

Chapter 1

“A what?”

“There's a monster roaming the school at night! I heard from someone in class that an 8th grader was walking past campus one night and he heard these weird moaning, rumbling noises coming from the school building. Apparently a couple other people heard it too and have no idea what it is, but it has to be a monster! There's nothing else it could be!”

I hadn't even put my lunch tray down on the rickety table when my best friend Jessica blasted me with this ridiculous story. Being a hyperactive preteen girl with an overactive imagination, she latched onto this story pretty quickly. But I, a boring twelve-year-old girl with no sense of style, no imagination to speak of, and quietly cursing my lack of a growth spurt leaving me shorter than most of the other kids, I thought it was dumb.

“How late was he walking by the school? The middle of the night? What kind of junior high kid walks around town in the middle of the night?” I asked.

“Delinquents like you?” she said, pointing at me with a small carrot from her lunch box before tossing it into her mouth.

“Yeah yeah.” I bit into my bland cafeteria hamburger and instantly wished for a microwave to zap it for another minute.

Jessica stood two-and-a-half inches above me. Her blond hair was tied in a braid, reaching down to the bottom of her back. She wore no makeup unlike most of the girls in our class, allowing the freckles that dot the tops of her cheeks to be exposed. Her dark blue eyes focused on her sandwich as she took a huge bite, leaving a couple crumbs on the edge of her lips. I think if she worried about her appearance a little bit more, like wearing something other girls our age wore instead of her older brother's old hand-me-downs, she would be a bit more popular. Instead she hangs out with the other rejects of our grade, namely me.

“Eva,” she called out.

“Huh?” She'd caught me zoning out. Trying to hide this fact, I pointed at her mouth. “You have crumbs on your face.”

“Thanks,” she said, wiping her mouth with the back of her sleeve. Just then her mouth gaped open and she hit the table with her fist. “Oh yeah! There's another part to the story!”

“Yeah?”

“Supposedly, there's been a high-school girl wandering around the campus at night too. Some say she even carries a gun with her! Scary, huh? They say the monster is her pet and she uses it to kill us junior high students like it was a game or something! What do you think high schoolers have against us? Huh? Man, I can't wait to be in high school.”

“I guess.”

After that, our conversation jumped from a variety of topics without spending any particular time on one, as Jessica would grow bored if we discussed something for too long. I would try to follow the directions she would lead the conversation, but I've learned a long time ago to just kick back and let the conversation flow.

Eventually lunch ended and we returned to class. Class after class facts are drilled into my head. Mathematical equations, history of our state, Texas, biology, et cetera, et cetera. While I know that going to school is important and that I should be remembering all this stuff, my mind would beg to differ and I'd start to fall asleep at my desk, even if I wasn't tired. Something about being subjugated to hours of facts stuffed into my brain makes me sleepy. Sometimes I'd wish there was a way for me to memorize everything in my sleep, but then when would I get any rest?

Once school let out, Jessica and I grabbed my bike from the bike racks and walked home together, a ritual that had yet to be broken since early elementary school when the two of us met at our apartment complex. In the morning I would sleep in late while Jessica walked to school. I'd then ride my bike as fast as I could and make it just in time for class. Since we head home at the same time and

Jessica didn't have a bike of her own, I'd walk mine. Every school day this pattern occurred without fail.

The fall wind had started to push out the remnants of summer. Some of the other kids were wearing light jackets, but the two of us only had our heavy coats for the winter and it hadn't been cold enough to wear them. The leaves on the trees were still green, so we were still good for awhile. Then again, Texas is known to swap out seasons in the blink of an eye, so I can't be too lax about it.

Houses in the neighborhood had put out decorations for Halloween; pumpkins, fake cobwebs, those giant inflatable snow globes with the skull and ghosts inside that stood out like a terrifying eye sore, and dancing skeletons hung on the walls. With less than two weeks until the 31st, people were getting excited.

"It's getting closer to Halloween," Jessica said.

"Looks like it," I replied.

"You want to go trick or treating this year?"

The two of us, to my dismay, would go trick or treating every year, going door to door in the surrounding streets of the apartment complex and collect as much candy as possible. The majority of the candy I collected would be given to Jessica, as she had more love for the stuff than I did.

"Aren't we too old for that stuff?" I asked.

She drooped her shoulders and pulled up her tattered backpack. "Really?" she mumbled before heaving a sigh. Obviously she's not one to hide her emotions.

"I think it's time for a new generation of kids to take our place."

"I guess."

I scratched the back of my head. "If my dad has any candy left over after Halloween I'll give it to you."

