that our leaders do the same, and use their power to enforce this action. We kindly ask that our brother nations return the Greets to us, and that if you see something, say something. It might just save a life”

Precision shuts off the tv before throwing her tv remote across the room, listening to it shatter in a sickening crescendo.

“How dare they,” she mutters. The Greets had given the world security, and hope. They throw it aside when they want chaos. They brought order.

She digs through her duffel bag for a pair of civilian clothes when there’s a knock on the door.

“Fuck,” she mutters.

Another knock.

She peers out the window, and sees unlit police cars lining the street. She turns and walks to the door, opening it slightly ajar.

“May I help you,” she says. “I’m quite tired after today.”

The hotel manager is sweating. “Yes, I was hoping you could come out into the hall for a moment to talk about the fee for your room? It seems there’s been a problem with the card you gave us.

They were treating her like a common drug dealer. She would play.

“Alright, let me just get my bags.”

“Oh, there’s no need for-“

“No,” she insists, “ I have more cards in there. I’ll have them for you in a moment.”

Her best option was to jump out the window. The media would love it, but she had no choice. She wasn’t going to fight a bunch of police officers, it was a too direct assault against the law.

She’d pick the glass out of her arms later.

The hood of the Dublin police car crunches under her weight. She doesn’t spare a passing glance at the police officers around her as she rolls her body onto the street, feet hiding cobblestone as she runs back towards the docks.

The odds of someone letting her take a boat are still fairly high. People always want to help those that stand out in the world. As she nears the docks the smell of the sea grows stronger. The wooden planks creak as she runs, trying to avoid the bird poop splashed across the deck as best she can. Many of the boats are too small to make the journey to England on a choppy night like this. At the end of the dock lies the only fishing boat big enough, but there’s a light on in the captain’s seat. They’d have to get off so she could set sail. She breaks the thick rope in her hands and pushes herself onto the boat, knocking rapidly on the captain’s door. There’s a clattering inside before it opens, revealing an old man in a bright yellow raincoat and dungaroes, smelling distinctly of fish and saltwater. He doesn’t look pleased to see her.

“I’m going to need to commandeer this ship, sir. A matter of national security.”

He looks her up and down. “You’re the one they’re after, aren’t you? The Greet?”

A click comes from his left arm. Precision looks down and sees the old shotgun supporting his left leg. Behind him there are anti-government paraphernalia, a bumper sticker that says “nuclear power? No thanks” and a mug that says “Fuck the RA” on the side. Anti-England, anti nuclear. She can work with this.

“I’m fighting for the little guy. That’s why they don’t want me going to England, fucking sympathizers.”

The fisherman shifts his stance, leaning harder into the gun.

“You IRA?”

“I’ve travelled all the world, and I’ve seen movements like it across every nation. I support the cause.”

“Nice to meet you, I won’t tell them you came by when they search my boat.”

She reaches out a hand, “wait. Please. If I go back with them, there’s no telling how long they’ll keep me. I’m just looking for passage to England. To get somewhere safer. Your boat’s the only one big enough to take me there.”

The old fisherman sighs. They both look off into the distant night when they hear the police sirens encroaching closer and closer to them.

“It’s now or never. If you don’t take me now, I’ll swim.”

A lie. He scrunches his fluffy beard against his chin.

“I’ll keep the lights off for as long as I can. Hide under the bench until I knock.”

She follows him into the captain’s seat. It smells strongly of him and canned sardines, and there are a few shirts scattered around the dashboard and floor. He swipes one off the wheel. Precision folds

herself into the small space below the bench of the ship. She hopes they'll be in safer waters sooner rather than later.

Chapter 8

Precision wakes up to the thumping on the seat above her.

“We’re all clear. Their boats can’t pass into English land without permits.”

She gently pushes the seat up, squinting under the soft light of the fisherman’s candle. “How long was I there for.”

“Two and a half hours. Maybe three.”

The fisherman is whistling, a breathy attempt at “We Will Rock You” By Queen.

The song reminds Precision of Geoff. She remembers them all screaming it in the back of escort vans, before the full days of training, and once even on the battlefield.

“Roxy,” he had called, “care for a recital?”

And they sung through broken limbs and concussions, making the best of what was almost their last mission. Myanmar isn’t somewhere she has a desire to go back to. Instead she enjoys the rocking of the boat, and the scent of the sea that leaks through the door. It’s dark and she can imagine that they are rocking along magma, sailing through a dark and hellish sea. Just to pass the time.

“How do you know the IRA,” the fisher questions.

“I know all the anti-government organizations. Or used to.”

The way that some eight year olds memorized Pokémon and their evolutions, Precision memorized the lives and numbers of anti-government organizations that sprouted and festered in different parts of the world. There were three tiers, and the IRA was a tier 2. Her education on the

governments of the world was strange. Agent Bartley tested her on the U.S. government, and how to identify groups that went against patriotic values. US relations were color-coded and memorized, that she could close her eyes and see the map of the world in three colors.

She cringes now when thinking of how she used to preach on live TV about fighting for justice and the American way. She used to believe that people were crazy when they said governments weren't good for anything, and she'd rolled her eyes. She did plenty every day to further the US agenda. But no matter how many terrorist groups she captured, and governments she de-stabilized, she would not see a change in the way things were.

"Almost had to take a few of you down a few years back," she admits, because who would she be protecting at this point by lying. "Got called off when you guys lost traction."

"Good thing."

"Yeah."

"Now you know. The only thing you can trust from the government is for them to stab you in the back."

Precision wants to tell him it isn't as simple as that. A pit of anger always grows in her stomach when people say things like that. Not everyone who works and trusts their government is bad. There are good people, too. People who do the hard work, who make sure people get their licenses in a week, and deliver mail and say hello to fifty people a day. None of them get paid enough, but they still do it. There are people who work day and night to improve government websites, making them more accessible for near nothing of what their talent is worth. She wants to ask, "who gave you your boat

permit, your fishing license. Who let it slide when you didn't have enough papers showing proof of residence?"

But she doesn't ask that. The answer will be anger and conspiracy theories mixed with the one hard truth: the people who lead poison the good work of those who follow.

"True enough," she says.

The rest of the ride across the ocean is uneventful. Silence from the fisherman was welcome, as Precision was able to catch up on the sleep she missed during the plane ride.

It was still dark when they landed in England, off of Liverpool.

"This is far as I can take you. Docks are closed for the evening to private boats, so you'll have to swim. I'm guessing you can handle the cold."

"Thanks," she says.

"Don't mention it. To anyone."

When she jumps into the water, it is icy cold. Her clothes feel heavy under the water, but the duffle bag floats next to her, waterproof and buoyant. She takes long strokes against the chilling cold, keeping her mouth as closed as she can as the ocean splashes her face. Her palm touches the concrete wall first. Grabbing onto cracked brick, she pulls herself upwards onto the street.

"Fuck," she whispers. The cold bites into her sopping wet body. She might be indestructible, but not completely safe from hypothermia.

She spots one of those touristy red telephone booths. She can change and get moving before the sun rises, find a place to stay and try to get an internet connection so she can figure out where Bobby is before Caesar comes up with another game to play.

The booth phone rings. Precision groans. Of course. She finishes pulling up her dry pants before picking the phone up.

“What.”

“So eager, I see. I hope the ferry ride treated you well?”

“Yeah, buttered lobster and caviar. I’m kind of in the middle of changing, here. Can you wait?”