"Really!?" she cheered. She wrapped her arms around me and gave me a hug. "Thanks! For a moment there I thought I was gonna go a year without any candy!"

“N-no problem,” I managed to say while a shiver ran down my spine. I was never one for hugs, even from friends and family.

She skipped ahead of me then turned around to face me, walking backwards. “There’s another thing I want to ask.”

“Go ahead,” I said.

“Want to come with me to school later tonight and hunt for the monster?”

I stopped in my tracks. “Huh?”

“Do you want to hunt for that monster tonight with me?”

“The what?” I asked.

“The monster I was talking about during lunch! I can’t believe you already forgot that! It’s gonna be tough for you once you’re old. You’re gonna end up like my grandma, forgetting what she did only a couple hours ago. Anyway, I want to go hunting for that monster everyone is talking about.”

“Why?”

“Because I want to see it, duh! Imagine being able to see a real life monster and being able to pet it! I bet it’s covered in fur, too!”

“Wouldn’t it try to kill us if it was a monster?”

“But that high schooler has control of it. Maybe if we just ask they’ll let us pet it.”

I let out a long exaggerated sigh. The idea of me sneaking around at night wasn’t beyond me, but going to school to hunt for a monster? I’d rather just go to bed and dream of monsters instead of being horribly disappointed by reality.

“Let someone else do it.”

“But I want to be the first one to see it!”

I looked up at the clear blue sky for a moment before turning to Jessica, who was staring intently at me. When my eyes locked with her, any chance for refusal was out the window.

“Fine,” I muttered.

“Yes!” she cheered, pumping her arms to her side like she just scored a goal.

The apartments Jessica and I lived in was gated, but that's not to say it was high class or anything. Outside of the apartments where it met with the passing street, the grass was green and the yard was lined with trees that was just now showing small signs of red for fall. Apartments facing this street were nice looking with the patio and the balconies being quite spacious and with a large roof cover. Inside, on the other hand, was mostly dirt or patches of dead grass with the occasional tree that were half dead due to the long drought and extreme heat we had this past summer. The apartments looked less dazzling than their counterparts facing the street, with some paint chipping and general wear and tear. Not to say the place was bad, but looking at the outside only to see the conditions inside was like going to a major theme park only to have every single ride out of order except for the prize games.

But I digress.

Jessica and I arrived at the entrance to the apartment complex. The electronic gate was already opened for a car that passed by a few moments ago. As we walked through the gate a pair of curious-looking individuals walked past us. I've never been one to be able to tell one's age, but I would say they were either in high school or maybe college.

The guy was extremely tall and looked like he had just rolled out of bed. His long black hair was all over the place, reminding me of something like a mad scientist. Growing off his face was a shaggy looking beard that probably hadn't been cut in the past couple of weeks. A long black trench coat hung down past his knees covering his tattered jeans. On the sleeve was a weird looking patch that appeared to have been haphazardly sewn by someone who didn't know what they were doing. Hanging on his neck was a ridiculously large pair of yellow headphones.

Walking next to him was a girl half his height. She had red hair tied into twin tails with the hair spiking outward. Her outfit appeared to be a costume, which consisted of a purple leather bikini top in the shape of a bat with red devil wings sticking out of her back, long purple gloves that stretched over

her arms, a purple and white mini skirt with a red devil's tail sticking out from underneath, purple stockings with a lighter shade of purple boots with what appeared to have faces on them, and a choker with a large gold ring attached to the front. I wondered if she was cold wearing that.

As we passed each other I ended up staring at them, specifically the girl. The tall guy didn't seem to notice, but the girl slightly turned her head toward me, telling me she noticed I was staring. Or at least that's what it looked like to me. Probably just thinking too much into it again.

"Looks like some people are already wearing their costumes."

"What?" I said, turning my attention to Jessica. "Oh, yeah. I guess? Pretty weird if you ask me."

The two strangers walked out the gate as it closed behind them. I got one last good look of their backs before deciding it wasn't worth thinking about it too much.

Jessica and I went our separate ways at the bike rack, as she lived further back in the complex. After locking my bike I climbed the chipped painted stairs and unlocked the front door with my spare key, yanking the advertisement for a local pizza chain off the clip meant for apartment notices. Wish they wouldn't do that.

The living room, which also functioned as my dad's room, had a futon with an old wooden coffee table in front of it. Across from the futon was a bulky twenty something inch TV that sat on another coffee table similar to the one in front of the futon. I think they were originally a part of a set of two. Next to the futon was a dresser where my dad kept all his clothes and everything else he owns. Since he has to travel a lot he's not one to keep much possessions.

The kitchen was attached to the living room, except with a closet that sat in the middle of the room, giving the living room/kitchen a sort of a "O" shape. There was a metal table placed inside a little extension to the wall, just enough room for a table with two chairs to be placed on the side. A microwave hung over the counter, attached to a bunch of white-washed cabinets. I placed the advertisement on the table and headed to my room.

My room was a little bit livelier than the rest of the apartment. The bed was up against the

corner of the room with the blanket falling off the side. At the end of the bed was my laundry basket, filled to the brim with dirty laundry. On my wooden dresser was a small TV/VCR combo with a decade-old game console hooked up to it, which I had gotten as a Christmas present years ago. It was outdated when I got it, and even more so today. I played it a bit when I first got it, but video games didn't seem to entertain me much, so now it sits there collecting dust until I wipe it clean. A small poster of a cartoon I used to watch hung next to the light switch. It's a bit girly looking at it now that I'm older, but there hasn't been a reason to take it down so it's still there.

I sat down on the floor in the living room and turned on the TV as I did my homework. It wasn't long before I finished. One thing I like to be proud of is my intelligence, but at the same time I'm not enrolled in any honor classes or anything to actually get me to work hard, so you could say I'm just a big fish in a small pond. After I finished I laid down on my back on the floor and watched TV upside down.

It wasn't until late at night when my dad came home from work. A tall man in his mid thirties, he wore a black business suit and tie with a white buttoned shirt underneath. There were noticeable bags under his eyes; his job and raising me alone slowly taking its toll. Along with the briefcase he usually carries he held a bag of fast food, which only meant one thing.

"Where you going this time?" I asked, going to the fridge and pulling out a container of ketchup.

"Canada," he said with a stern voice. "There's a meeting I have to go to. I'll be gone for a week or so, not completely sure yet."

"Huh."

"It's very short notice. The plane leaves early in the morning so I'll be heading out around two tonight. I tried calling your aunt to come over today to watch you but she said she won't be able to come by 'til tomorrow. You think you'll be all right by yourself tomorrow morning?"

"Yeah," I answered, drinking my soda. "I'll be fine."

He gave a brief smile before his face fell back into a serious expression built up from all the work he does. To be honest I'm not sure where exactly he works, but the one time I asked he completely ignored me so I never thought to ask again.

The two of us finished our dinner in silence. My dad immediately began to pack a suitcase. I could hear him mumbling under his breath about not having enough time to go to the dry cleaner. Meanwhile I returned to my room and watched some more TV before it was around the time I normally went to bed. I put on my pajamas and slipped into bed and stared at the ceiling, thinking to myself.

Hours passed when I heard the front door shut and lock. Looking out my window I saw my dad get into his car and drive off. Immediately I tossed off my pajamas and put on a clean outfit. I grabbed a flashlight from a drawer in the kitchen and headed outside, locking the apartment behind me.

I grabbed my bike and rode over to Jessica's apartment. She lived on the first floor so I was able to tap on her window softly. After a minute of silence I tapped on the window again without any sign of movement in her room.

"Must have gone already," I muttered to myself.

Jumping back onto my bike I rode toward campus, thinking maybe Jessica would be there.

The air had gotten significantly colder since the afternoon, making me regret not bringing my coat. The weather gods or whatever needs to hurry up and make up its mind on whether it wants it to be cold or warm.

Sporadically placed street lamps illuminated the sidewalks, allowing me to ride my bike without having to use my flashlight. Clouds in the sky had a dark red hue from all the light pollution in the city. A chilled wind whistled against the rustling branches, almost creating a song. There wasn't a car to be seen in the streets.

It wasn't long before I arrived at my junior high school. There were plenty of lights illuminating the area, making it difficult to hide from anyone passing by. Since it was really late I wasn't too concerned with getting caught. There wasn't a sign of life inside the building; not even a hint of a security guard making rounds.

I got off my bike and walked it up to the entrance, looking around to see if Jessica was hiding somewhere waiting for me. It was completely deserted. There was a rail behind some bushes facing away from the street, so I locked my bike and walked around to the side of the building. Trees paralleled the darkened windows on the wall. I tried to call out Jessica's name softly, but it fell on deaf ears.

By the time I reached the back of the building I was about ready to give up and go home when the sound of a low growl rumbled through the air. A shiver shot down my spine. It didn't sound like anything from an animal I've ever heard before.

"This must have been what they were talking about," I thought to myself as I debated whether I should go home or not. It was then I noticed a bucket holding a metal door ajar, leaving the school exposed.