“Justice doesn’t wait. You think you can leave this lifestyle, Roxy? I bet you didn’t hesitate when you came to rescue Mr. Governor here. You just did. Can you believe that, Philip? No thought, before she rushed in to save you.”

She wants to break the phone in her grasp, “you took him again? Let him go, Caesar.”

He laughs, “so impatient, Roxy. I will, I will. As soon as you do a few things for me. Humor my nostalgia. Your first task is in a note inside the phone.”

Dial tone. Precision crushes the plastic and wiring in her hand, dropping it from her hand. There’s nothing inside, but the circular bottom of the phone has loosened slightly. Picking it up again, she unscrews the cap, and finds a tiny note with an address on it. There’s an earpiece as well.

Hope Street. St James Gardens. Make sure to put the earpiece in so we can continue to chat.

She stuffed the note in her bag before finishing changing out of the wet clothes. She could dump them in a trash can nearby.

She knew Liverpool well enough to know there was only so much expansive green space in the nearby area. The street lamps lit her way, light expanding on the crown of her head and disappearing just as quick as she jogged around the corner. There was a cathedral two blocks down with a garden area, and there was a good chance that it was where Caesar wanted her to go. She’d have to take the

chance. When she got there, it was empty, save for a father and his daughter. The child, probably eight or nine, was sobbing next to a big oak tree, and her father was trying to console her. He looked relieved when Precision came into sight.

“Hey! Aren’t you Precision? The hero?”

Precision put on her ‘I’m responsible’ face.

“Yes, yes I am. How can I help you out today? Is there someone wrong?”

The father looks down at his daughter. “Go on, Casey, tell her what’s wrong.”

Casey wiped her snot onto her neon orange sleeve before looking up at Precision. “King Wenceslas is stuck in the tre-he-ee,” she trails off into a sob again.

“Well,” Precision says. “I’ll go get him for you. How does that sound?”

The little girl nods, and the father lets out a relieved sigh, muttering tired thank yous as Precision climbs the branches. The first few are bare, so she ascends into the leaf-filled upper area of the tree. Nothing to her right, but the sun is starting to rise, and the warm tone sheds some light within the tree. She looks to her right, and holds in a yelp. There’s a spider, which is much too big for her liking, perched on the branch next to her head. It is hairy and big and definitely could’ve eaten the girl’s cat. Precision hops down from the tree, and looks at the dad.

“I didn’t see a cat up there,” she leans in and whispers, “but there’s a tarantula big enough to E-A-T one up there. I’m so sorry.”

Casey perks up. “That’s him! That’s King Wenceslas!”

Precision shivers.

The dad shrugs, “What are you gonna do? Kids.”

Caesar was going to make her touch a spider. A bit crude, but still evil.

“Do you guys have a cage, or...?”

“No,” dad sighs. “This one likes to take him with her on midnight walks.”

“The moon rejuvenates him!” Casey yells.

“You’re gonna have to grab him.”

“He’s really sweet for a Burgundy Goliath Bird Eater,” she insists. “He ate a whole bird’s nest, so he should be pretty sleepy. He’ll crawl right into your hand.”

Precision’s back feels achy, and thinks that maybe climbing the tree again wouldn’t be such a great idea.

Her earpiece crackles, “Come on now Roxy, tick tock. There’s only so much time before I get bored with the governor here.”

Precision waves the dad over, far enough from the daughter. He leans in close when she motions him to scooch in.

“Do you want me to stomp on it?” she whispers.

The dad looks horrified. “What the hell is wrong with you? No!”

Precision lurches back from his anger. He talked about it in a neutral tone, and what she clearly remembers as ill-hidden disgust. “Suit yourself,” she says, miffed. A seed of discomfort sews in her stomach from the misreading of what is a simple situation. He should have said yes, please, and thank you.

She takes off the zip up jacket she’s wearing. She climbs back up to the unfortunate reality that the spider is still there, and that it has turned to face her. Balancing her feet on a branch below, she

holds out the jacket to King Wenceslas. He reaches out one ligament, tapping it against the new surface in front of him. Another feeler reaches out and slowly, he traverses closer to Precision.

“This is so creepy, please don’t kill me, please don’t kill me. Don’t touch me with your weird little feet.”

When he’s fully on the jacket, she starts to descend. He is still crawling towards her, nearing her chest and face.

The ear piece turns on once again, “now steal him.”

“What,” she hisses.

“Go on, steal him. And head to the bank five blocks down. Someone’s going to rob it in fifteen minutes.”

The ear piece clicks off once more, and Precision wants to pull her hair out of her head. She folds the jacket over King Wenceslas, and runs off without a word to the family. She can hear Casey wailing.

The thing is dormant in her hands, to the point where she wonders if it is even alive. But then it wriggles. She hasn’t ever held a spider this big, before. It is disgusting.

“I’m gonna kill you,” she yells, hoping it reaches him, then regrets it when the spider ruffles disapprovingly at the sound. The morning is just beginning.

Right as she wonders how in the hell she’s going to find the right bank, there’s a chorus of gunshots up ahead.

She runs with her arms outstretched in front of her towards the noise. She lets loose a myriad of curse words as she runs, mumbling them under her breath in case there are cameras nearby.

Caesar wants to catch her on camera at this bank. But what was he planning? She could see him manipulating the situation into making it seem as though she was robbing the bank, but that wasn't his style. It would alert the authorities to her presence, no doubt. Make it harder for her to escape, maybe. It had been a while since she had authorities looking for her in an urban area.

“Hands up!!”

When she makes it to the bank, she freezes, and she understands.

Chapter 9

Roxy was thirteen when her mother started to treat her like a lady. Cotillion was announced at the local community center, and Mrs. Greet saw stars.

“Oh, you'll learn how to dance, and how to be a lady,” she squealed.

Roxy was secretly pleased her mother was taking an interest in her. She used to dress her up in gowns and outfits, but when Roxy started practicing things started getting torn. Her mother had started letting grandpa buy her clothes,

“Since he's going to cause all the rips anyways,” she said.

Roxy was okay with that, she guessed. But she was growing, and too embarrassed to ask her grandpa to take her bra shopping.

She was also, to her great secret shame, very excited to wear the white silk gloves.

“Oh, and you'll get to know some of the girls, too. It'll be so nice to get to know young women your age.”

Roxy hadn't gotten the chance to be around other girls for longer than a conversation in the grocery store. She loved her brothers, and she was around some adult women at the Octagon, but never anyone her own age. It would be nice.

Bobby ran down the stairs, suited up. He kissed his mom on the cheek, and messed up Roxy's hair before running towards the door.

"Grandpa and I are stopping a bank robbery, see you later!"

"A bank robbery? Isn't that a little too dangerous?"

"Bye!"

Roxy longed to follow him. But there will be other missions, and her and her mom were going to the mall to find a dress that suited her just right.

Roxy was in a T-pose, being scrutinized by Mrs. Greet and the woman who worked at the store.

"Too long, don't you think?"

"Not if we put heels on her," she said.

Roxy looked uncomfortable. Mrs. Greet noticed and shook her head at the woman.

"What about that purple one? Let's try that on."

The adrenaline and nerves about trying on dresses exhausted Roxy. This is the fourth dress she's tried on in the past hour. She returns to the changing room, elbows bumping against the sides of the stall as she shimmies off one dress to try on another. When she returns to the mirror in the store, her mother gasps.

"Oh Roxy, you look so delicate. Those sleeves make your arms look so slender."

And they covered up her muscles. But Roxy agreed, she looked nice. Her heart fluttered as she looked at the girl in the mirror in front of her. Her mom had taken her to Victoria's Secret, and she had learned she was a B cup. Seeing her body in clothes that weren't for training was strange. She looked...normal.

The TV behind the desk caught Roxy's ear when she heard "Greet".

"Two of the Greets are working with police in a situation involving hostages and several dozen armed robbers. In a calculated attempt against the largest bank in the city, we are reporting live."

Roxy looked at her mom, who was watching the TV as well. It was always hard to read what she thought of all of her children fighting crime. Roxy used to think it was fear, and confusion. She now knows it was resentment too. Her feet wanted to rush her to the bank. There was a pulling in her, when she knew that there was something bad happening and she could stop it. Grandpa called it her moral compass. Bobby called it B.S. Still, looking at the building, she yearned to be there. Maybe she could go after buying the dress with her mom.

"Breaking News, it appears that Mr. Greet has exited the building without Bobby in tow. The situation is unknown, but it appears the teen is still inside. Folks, it seems that Mr. Greet is going back in as well." There's more gunfire, and the TV cuts off into a slap chop commercial.

Roxy's heart stopped.

Her mother sat down on a stool, furiously typing into her phone.

"This always happens when I'm trying to enjoy my day. Bartley better make his way over there, or I swear I'll— Roxy, no."

Roxy hesitated. Her feet faced the door, gym shoes on and ready to run.

“Just really quick. To make sure they’re okay.”

“If they need more help they can call in the SWAT team.”

“But mom, I—”

“It isn’t ladylike, roxy,” her mother grabbed her wrist. “Stay here. I am not asking you.”

It’s funny, how grips can still feel tight, even though Roxy could easily break away. She noticed the lack of space between skin and skin, and the repression of her circulation.

“I’m sorry mom,” and she really was. She gently pried her mother’s fingers one by one off of her arm, before turning and running towards the exit and towards the parking lot. She stole a golf cart from a security guard, and took the thing three blocks down, to the bank where they needed her.

Roxy abandoned the cart and rushed past police lines, a few tried to stop her, but she easily yanked her arm back, with the correct amount of force, and continued to stride towards the bank doors. She heard gunshots from inside, and her brother cry out in pain.

If she were someone else, she would’ve been dead as soon as she entered those doors. Bullet after bullet rocketed towards her, and their force knocked her off her feet. There was silence outside the bank. The sky was blue, not a cloud in sight.

“She’s dead!”

Roxy shot up at that. No, she wasn’t. She was surprised too. No one ever shot her before, and the holes in her dress made her angry. Her mom would be even more mad. She got up, this time walking instead of standing there with a dumb look on her face like a civilian.

She bent her knees, giving herself lower body support against the blowback of any more bullets. She spotted Grandpa and Bobby, staring open mouthed at her. A girl in a purple dress, doing something impossible for them.

Roxy yelled, like Grandpa taught her to, to intimidate the enemy.

“Bullets aren’t working, dumbass! Get in there!”

“I’m not fighting a little girl.”

“That thing isn’t human. It’s us or her.”

So unorganized. Roxy grabbed the first man by the throat, and yeeted him to the side. She grabbed the man who encouraged his friend to go in, and punched him in the gut. They were both wearing bright blue shark masks.

There was chaos behind her as a new group of sharks, who seemed to have forgotten that she was, to her surprise as well, bulletproof.

She swung at them wildly, with less caution than allowed in training, and it felt amazing. The adrenaline of nerves is nothing compared to that of success, of blatant lack of fear and confidence to be better than everyone else around.

She lived in her indestructibility.

Turning to where she expected her brother and grandfather to be, she doesn’t see them. They usually would be up and leading again, once the bad guys were cleared away. Where were they? She returned to where they were hiding behind a desk. Grandpa talked in a low voice to Bobby, who breathed in and out in rapid succession. There’s blood seeping out of his leg, making his uniformed pants even darker.

“What happened?”

“He got shot. He tried to charge right through, and take them out himself.” Grandpa shook his head. “I told him not to, the fool.”

“But you could do it,” Bobby spat. “How could you-- you—”

“Hush, Bobby. You aren’t right.”

Bobby nodded his head, pressed his thumb against his neck. He claimed it helped him keep from throwing up.

Grandpa looked Roxy right in the eyes. “How did you do that?”

She shrugged, “I don’t know, why can’t you?”

He looked closer at her irises, searching for some sign of hesitation, some withholding of a secret. She blinked, and he looked away.

“Alright, go get the armed police outside. I’ll go further in with them, stay with your brother.”

By the time Mrs. Greet pulled up and made her way through police lines, they cleared the building and Roxy waited with her brother and the EMT’s on site. She pushed through the crowd, eyes frantic as she landed on Bobby’s prostrate form.

“Oh, Robert,” she sobbed.

“Ma,” he chided. “I’m fine. I’m feeling better already. Really.”

She brushed his sweaty hair back from his forehead. “My brave little Bobby.” Turning to Roxy, her smile dissipated. “We are still going to have to pay for that dress, Roxy. And you’ll never be able to wear it with all those holes in it. For once, couldn’t you let the boys handle it?”

Roxy opened her mouth to protest.

Mrs. Greet interrupted, "I don't want to hear it Roxy, we'll talk about it on the way to the hospital. Just know that I am very disappointed in you."

Bobby stuck his tongue out at Roxy from behind their mother's back.

Chapter 10

All the bank robbers wear pink masks, undeniably shaped like sharks. Precision wonders which one is going to get a spider to the face.

"Roxy, you can put the spider down somewhere." Caesar speaks in her ear.

She nods, slowly lowering her arms to the floor, placing her jacket on the ground. It shuffles around inside her jacket before stilling once more. She turns towards the bank robbers, "alright, i'm going to have to ask you to put your hands up, put the money down, and wait for the authorities to arrive until I get the civilians out of here.

They say nothing. One of them shakes in place, holding the gun tightly against their chest. Odd.

"Put them down," she orders. One by one, they take their masks off, all except the one shaking like a wet dog in the snow at the very back of the bank. The teller looks frozen in fear behind him. Something is off about the robbers. They are all incredibly...diverse. Age, style, race. None of them seem to fit the bill of crook, and they all look terrified not of her, but of *him*. This pink masked robber in the back. He stops shaking, and presses a hand against his ear.

"Caught me!" he sings. He aims his gun at the fluorescent lights above him, and creates a shower of sparks. She can still see, but the sparks light some damp papers on fire next to the teller. She moves to the teller's desk, swinging behind and grabbing her up in her arms.

“I’ve got you,” she says in her hero voice. Civilians love the hero voice. She places her gently down near the rest of the victims. “Evacuate! Go!”

Caesar nods his head at the sweating masses. They move, ripping earpieces off their heads and helping one another to the double doors out front. She wastes no time in continuing towards the back where Caesar ran off to, just in time to see him step slowly into a black car. He pulls up the mask, and smiles at her before speeding off.