"She couldn't have already gone in, could she?" I mumbled, thinking it weird for Jessica to be the one to initiate, but I thought a quick check wouldn't hurt in case she had.

I walked up to the door and opened it slightly, peering inside. It was too dark to see anything, so I grabbed my flashlight and turned it on, stepping inside.

The door led to a hallway that lined the gymnasium and the locker rooms. Every step I took echoed off the bare walls. I pushed open the door to the gymnasium and flashed my light inside. There was nothing but the basketball hoops hanging from the high ceiling. I let out a soft whistle that was magnified by the vast room.

The same loud growl came in response, but it didn't come from inside the gymnasium. I closed the door and ventured further into the hallway. It led to the entrance to the large courtyard in the middle

of the school, surrounded by the athletics department, lunchroom, arts and tech department, and the main building consisting of the general education classrooms. When I peeped into the courtyard through the small window on the door I was met with an abnormally large shadow. My heart began to race, even though I was pretty sure the shadow was that of a tree.

Then the shadow moved. I fell to the floor, scrambling to turn off my flashlight. My breathing grew louder as I tried to calm myself. After a minute of catching my breath I peered through the window again.

At the other end of the courtyard stood the shadow of a large beast.

It appeared to be about eight feet tall. Its legs and arms were as wide as the trunk of a large oak tree with stumps for hands and feet. Two large circular ears stood on top of its head. The beast appeared to be spying into a window on the second floor of the general education classrooms. There was little movement from it other than a tilt of its head, trying to look up into the window.

Since it stood in front of the light I couldn't make out any more details. Grabbing every ounce of courage in my small frame, I quietly opened the door and slid into the courtyard. I hugged the wall, quietly crawling around the courtyard for a better look, praying the beast wouldn't notice my presence. Finally, after what felt like an hour of crawling, I was able to get a good look at the beast. What stood before me was beyond any expectation I might have had.

“What in the he-”

Before I could finish my sentence I felt a large force hit me in the back of my head, knocking me out cold.

I regained consciousness with a sharp pain in the back of my head. Immediately I sat up and placed my hands where it hurt.

“Ow ow ow!” I cried.

“Sh!”

There was another presence in what I realized was a classroom. Kneeling on top of a desk against the window was a girl wearing a familiar devil looking costume, looking out the window with a pair of binoculars

I'm in a classroom in the middle of the night with a weirdo. Great.

“H-hey, have you seen a girl my age come here by any chance?”

“Nope,” the girl replied.

So Jessica never even showed up, meaning she was probably sound asleep in her bedroom. Why did I bother coming all the way out here then?

I stood up from the floor. “I didn't happen to see you leaving an apartment complex earlier this afternoon, did I?”

“Could you keep your voice down to an absolute minimum?” she replied with a voice as sharp as a blade. “The last thing I need is a little girl screwing things up any more than it already is.”

“Are you talking about that monster in the courtyard?” I asked.

She face-palmed. “It's not a . . .” The girl stood up and walked over to me, grabbing my by the arm. “Just come over here and look.”

I was led to the window, where I noticed we were on the second floor.

“Look down here,” she said, pointing at the bottom of the window.

I climbed up the table and looked down into the courtyard, where I saw the top of the beast's head. It was pink and slightly fuzzy. Its ears were stitched on the top of its head. Two large black button like things were where its eyes should be. A dark purple nose stood out from its face. Below it was a tiny sideways 3 for a mouth.

Kind of cute to be honest, other than it being terrifyingly tall and it being alive and all that.

“A giant teddy bear?” I asked, confused.

“Not just a giant teddy bear,” she said, “but a giant *living* teddy bear. And I'm here to kill it.”

I sat in silence, completely dumbfounded by the situation as I watched the teddy bear waddle around the courtyard.

“What?” I couldn't think of anything better to say.

“The world rests on a very delicate balance, each side maintaining an equal weight to the other to the tiniest atomic particle. However, there are things that disrupt this balance. Unnatural things that occasionally pop up and tilt the balance to one side, causing the Earth's natural state of being to be thrown off into oblivion. I'm here to make sure that those things never get a chance to do it.”

Again, dumbfounded and confused.

“I have no idea what you're talking about,” I said.

“Kids these days,” the devil girl complained as she let out an exaggeratedly long sigh. “Let me put it in easier terms for you to understand. Are giant living teddy bears normal?”

“Of course not,” I replied, stating the obvious.