“Fuck the pavement,” she says. Tearing off after him leaves shards of concrete in her wake, but there’s no time. If she catches him, the Octagon can keep him as a peace offering. She could present him on live TV, this time. Maybe then they’d be forced to advertise her as a force for good again. Morning traffic picks up, and it is getting harder and harder to follow Caesar’s car. The city is becoming too ingested to be upturning this much concrete. The crashes might kill people. Just as she slows down, so does Caesar’s car. Confused, she takes a step forward, only to have the car inch forward as well. When she jogs, it moves forward. She stops in the middle of the street, cars beeping and trying to move around her from either side. She doesn’t bother to move from her spot, as the cars will probably take more damage than she will at this point. A rather obnoxious beep coming from her right breaks her out of her stillness. It’s familiar. A large, hot pink Jeep stops in front of her and the driver wordlessly leaves the driver’s seat, engine running. The license plate reads GOROXGO. Precision’s stomach sinks as she enters the giant, audacious car. Her earpiece crackles.

“Look familiar, Roxy Roo?”

Chapter 11

I don't understand why anyone would want to live on a street where all the houses look the same. Red brick houses with trimmed lawns pass by, one by one, another after another. The street is newly paved. The home owners association collects annual donations to keep things the same every year. The last time I was here, I was Geoff. I became Psycho, I was 'reformed', and now I am back as a friend even though they no longer see me as family. I turn into the third to last house before the curve of the cul-de-sac.

I pull into the driveway, and there stands Roxy. Codename Precision. My little sister looks the same. She is pretty and sweet and has pigtails and bandages. My all-American tomboy. When she sees me, her whole face lights up. My chest tightens. My palms sweat. She has gotten so much older. I've missed so much.

"Jiffy," she yells, and she runs towards me, arms wide, feet so fast.

"Hey, Rox," I say. I brush my hands against her shoulders, barely touching them.

"Mom told me you were gone! That you went on a long trip and might have to go," her eyes flit around, "undercover".

My mouth works itself upward into a smile. "Yeah, but it turned out to be a red herring."

She nods. She doesn't know what a red herring is.

"Bobby'll be so happy you're back! He's been getting all of grandpa's attention."

When she rolls her eyes, she looks just like mom. Her hand touches mine, and I hope she doesn't notice how it trembles. Twenty-seven bones in the human hand. By sixteen, she'll be able to pick and choose which ones to crack.

“Today I learned how to make a baking soda volcano.”

“Is mom going to let you go to public school next year?”

Her fingers wiggle against mine. I withhold the urge to rip my hand from hers.

“No. She was thinking about it, but then they changed ‘history’ to ‘social studies’”. She rolls her eyes again.

“You really are starting to look like mom. If you keep doing that with your eyes they’re going to stay there, you know.”

I’ve lost her attention by the time I finish my sentence.

“Look at the pink jeep I got!”

She lets go of me. I rub my hand against my knuckles. My headache is getting worse. It’s not right for one thing to have so much power, to be able to physically intimidate other people into submission. She’s climbing into the tiny electric car, scooting her knees under the wheel. She needs a bigger one. Must be from dad. She turns her head to me, and smiles. All bright eyes and chubby cheeks. She is so young, so much younger than she deserves to be. Me and Bobby never got to be this young before they ruined us. Before grandpa made us train, and mom told us how to be ‘proper men’.

“It’s from dad! For completing another basic martial arts class. I know some Krav Maga now.”

She won’t need it. It focuses on using the enemies strength against them, but there’s no one that can match. I’ve heard even Bobby loses sometimes.

I clap her on the sides of her ears. She screams in pain. She must feel so dizzy, like her brain is being squeezed. I take out a baton, crackling with electricity. She turns, her eyes wide and body stiff. I swing my arm down. This is it, this is the end.

She's different, though. I went in thinking she'd be the same, but she's different. The jeep reaches my head before a shock pierces her neck. Then there's shapes and sounds and a bright light. I feel like throwing up at the same time as I am weightless. I'm back in my body when I hit the hood of a car. I groan, and turn to roll off the hood. It's my Camaro.

"Geoff!"

It's Bobby. He's running towards me. I don't see Roxy anywhere. He wraps me up in his arms. I revel in it, he'll see the security footage soon enough with the rest of them. He won't love me anymore either. But for now, he carries me upstairs. He takes a right, and lays me down on the bed of what used to be my room.

"You gotta stay awake, Geoff. Stay awake, listen to me. What's five plus five, Geoff?"

"Twelve."

"Close enough. I'm calling grandpa."

I want to tell him no but my mouth won't move and I'm not quite sure why I don't want to see grandpa. I want to tell him that grandpa isn't the same anymore and that he's different, just like mom and dad are different and that Roxy is a lost cause and we need to get out of here.

"Rox, changing." I say.

Bobby shushes me, "it's alright, she's been taken in. She can't hurt you here, she didn't mean to but she's getting stronger. It's been harder to keep her under wraps."

Why is she wrapped? Presents? I don't feel good. I vomit, spewing out bile and the coke I had at the gas station before coming home. To their home. I don't remember what five plus five is.

The door creaks open, and in comes Agent Bartley, dressed to the nines.

“What happened.”

“Roxy,” Bobby shakes his head. “She must have lost control. I keep telling her to restrain herself but she never listens.”

“Where was he hit.”

“Where do you think? The giant gushing cavern on the right.”

“Cavern?” I say. That doesn’t sound good.

“Have you seen a doctor.”

“Does it look like we’ve seen a doctor?”

There’s a silence when they leave the room. They are gone fifteen minutes, or an hour.

“—And she just clocked him. I don’t know why, but it looks bad. She broke bone.”

I hear grandpa before I see him. “What’s he doing here.”

“I don’t know!”

Bobby is upset. I’ve upset Bobby, and I didn’t mean to.

“Get him out before Carrie sees.”

I flinch when I hear mom’s name. I try to move, and grandpa places his hand on my shoulder.

“He needs medical care. Where’s Bartley.”

“With Roxy, they’re looking at her first.”

He doesn’t sound like he’s mad at her. Why isn’t he mad at her? She hit me.

“Geoff, no.”

Grandpa stops my hand from touching my head.

“Bad?” I say.

“Where’s the doctor.” Bobby says.

Then there’s a doctor, a nurse, a suit. A few suits, actually. I should be honored.

“Dead,” I sputter. I think I say it.

“No, you’re here, son. Not gone yet.”

Her, I want to say. Roxy, is she dead, did I do it.

“Rox.” This time, I’m sure I say it.

“She’s fine. Everyone’s fine.” Bobby sounds like he’s choking. He should drink some water.

“You’re going to be fine.”

Bobby moves back, and the doctors are closer than him and I don’t like it.

“Mr. Greet, come with us.”

More muttering, the door closes and I’m alone with these strangers. They give me something that goes down smooth, but I try to listen to what is being said on the other side of the door. Nothing. I hear nothing.

I am in a hospital room, with a fake window and a tape of a yellow-crested warbler chirping the same tune on loop.

Still, I say “why won’t any answer back.” The bird sounds lonely.

“We’re not allowed to talk to you unless it is for a medical request.”

Probably a nurse. I don’t turn my head to look. It is days of this bird, and the fake window. No one who knows me comes to visit. Not even Bartley. I wonder if any of them are coming to get me, or if any of them care. I hope Bobby forgives me for what I did, but what she can do is bigger than family, it’s about balance. The world can’t withstand a Greet that strong.

Every day in this place is the same until He comes. And he comes in a storm. First I hear him.

“Caes—” I say.

He cradles my head in his hand.

“What did they do,” he says.

I grumble. I open my eyes, and I see his.

“There’s your gentle smile,” he says, and I try to grin wider for him.

He has someone else pick me up.

“I can walk,” I say. I have a brain injury, not a fractured spine.

When I take a step, it’s harder than I thought it would be, and all too quick I’m closer to his feet than I am to his eyes. Caesar wraps an arm over my shoulder.

“Take your time,” he says. “There’s no need to rush. I’ve got this under control.”

Of course he does. We walk at my pace, slow.

I kiss him, slow. We’ve been in the Greek islands since we left. It’s hard to say how long, but long enough to where I feel better again. I speak and I know the sentences are leaving my mouth. Even when they are slower than I am used to. I begin to think that the medicine worked, they actually took care of me and I will recover, eventually. I would relax more, but this home is tall and all glass except for the bathrooms. Caesar doesn’t need to hide, because they already know he is here. He likes to think he’s invincible.

“Why hasn’t the place been stormed yet,” I ask.

He scoffs, “What you think I wouldn’t take you without plenty of blackmail. I’m hurt.”

“Juicy?”

He grins with crooked teeth. “Oh yes. Involves the president’s son and a few of Putin’s advisors. I’ll spare you the details.”

Three more weeks pass, and I know for sure I’m going to die. I can see it in how he holds me, how he traces the lines of my face and the contours of my body. I see it when the doctor he’s hired speaks to him in muttered Greek, and they both nod so somber.

“I’ve never noticed how big your Adam’s apple is,” Caesar says.

“When is it all over,” I say it for the both of us. “How long do I have.”

His thumb brushes over my knuckles. “Seven wrinkles on the joint of your middle finger. Then five, the seven again. Almost a haiku.”

“Inverted poetry.”

He doesn’t tell me when it’s coming, but I can feel it. The end moves much slower than I pictured it would. It is not fast and rough. It isn’t a lamppost on a street corner I’ve been thrown against. It isn’t an assassination attempt. It isn’t the Russians, or the North Koreans, or even Caesar. It is my sister, my clumsy little sister who hit me over the head with a pink jeep. It is a glass house on the edge of an ocean. It is tidal waves washing in and out, and a man who loves me holding me through it all while my family is nowhere to be found. It is gradual, but my migraines are gone. I think that means Roxy’s gone.

“You won’t forget, will you?”

He pauses cutting bell peppers in the kitchen.

“Forget what,” he says.

“Me. But not me like this,” I gesture to my head. “Me when I was together and passionate and driven.”

“You are still all those things.”

I think of how I should say my next few words. He doesn't pick the knife back up again.

“I don't want you to forget that I was wonderful. That I made mistakes and I was shitty to you sometimes but I was brave and I don't want you to forget it.”

Caesar moves from the kitchen to where I sit, staring at the ocean. The water is cold today. He combs my hair with his fingers. He says “okay” softly, and traces the side of my head that isn't bandaged. “Do you want onions in your omelet?”

“No, it's alright.”

At this moment, it's all alright.

Chapter 12

The pink monstrosity barrels down the street as Precision chases Caesar. Lights that turn green for Caesar yellow as she speeds after him. The roar of the engine matches her own heartbeat.

“I'm going to kill him,” she murmurs. And she means it. She wouldn't stand for anyone else trying to make her feel guilty for what was family business. Not his. After running the fifth yellow light, however, she slows down. And at the seventh, she comes to a stop. What is she doing? What sort of world is she allowing to exist, if she persists? The car in front of her stops as well. The side of the car door opens, and out steps Caesar once more. He wiggles his fingers at her, as if to say hello. She scowls back at him. He waves a hand at her, signaling for her to cross the street to him. The cars on either side of her are at a standstill. Police sirens wail much closer than they did in Ireland, and they rush forward,

only to place medians, blocking the public from the one block stretch in which Precision and Caesar are situated. People roll down their windows, pop out of their sunroofs and argue with the policeman as they try to get a better look at what's happening in front of them. Caesar's smile turns downwards at the commotion. He huffs, and turns one of the tiny knobs on his watch. Phones wave erratically in the air, people pressing their power buttons, desperate to turn them back on.

"So loud, aren't they? And they complain about Americans acting belligerent." he smiles at Precision, as if she'll laugh along with his jab. "Oh come on, fuck the ra and all that," he says. She gives him nothing. "I'm surprised you stopped the car chase so early. Last time I saw you you were tearing up anyone who so much as whistled at you."

"Well," she says, "I was sixteen. I've got a clearer head these days."

"Practicing some self restraint, I see. I'm sure Geoff would've appreciated that."

Precision hates his scathing tongue. She hates his stupid brown hair and his stupid brown eyes and the way he can say exactly what he means. She clenches her fist, and then releases it. He wants to be punched. To prove that she's brutish and incapable of talking.

"You think I'm just a little girl throwing a tantrum," she says, taking a step forward, "that I tried to hurt Geoff? I was scared, and he tried to hurt me."

Something flashes over Caesar's face. A reflective light, for just a moment. She whipped her head upwards, and saw the sniper from the roof of a seamstress shop; and, too late, the firing of his gun.

When Precision wakes next, she is next to a sleeping Caesar in a cell. It's more befitting to decorate the Pirates of The Carribean than hold them captive, but she supposes there could be more

than meets the eye. Pushing herself into a sitting position, she grabs the attention of the guard with a black cap on. His eyes widen, and he pulls the hat over his face, showcasing the sloppily cut holes over his eyes and mouth.

“Fuck, Shit—” he mumbles outside the bars. “Viny-I mean Bull! She’s awake!”

“Move, move.”

There’s stumbling as a large man, Bull, trumbles into the room, hands shaking as he props a small box against the metal bars. It whines to life, a blue light coming on as it touches the iron of the bars. “Touch that,” Bull pants, “and he dies. Electric.”

Precision looked at the device. He was right. She could stand the shock long enough to pry the bars open, but it was unlikely that Caesar could.

“You two are going to stay put until we can get some feds to come and give us a reward.” The lanky one points a finger at her, “Shock him to get yourself out and the whole world will know you killed him.”

Caesar moans in the corner. The two kidnappers snicker as they leave the cave, footsteps distinctly stepping into puddles of water before fading away. The world around them is blue. Blue shines out from the computer monitor on the desk in front of them. It showcases the glistening water that has accumulated on the bricks making up the floor, arched ceiling and walls of this place. The smell of musk and moss hung in the air, and the only breeze that came in was just before the two kidnappers feet stepped out of range. They were somewhere old, and secret. Forgotten. Precision slumped back into the rocky wall. She hated forgotten places.

“Who were they,” Caesar rasped next to her. While her back was turned, he had fixed the upturned and crinkled collar of his shirt, and his hair was no longer sticking up against the stone.

“People who think they’re going to get paid for turning us in, I guess,” she rubbed an eye. Her fake tooth was annoyingly digging into her gums, but she couldn’t take it out. Not yet. “I say we get out of here together and settle what we started above. I’m not done talking about Psycho.”

“Geoff.”

“Whatever.”

“Oh please,” Caesar’s nostrils flared. “He loved you more than anything. And you ruined him.”

“He was already ruined,” she said. “By his genes and his heroes. Don’t blame me for what was already happening to his mind.”

“What was already happening was not madness. He was much, much smarter than you all were. And so am I. And we understood one another.”

“What, did you go to MENSA together once? He hated all villains,” she spat. “Don’t make up feelings based on lost memories.”

“You’re what, twenty five? You can’t believe in that dichotomy.” he replied.