“Exactly! Giant living teddy bears are unnatural things that shouldn't exist, but there it is, stumbling around down there. And it's not just that teddy bear. There's been sightings all over the world of unnatural things appearing.”

“Like what?”

“All kinds of stuff,” she said as she opened her arms. “Everything from objects floating in the sky to entire forests appearing and disappearing in the blink of an eye and even mythical creatures like Bigfoot showing up in Times Square. Heck, I read recently that there was a bunch of supernatural humans fighting each other in Toronto, using psychic powers and the ability to pull weapons out of thin air and other wild things. All these things mess with the world's balance and someone has to put it back in order.”

The more she talked the more confused I became. She seemed to be the type to beat around the bush for as long as possible until forced to get to the point.

“So you're going to kill it because it's evil?” I asked.

“Precisely.”

“But how do you even know it's evil? It's just standing there doing nothing.”

“Intuition.”

Deep in my gut there was a small voice telling me not to get involved with this person. No good was going to come from associating with her. I should have walked out of there and not looked back, gone to bed, and forgotten the night ever happened.

“So what's with the costume?” I asked.

The girl walked over to the middle of the room and struck a pose.

“I'm the most beautiful and powerful girl of all the Netherworld. People bow down before me whenever I my appear. Legions follow my every command without complaint, lest they get a pay cut. I am Beauty Queen Etna!”

There was an awkward silence in the room after she finished. I kept staring at her outfit, trying to think of who she's suppose to be, but I must be out of the loop in pop culture because I couldn't think of anything.

“Is . . . uh . . . that a character from a movie?” I asked.

“An old video game to be exact. I doubt you would know who it is.”

“Aren't you cold in that?”

“It's my battle outfit number twenty-two,” she said as she went back to scanning the courtyard.

“You can't fight unnatural beings in just regular civilian clothes. That'd be too boring. By the way, can you reach in that bag over there and get me an energy drink? I'm losing my buzz.”

I walked over to the large bag I saw her carrying earlier today and opened it. Inside were a couple energy drinks, what appeared to be fireworks of some kind, and a weird looking gun out of a cheap sci-fi film. I tossed her the energy drink while I fiddled with the gun.

“What's this supposed to be?”

“It's a gun from the video game. Normally my character would have a larger weapon, but it was too bulky to bring, so I brought that instead. It's supposed to shoot a giant energy blast the size of a van that can blow a hole through walls and enemies and such.”

“Cool.”

The gun was round like a small football with a handle coming out of one end and a little stick with a ball at the end of the other. Little LED lights covered the body of it. I found a switch on the bottom of the handle and flicked it on, causing the gun to make a small bleep noise and the lights to come on.

“If you pull the trigger it plays the sound effect from the game. It's pretty cool,” Etna said as she popped open her energy drink and turned to me. “Try it out.”

I was about to pull the trigger when she stopped me.

“Make a cool pose before you pull the trigger, otherwise you lose some of the charm.”

“No thanks,” I said as I casually pointed the gun to the wall. Then I pulled the trigger.

A tingling sensation ran down my arm. Shooting out from the plastic gun was a giant beam of blue light the size of a small van, followed by a deafening noise like that of an old TV that can't find a signal. It blasted a hole into the wall and burned whatever happened to be around it. There was no force pushing the gun backwards; instead it was like the laser wasn't even there. Instantly I dropped the gun, ceasing the blast. What was left was a large hole in the classroom wall with small fires burning around its edge.

I collapsed to the floor as if all the energy in my body was zapped from it. Etna stared at the hole left behind, her hand empty while her energy drink leaked on the floor. She got up and walked closer to the hole, noticing the tree that had been standing on the other side was now on fire.

“Holy crap! That was awesome!” she cheered. “How did you do that!?”

“I don't even know what happened!” I answered. “I thought you said that was a toy gun!”

Etna picked up the gun and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. “It *is* a toy gun. I bought it on

an online store.”

I struggled to get back onto my feet. Etna helped me into a chair and gave me her other energy drink, then sat down next to me.

“You all right?” she asked.

I chugged the energy drink and nodded. “I’m spooked, but I should be fine. Just give me a minute or two.”

At that moment the windows facing the courtyard shattered with a large pound. When I looked to see what happened I saw the giant bear punching its way into the room.

“Doesn’t look like you’re gonna have that minute,” Etna said as she ran to grab her bag. “Listen to me, I need you to do me a huge favor.”

The bear continued to pound the wall, causing panels from the ceiling to fall to the ground as the wall began to bend inward.

“What is it?” I said, stumbling out of the chair.