“In most cases, the world gets a little greyer. But when it comes to the people we fight, it’s never been clearer. Good,” she jabs a thumb at herself, before turning it on him, “and bad.”

“And so what was your brother,” he asks. “You say it’s as simple as that,” he points at her, “good and bad. What was Geoff?”

“Psycho was good and then bad. There are two sides to the coin, and you can choose to flip it over.” Precision had thought about this fact long and hard. Psycho chose to be taken in by the less than

savory side of the world. He was to blame for what happened to him, and her therapist assured her so all through puberty. “You went too far with the Jeep, Caesar. You know it wasn’t my fault.”

“Perhaps not your fault, no,” he replies. “But you are your mother’s daughter, that’s for sure. And your grandfather’s golden child. The world was easier for you than him because of it.” Caesar’s face turned red as he spoke, and his eyes glistened. “Ugh, look at me. This is what happens when life doesn’t go according to plan. I was supposed to have eyes in the sky.”

Precision shifts, uncomfortable with this stripping of the veil. Here Caesar is, and she cannot kill him, and she cannot contain him. He is usually far away, if only separated by a table. But they are both stuck in the same rotting cell, and he looks uncomfortably human.

“My questions,” she says. “I have a couple more.”

His eyes light up with a familiar gleam. Conniving. The veil drops. He rolls himself into a higher posture, coiffing his hair with his fingers once more. “I suppose we have nothing but time.”

“What is it that makes you chase after my family?”

“A waste of a question, asking about me, don’t you think?”

She shakes her head. “No. I know where my family is. Bobby is having some sort of ‘finding yourself’ journey, Grandpa is grandpa and my parents are back home. So, what is it that keeps you obsessed with us after all these years?”

“Those are two different questions,” he tuts. “Pick one.”

“The first,” she doesn’t care about the semantics. “You said I got twenty.”

“What makes you think it’s a chase? It’s not. Ten.”

“Semantics and dialect aren’t fair deflections,” she retorts. She walks closer to him, his head leans back and rocks from side to side, eyes closed as he nods to an invisible song. She squats down, and he opens one eye to look at her.

He scoffs, “I don’t want to play right now. You aren’t being interesting.”

“I’m not the one who made the rules. Answer my question.”

“Alright. Tell me, who isn’t interested in the Greets? The only family with inexplicable powers, and an eldest son with the ability to perceive so much quicker than the rest of the world. When I first saw your family in those plaid suits, I thought I wasn’t alone. And then our paths diverged. And then so did your brother’s.”

She shifts, uncomfortable with the likelihood that Psycho and Caesar did more than work. Precision’s family said Psycho was a loner, and that’s why it was so easy to get him to come home.

“No one can replace family,” her mom said.

They were friends, probably, she imagined. Close because of trauma and their station in life. When she was Roxy, she was too young to help. That’s what Dr. Woo said, at least.

“You can’t blame yourself for the way he died, Roxy. It wasn’t you. It wasn’t about you.” Dr. Woo said.

And Precision knew she was right, of course. Logically. It didn’t stop the guilt, or Bobby from distancing himself from her.

“I defended myself and I paid for it. It’s the way of the world, Dr. Woo,” she said. “When you are loved and powerful, people will always try to destroy you.”

Dr. Woo had suggested she not be put back to work for a few more months, and the next time she went to therapy, Dr. Woo was replaced by Dr. Farrow. Roxy had stopped going after that. Dr. Farrow agreed with everything she said.

If anything, Precision was annoyed that Caesar was disagreeing with Dr. Woo. And her heart beat faster when he talked of her brother as though he knew him. No one knew Geoff. He was too far gone to know. Too different.

“He loved me, you know. Maybe not more than you, but he loved me too,” Caesar says. Her skin itches to jump off the bone, and crawl out from the bars themselves. Roxy wants to crush the hands he keeps pushing and rubbing together. All 27 bones.

Instead, she asks, “Where are you from?”

“Montana,” Caesar replies. “And you’re wasting your questions. Just so you know.”

“It’s worth it to see you vulnerable and out of control,” she says in his face. “Just so you know.”

He looks uncomfortable with their proximity. She smiles, and takes her fake tooth out of her mouth, a string of saliva coming out with it. He grimaces. She grins wider.

“Pussy.”

“Monster.”

The sound of wet feet approaches the bars again, and the two kidnappers return.

Bull speaks, “The middle men should be coming soon to take you to their boss. You,” he points to Precision, “are going right back to the suits. And you, mister Caesar, are going to be going off to meet an old partner of yours who was very generous with the amount of money he’s giving for you.”

“Lucky us,” Caesar says.

Bull smiles, and starts to undo the box electrifying the bars above them. He hesitates, and laughs at himself. "Can't let you go until they get here. Stupid."

"Bull! Get in here, the loose pipe is leaking again."

"How many times do I have to tell you Zo, just--you know what, I'll do it myself."

He leaves, and the two bicker in the other room loud enough for Caesar and Precision to hear.

Caesar stands up for the first time since being captured, and takes a look at the bars.

"Do you hear that annoying zap coming from up here?" he says.

"Yeah, coming from the box that'll kill you if I get out of here. Really fun stuff."

"No, you idiot. Listen. It's new."

She quiets down, and hears the annoying zap everytime a water droplet splashes against the bars. "It's making a noise because water's hitting it. The tiny one just said a pipe burst."

"In the other room, not here. I think Bull might have accidentally taken the first safety precaution off the box." Caesar moves closer to the bars, eyeing the tiny black box keeping them prisoner. "Instead of keeping the water off it, everytime it hits the energy around the bars is redirected there, just for that moment."

Precision moves closer to the box, conscious of the space she leaves between them. He's right. She's upset that he noticed before she did. "Huh. I could probably break the bars open and get us out of here before they even realize we're gone."

"Oh, your timing is that good, is it?"

"Yes. It is."

Despite the wisdom grandpa Greet has, he also had insane ideas about how to train his grandchildren.

“Wax on wax off was my idea!” He claimed after the kids made him watch Karate Kid after he had them attach the shingles to his roof.

“I’m calling the Warner brothers.” He didn’t know they died.

Grandpa’s chores forced them to listen carefully to the rhythm of Geoff laying the shingle, Bobby placing the nail with a slight ‘tink’, and Roxy bringing the hammer down onto it with just the right force. Geoff would sing a tune to keep his siblings in sync.

“One goes ‘plank’ and two goes ‘tink’ and three goes ‘smack smack smack smack smack’.”

If their enemies could have seen them, children singing songs that were too rudimentary for their age, it would call into question their belief that the Greets were sociopathic monsters, incapable of empathy. Roxy let out a particularly exuberant “smack smack smack!” laughing when she hit part of Bobby’s thumb. Maybe not.

“It didn’t really hurt, Bobby,” she teased. “You’re stronger than that.”

“Whatever pixie,” he said. “Give me the hammer and see what happens when I hit your thumb.”

That was the winter before her brothers were allowed to go to sleepaway camp, while she had to stay home.

Precision listens closely to the water. The pattern is quick, but consistent. “Stand back. I’m going to hit the box when the water hits.”

“Isn’t that going to hurt?”

“It’s better than getting captured again. Do you want to wait for your business associate.”

He quiets down. Precision closes her eyes, and listens to the water. The drip goes from high note, to low note, to high again. Following the U shape, she feigns a few jabs before twisting her fist out in front of her, dislodging the box with a hiss and zap of her entire left arm.

People were always amazed when she remained undamaged by the pain inflicted upon them. The problem was that it hurt the same as the first time, every time. Parts of her body don’t become numb to similar inflictions, because her nervous system has never lost its sensitivity. Despite the immense pain, she barely winces. She touches the bar, and feels nothing.

“Let’s go.”

Caesar gets up close behind her to peer suspiciously at the area she’s touched. “Are you sure?”

“You’d be dead otherwise.” She pries open the bars. “Come on.”

They pad out of the cell, tiptoeing around the arguing kidnappers. Caesar, of course, steps in a puddle.

“What was that?” one says. “And what about the cell-hey! Stop!”

Precision runs into the hallway, only to find herself in an old sewage cellar. The stone around them is breaking and moulding, all with a blue glow that waves refracted light against the walls.

“This can’t be a real place,” she murmurs. She turns the corner and runs, Caesar close on her heels. The patter of feet follow behind them, and Caesar’s grow slower.

“Wait,” he says. “Wait. You’re too fast.”

She doesn't look back. She doesn't need him. He's made her skin crawl, and not in the good way.

Then, of course, someone turns the corner ahead of them in this maze. It's a tall man, with broad shoulders and the face of a baby. A sickly glow hangs around his chubby cheeks. His bulky form may be a threat to normal people, but to Precision, it would be a concise fight.

"Caesar," he says, and she knows he is going to kill him.

She sighs. "Get behind me."

Caesar takes shelter behind her back, cheeks still flushed from running. "I knew you couldn't leave me to Buck."

She rolls her eyes, and widens her stance.

The baby faced man, Buck, frowns. He snaps his fingers, and several men emerge from behind him, wading through the murky water to stand on either side. One looks full of steroids, and he huffs like an animal readying to charge. The one to the left, who actually concerns her, is normal. He stares at her, then the walls, and the slight form of Caesar that peeks out from behind her. She would have to stay a step ahead of him. Maybe three. The huffing man, cued by the nod of Buck, starts to barrel forward. He yells, and is immediately clotheslined by her outstretched arm. Moaning, he slumps over and doesn't get back up.

"Oh Jesus, Mikey! Johnson is useless. Go."

Mikey darts forward, low and eyes trained on Precision. She sees the blade slide out from under his sleeve. It's short, and he aligns it with the straight edge of his forearm, wrist cocked backwards to accommodate the sharp angle.

It would be easy: grab the arm, crack the elbow and take the knife. She would barely have to move. She lowers to his stance, and her arm shoots out and grabs his arm. His arm crackles, like popcorn, as she pulls and breaks the connection between his upper and lower arm. She hears the other knife before she sees it. She goes to grab his other arm, but to her horror, it points out from the front of his shoe, and it swings around her to the instinct-less Caesar. If she grabs the leg, he will get stabbed, and if she grabs the shoe, she has to spin away from Mikey's other arm. A vulnerable opening. She lets the boot sink into Caesar's side, the familiar sink of metal into flesh, and grabs Mikey by the throat. She holds him by her left hand, and her right holds back his unbroken arm. When he's unconscious, she turns to Caesar, connected to Mikey by his steely boot.

For all his airs of knowing her and her family are evil, he looks shocked that she let him be stabbed. His breath is short, panicked. Breathy. His dirtied white shirt blooms with red. Her eyes almost betray her, but with the glow of the water, her glossy eyes can be seen as just the glow of the walls. She tears off part of her own shirt, pulls Mikey's boot out from his side, and ties the wound before the blood continues to gush. She is too close to his vulnerable body for her liking. She wraps his side like a child would paint an Easter egg. Slow, careful, afraid to crack it. He looks ready to break and spill over onto the floor.

"You said it, I'm not a hero," she spits. She needs him to stop looking so betrayed.

"I suppose I have been saying that," he breathes.

"You're fine. Knife wasn't long enough to reach your kidneys from around me, so get up and be quiet."

He nods, still gasping.

She turns back towards Buck, whose gun is pointing directly at Precision. She positions herself in front of a paralyzed Caesar, prone on the ground.

“I can’t let you kill him.”

Buck lets off a rapid succession of shots directly at Precision. She loosens her muscles, letting her body absorb the shock of the bullets, like hitting jelly. His gun clicks empty, and she moves forward, long strides once, twice, three times before she grabs his gun and hits him over the head with it. She stares at his unconscious body, and decides it’s best to not tie him up. There wasn’t time. She looks behind her, and stares for a quiet moment at her enemy. She strides towards him, and picks him up, like a child. He is cold and wet to the touch from the water around them. The cloth she wrapped around him was wet again, too. Careful to not aggravate the wound, she moves forward, towards the ever brightening light of the cave they are in. Her steps become splashes as the water deepens, but the light shines brighter. She never lost her fear of crocodiles and other unsavory creatures of the deep existing and swimming by her in dark, murky waters. It was easy to see the rivets of water as she moves of snakes, or creatures long forgotten by the world above her. They reminded her of Caesar of the way in which he snaked through the unknown, grabbing her ankle and rising just as she rationalizes that there’s nothing in the deep. Creatures the world above would rather forget and convince themselves had died, or had never existed at all.

The mutters of the above world become crisp when she emerges from the sewer, Caesar propped against her in one arm while her other pulls them out onto the surface. Wails of sirens surround them, and the sun blazes down. The rain has passed. Police officers move towards her, taking

Caesar out of her hands and offering her a blanket. She thanks them, wrapping it closer around her body.

Chapter 13

King Wenceslas remains exactly where they left him. Casey, who had loved and domesticated the wild thing, also never rid it of its ability to hunt. The bank itself saw a miraculous reduction in its mouse population, which had been a secret problem the regional manager struggled with behind the scenes for months.

King Wenceslas lives contently in the vents. Occasionally, he would come down when he saw a small human with long tendrils that grew from their head. Just to make sure it wasn't his. It never was, and he was almost squashed by a wailing panicked thing that was most definitely not his Casey, despite the pink butterfly clips placed so improperly in the child's hair. He moved in variant speeds around the bank: quickly when he needed to hide, and slowly when the bank was nearing close, hoping that she would be exiting through the largest doors. From what he recalls, he was scooped up from a secluded nap, whisked far away before being dumped in a clinical tiled house. Except unlike their house, people didn't sleep under warm blankets, they just shut off the lights and left him alone.

At first he enjoyed the solitude. Casey always wanted to hold him, and the rats she gave him were always cold. The meat here ran, and was fresh. The King was very grateful for their dawn walks, as he would have never ended up on such an adventure all on his own without them. The bright full moon feels good against his hair, and soothes the ache in his mandibles, but the hunt is something that warmed his body. Here he is once again living in self as a bird eating goliath, a fearsome yet elusive patron of nature who meets no equal. He is fearsome, quiet, fair. He leaves the most skillful of mice to

breed, perhaps the next few will be smarter, and offer a new challenge in his new domain. After a while, things got boring. He misses watching screens and living in her room. He even misses her sweaty, fearful father. If anything, though, he is patient. He observes the tiny ones, and waits for his to come and find him. Casey is slow moving, but not forgetful. It was only a matter of time.