“I need you to go downstairs and lure the bear away from the courtyard.”

“What?”

“Just do it. I’ll tell you what to do next in a bit.”

She tossed me a walkie-talkie and bolted out the door. I managed to miss it right as the wall collapsed, causing me to fall over. The bear climbed into the room and stared at me with its large button eyes, letting out a low rumbling roar. My heart was pounding as I stayed on the floor, too afraid to move. It wasn’t until it took a step toward me that I snapped out of it, grabbed the walkie-talkie, and jumped to my feet.

I ran out the door and turned to run down the hallway when the bear crashed through the wall, ramming some lockers. My heart skipped a beat as I quickly stopped myself and ran towards the other direction. The floor shook with every step it took as I heard windows breaking and lockers being smashed. Everything that stood in its way was demolished.

“What am I even doing here!?” I yelled.

I quickly ran down the staircase, only to miss a step and trip. Amazingly, I managed to keep myself from falling and jumped off the last couple of steps.

When I turned to head for the front entrance I was blocked by a fence, meant as a security measure for after-school events when only a part of the building is allowed to be accessible. Why it was down now of all times I hadn't a clue, nor the time to even think about it.

“Crap!” I yelled as I ran into the fence.

Behind me, the bear fell down the stairs. It pushed itself up by its giant stumps and bulldozed toward me. Without a moment's pause I ran at the bear, barely dodging a swing at me as I skimmed by it and headed in the other direction. When I looked back I saw the bear stumble into the fence. It took a moment before it was able to change directions and resume chase.

At the other end of the hallway there was another fence and another set of stairs leading back up. I climbed the stairs and was back on the second floor, looking at the damage caused by the bear. Lockers were ripped from the wall while a water fountain laid on the ground as water sprayed from the broken pipe. Glass sparkled across the floor. The classroom Etna and I were in earlier had another giant hole in the wall created by the bear, with debris splattered outside it.

The floor shook as I heard the bear punching the walls while running to the staircase. I ran down the other end of the hallway, having made a circle. There was a large window with a small handle that led to the roof of the arts and tech departments. I grabbed the handle but it was locked. At the other end of the hallway the bear had climbed the stairs, sniffing for my location.

I grabbed a bar from a nearby broken desk and started smacking the window with it. When I hit it there was a clank sound, alerting the bear of my whereabouts. Cracks began to form in the window while a large pounding noise warned me of the bear's movement. The window broke open with a small hole. I started punching the hole to make it bigger, copying something I had recently seen in an action movie. My knuckles began to bleed from hitting the broken glass, but surprisingly there wasn't any

pain.

The bear was about to ram me when I tossed the bar and jumped through the broken window, scraping my arms and legs while ripping my shirt on its sharp edges. I fell onto the gravel covered roof as the bear crashed through the wall and fell outside the building. Inside the courtyard I could find Etna fiddling with something.

“You almost done!?” I yelled at into the walkie-talkie.

“Give me like one more minute!” she replied.

“Hurry up!”

It was hard to run on the gravel, so I slowed my pace as I reached the corner and turned, now walking on top of the music department. I stopped to catch my breath when I saw the bear climb the building.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” I muttered.

The bear saw me and started running at me, slipping and sliding over the loose gravel. I was getting closer to the gym, which stood two stories taller than what I was running on. For a moment I was afraid of running into a dead end when I saw a ladder to climb up the roof of the gym. When I reached the ladder I jumped onto it and started climbing, only to realize I was setting myself up to get trapped.

“Too late now,” I said as I kept climbing.

Halfway up the ladder I felt the building shake with the sound of bricks crumbling. Below me, the bear was pounding the wall to make an indenture and scale the building. It seemed like there was nothing that could stop this thing.

“I’m all ready!” I heard my walkie-talkie scratch. “Oh wow, it’s climbing the building! Ha ha! Cute!”

“I could use some help!” I yelled from the roof, disregarding the walkie-talkie.

“Just get it to fall off the roof from around the middle there into the courtyard. Leave everything

to me after that.”

“How do I do that?”

“I dunno. Get it to chase you and then run out of the way? You'll be fine. It's almost to the top, so good luck.”

“Thanks!” I yelled sarcastically.

Every time the bear punched the wall, it violently shook the building. I kept thinking it was going to collapse at any moment. Carefully, I crawled to the edge of the roof where it faced the courtyard. I looked down to find Etna but couldn't see her.

I kept on all fours as I watched the ladder shake. Eventually a paw crashed onto the roof, bringing with it the head of a cute looking bear that was anything but. As it crawled onto the roof my mind raced.

I'll wait for the last moment then run out of the way. But what if I mess up? I'll fall and die! Okay, what if I pushed it? How would I even get a chance to do that? If I wait by the edge and move out of the way at the last moment? This is so stupid!

Once the bear reached the top of the roof it charged at me. I ducked in fear and covered my head like in a tornado drill, squeezing my eyes shut. For a brief second I felt soft fur glide across my arms. I opened my eyes and peeked at what was going on.

Time came to a halt. I was eye to eye with the bear as it fell upside down from the roof. It made a moan that reminded me of a whimpering dog. It crashed onto the ground of the courtyard, making a large crater from the impact. One of the nearby windows shattered.

“Cover your ears!”

There was a voice coming from the walkie-talkie giving me a warning, but I was too slow to react. In the courtyard the bear erupted into a giant ball of flames. The building shook as a large boom deafened my ears, bringing an intense wave of heat shooting into the sky. I pushed myself backwards onto the roof. A giant tower of black smoke rose from the courtyard while bits of burning cotton drifted

down from the sky.

“Hurry and get down!”

I grabbed the walkie-talkie and climbed down the bent ladder, dropping down to the first floor roof. The black smoke filled my lungs, burning them in the process. My eyes watered as I squinted to see where I was going.

“Jump down over here!”

I could hear a voice. I crawled over to the edge of the roof and found Etna holding her arms open.

“Jump!” she yelled.

I put my legs over the edge and pushed myself off. Etna managed to catch me.

“We gotta go before the police show up,” she said, throwing her bag over her back.

“I have a bike in the front behind some bushes,” I said in between fits of coughing.

“Great! Let's grab it!”

We ran to the front of the school building. The fire roared as bits of cotton continued to drift to the ground. Behind a bush in front of the school I unlocked my bike while Etna jumped onto the seat.

“I'll drive. Get on the back.”

I put my feet on either side of the wheels and we sped off away from the school. In the distance I could hear sirens going off, but I was too exhausted to care.

It was dark as we traveled through the empty streets. All the houses were tucked in shadows and quiet. Occasionally Etna would lose her balance but we never fell. I guess she wasn't as strong as I thought she was. I rested my head on her back, still smelling the smoke. Pain started to creep in my legs and arms where they had been scratched by the broken glass. There was a cool refreshing wind that helped my burning face.

We arrived at a neighborhood park where Etna stopped the bike.

“Let's rest here,” she said as we climbed off the bike.

I sat down on a bench while Etna walked over to a couple of vending machines. A street lamp above the bench buzzed. In the grass and swaying trees I could feel the last holdout of insects from summer. I closed my eyes as I enjoyed the peace after a hectic night.

“Here you go,” Etna said, placing a water bottle on my forehead.

“Thanks.” I grabbed it from her, opened it, and chugged half of it.

Etna opened her own water bottle and took a sip. “That was pretty cool what you did back there.”

“What was?”

“Did you just forget what happened in the past ten minutes? You leading the bear to the roof and pushing it off the side of the building.”

“I was only running away the entire time. Everything that happened was a fluke. I don't know why the bear didn't trample over me or drag me down with it when it fell.”

“Fluke or not, that was pretty cool.” Etna took another sip and put it in her bag. “So what's your name?”

“Eva Guile,” I said as I drank more water.

“So, Eva, I assume you have a lot of questions on your mind.”

“That's an understatement,” I replied.

“And I am more than willing to answer any and all of them. Tomorrow.”

“Gee, thanks.”

Etna put the bag on her back and hopped onto my bike. “I'm getting tired and it's pretty late, so I'm heading out. Don't bother looking for me. I'll find you. Okay, later.”

She pushed down the pedals and drove out of the park, leaving me alone on the bench.

“That was my bike,” I complained as I stood up, my joints aching.

The apartment complex was only a block away, so my walk home wasn't too bad. Downside was my legs and arms hurt like no other. When I touched my legs and checked my hand I saw traces of

blood. Should have guessed that was the case.

At the apartment there were numerous people standing outside next door, talking up a storm. It looked like there was a party going on. Not sure why they would have one in the middle of the night on a weekday. A couple of them looked at me when I walked by, but I made sure to not to return the gaze.

When I got inside I took a hot bath and laid in the water for a little while, almost drowning when I accidentally fell asleep. After drying off I checked my cuts. Thankfully none of them were that serious, but I knew people were gonna be asking questions tomorrow. I'll probably lie and tell them I fell off my bike.

“Hope I can get my bike back.”