Chapter 14

When they go to restrain her, she doesn't fight back. The world had seen her emerge from the sewers with an unconscious Caesar, and it would be hard to charge her with a crime. The people hate her when she worked for the US, and plead for her freedom when she is indicted. Two police officers put her hands behind her back, and take her into the back of a transport van. She hauls herself into the van. She doesn't look back and smile: she left her tooth in the cave. Metal doors shut, and only a sliver of light comes through the small window against the back doors, and the gun lights train red onto her head and heart. The sounds of London still surround them, and the car stops and starts all over again several times before they reach their destination. When she exits the car, the light stings, and the flashing of cameras stings more. She smiles with her lips closed, twiddling her fingers from behind her back. It's a smile that is devoid of fear, and full of confidence. She might be in handcuffs, but she's the one on top. When she enters the precinct the smile doesn't drop. Uniform police officers work on either side, and all crane their necks to get a look at the strongest person in the world. The fluorescent lights welcome her back to a home away from home. The place where she would shake the mayor's hand, turn in the crook and enjoy Bobby retelling the story to the police officers around, grabbing all their attention with his handsome face and way with words. The press like to villainize Precision, no matter what she said, so the PR team decided it was best that she just smile, and focus on body

language rather than words. Bobby hardly ever says the wrong thing, and people laugh it off when he does.

She is brought into a low budget investigation room. Two familiar men sit across from her.

“Agent Bartley,” she nods. “Rookie.”

The rookie sports a badly done spray tan, with clear lines of paint underneath his jaw. At the very least, it makes his teeth gleam whiter, she supposes.

Bartley clears his throat, “According to US-UK relations, we have authority over your capture and punishment. Do you understand that you violated foreign relation law?”

“It was in the best interest of both countries,” she replies.

“Precision,” he huffs. “Just answer the questions. Do you understand that you violated—”

“I was acting under my jurisdiction according to the ‘04 Edinburgh deal.”

“That deal was nullified.”

“It doesn’t expire for another four months.”

“It’s being sped up because of you and Bobby going so out of line.”

Well. Bartley thumbs the edge of his jacket pocket. Precision wonders if there’s a cigarette or joint in there, and hopes he’ll share. Even if the bill is expiring at a faster rate, she is still beloved, and still associated with the USA, whether they like it or not. She is invaluable.

The rookie, impatient, continues the questions. “Do you understand that you are under US jurisdiction, and because of your status as a federal, local, and international criminal?”

“I have diplomatic immunity,” she shoots back. They wouldn’t get her on tape admitting anything, technical or no.

Bartley huffs.

Rookie looks at him, charged and agitated. His eyes are wide, and his muscles tense. “Are you really going to let her walk all over you? She is-YOU are a war criminal, Precision. You will come back to the US, and do what is deemed you should.”

Precision places a shocked, hurt look on her face. “Is that a threat, Rookie? Everything I do, I do for my country.”

She wonders if they made sure no one is allowed behind the double glass walls. She bets not.

“You are government property, and if you care about your country, then you will come back quietly and peacefully.”

They want her blood, her genes. Impossible to recreate. Those carbon copies were nothing compared to the real thing.

“I left the US to protect the rest of the world. Those experiments, the soldiers you tried to create with my DNA”

“Roxy,” Bartley breathes.

“Don’t call me that,” she snaps. “Why are you trying to get rid of us? Everything my family has ever done has always been for you. You can’t just create wholesale Greets.”

“That is confidential information,” Rookie shouts. “You come back, and you help us before they all die.” His face pales, and Bartley rubs his dry hands across his face.

So they were unstable. Human genome splicing is dangerous, and scientists spend their whole lives studying her family. The frustrating thing is that they can’t find anything out of the ordinary.

They are perfectly average, to the scientific eye. Nothing distinguishes them from the next person over.

“It’s like a catalyst, isn’t it,” she says. “You hit a peak, and it’s downhill from there.”

There was a reason only the Greets were the way they were. Logic has nothing to do with it. Science has nothing to do with it. When you meet them, you understand. There is an air to each of them. Even when they were kids, playing in the yard, grandfather keeping watch in a lawn chair, it was different than the other families. Kids with any sort of intuition stayed away from their water balloon fights.

This wasn’t the first time someone tried to make someone like her family. Occasionally, they would come across someone who used brute force, flushed with the adrenaline of their blood lines before their bodies crumpled upon themselves. Sometimes it was something invisible, like organ failure. Other times it was terrible, like bones becoming brittle and breaking away forcing the body to collapse against itself. All the Greets had to do was outsmart the opponent, and wait for them to die.

“The best thing you can do is try to take it out of them,” Precision says. “Studying us won’t do anything for you.”

“We have to try, Precision,” Bartley says.

“I’m not coming back. I have something to take care of far more important than your mistakes.” She stands up, and they both pull guns out on her. “I’m not coming quietly.”

Rookie shoots first. His arm tenses up, his hand wriggling in anticipation, and it gives Precision enough time to move. His reflexes aren’t honed. Bartley, as always, is a terrible shot, and does a better job breaking the double glass than stopping her. He sweats as he shoots. He hates guns. Fate decides to show the world how incredibly underqualified Bartley is in most areas of his job, when one of his shots hits Rookie.

“Oh god,” he mutters. “That’s a Greet dose. You’re gonna be out for awhile.”

Rookie looks like he’s going to try to say something, but his speech slurs and body slumps on the ground. He is conscious, but useless. A really good high no doubt.

“That’s my cue,” she waves. And she walks out of the police precinct, without much of a fight. Next stop: China.

Chapter 15

The easiest way to travel as a fugitive is to dress in a way that makes people want to avoid looking at you. However, to get on a plane, you can’t be so scary that you get checked by the TSA. Precision decides to dress like a missionary. She dyes her hair blonde in a gas station, buys a knee length skirt, collared shirt, and some atrociously large glasses that magnify her eyes too much. Her bible rests at her side, and she gets on an international flight with ease, an expert in creating passports on the go.

She tires of trying to chase Bobby, and tired of trying to figure out what Caesar wants from her. Hopefully he got it in that sewer, and he’d stop interfering with her life. Watching her let him get stabbed serves as a warning, whether he takes it or not is his decision. She only saves the good guys. It’s his fault that the U.S. wanted her captive, and that citizens of the world are turning against her. And he fills her head with doubts of Geoff, and what he was and how she remembers him. People were simple, especially her family. Geoff was smart, but always completely one way, or another. Grandpa is the same. Bobby is as consistently disappointing as 100% concentrate orange juice. And Precision? She is always predictably successful, and dependable. Perhaps not as easy to love as Bobby (people love an underdog), but loved nonetheless.

She is alone and heading into an unknown trap. At the very least, Hong Kong is one of her favorite cities in the world. The woman in the seat next to her smiles, tight lipped, before putting giant headphones on and taking a tiny white pill. Precision is not excited to fly economy for 20 hours, but it would draw too much attention to herself to be a missionary alone in first class. The last time she flew economy was when an old woman had a fainting spell, and everyone looked to her when the pilot asked someone in first class to change with her. The flight to Hong Kong is short for the woman who takes the xanax, she bets. She wishes drugs worked the same for her, but this flight would be long, and she'd become aware of the oily plane air entering and exiting her lungs. Perhaps, even if only to play the part, she would read through the entire bible. Grandpa may be able to meditate wherever he is, but economy was a much bumpier ride than she remembers, so concentrating on not vomiting is becoming a priority.

And if she thought too hard, she might think about the people dying with her blood inside them. The way they might suffer. It sounds like it's being drawn out. Her words to those she fought when escaping the Octagon felt a little too true. Perhaps she should've been kinder, and let them believe that they were going to be taken care of by those they serve.