I put on my pajamas and checked to make sure I had locked the door. After setting my alarm I turned out the lights and crawled into bed. Faint music squeezed through the thin walls mixed with dozens of voices. I listened for a couple minutes before I quietly fell asleep. Thank God the night was over.

Chapter 2

My alarm clock rang with an ear piercing high-pitched tone that threatened to give me a headache. I grudgingly turned it off and forced myself out of bed. The room wobbled as I walked to the dresser and got ready for school. When I looked at the clock I realized I had woken up later than usual. Panicking, I grabbed my bag and ran out the door and to the bike rack.

My bike wasn't there.

“Where's my bike!?” I yelled when last night's events dawned on me.

I looked at my arms and legs but didn't see any cuts. That devil girl, the giant teddy bear, the explosions; was that all a dream?

Without a bike, I was forced to walk to school. The morning sun shined brightly. Leaves danced as the wind blew across the tops of the trees. A group of adults wearing exercising outfits jogged down the street. Dozens of birds chatted amongst themselves on the power lines.

As I got closer to school I could hear the sounds of a large crowd. My watch indicated that it was already a couple minutes past the first bell, so it's unusual that people would be outside then. When I arrived at campus I saw a large swarm of students peering over police tape as the police and firemen surround the building. On the side of the building was a giant hole where the second floor was. A couple of policemen could be seen standing on the other side. Bits of burnt cotton were lined up against a wall with more hanging in the trees. One tree was completely burned to a crisp while the roof of a house across the street sported a circular black mark.

Last night wasn't a dream.

“Hey Eva!”

Jessica was waving to me from the back of a crowd. She then ran over to me.

“Can you believe it!? Terrorists blew up our school!”

I raised an eyebrow, or at least I believed I did. “Terrorists?”

“Terrorists! Or at least that's what some of the other people are saying over there. Someone said they heard a loud explosion last night coming from the school and everything! Who'd ever thought that our school would be involved in a terrorist plot!?”

“I highly doubt it was terrorists. By the way, where were you last night?”

“What?” she asked with a tilt to her head.

“Last night you wanted to come by here and investigate the 'monster'?”

She blankly stared at me before remembering. “Oh yeah! We were supposed to do that last night, weren't we? Good thing we didn't come by here, right?”

“Oh, she was here,” a disembodied voice said.

I looked where the voice came from. Sitting on top of my bike was a high school girl with short brown hair. She wore the uniform for a nearby private school: a white blouse with a green sweater vest and a pleated tan skirt that stretched to her knees. On her feet was a pair of white socks that stopped at her shins and shiny black shoes. She had a large backpack hanging off her shoulders.

“Wow. I didn't realize we did that much damage to the building. Guess the dark hid some of the damage last night.”

I stared at the girl on my bike.

“What's up?” she asked.

“Who are you?”

“What!?” she yelled, throwing her arms up in the air. A couple people from the crowd look over our way for a second before turning their attention back at the damaged school. “How could you forget me?”

“Dunno, but I did, obviously.”

The girl reached for her backpack and pulled out a pair of devil wings and quickly put them on.

“Remember now?”

I guessed that she was Etna, but I totally didn't recognize her without the red hair and the

revealing outfit.

“Why are you carrying those wings?”

“You never know when you're gonna need them,” she answered honestly.

“Uh,” Jessica said, breaking into the conversation. “Who's this?”

“Beauty Queen Etna,” I answered.

“Elizabeth Sigmon,” the high school girl corrected me. “Etna was just the character I was cosplaying last night.”

Elizabeth offered a hand to Jessica, who shook it enthusiastically.

“I'm Jessica Wood! Wow, I've never had a high school friend before! So how do you and Eva know each other?”

“We fought a giant monster here last night and destroyed the school,” I said casually.

Jessica eye's grew wide. “What!? Really!? You saw the monster last night!? Oh man! I wish I didn't get tired so early and go to bed last night! So what was it like? Huh? Was it vicious looking? Did it have large teeth? How did it make that large hole? Did you guys do that?”

Before I could answer anything, Elizabeth cut me off.

“Hold it, shrimp. We can't just casually talk about that stuff here. Too many people around, if you catch my drift.”

Jessica nodded furiously.

“I have a secret base not too far from here where we can talk,” Elizabeth said, whispering into our ears. “Follow me.”

“But we have school,” I said.

“You think you're gonna have school in there?” she said as part of the second floor collapsed onto the first floor, shaking the ground. “You're out of school for a while.”

“Don't you have school?”

“Meh. Let's go.”

Elizabeth got off the bike and started walking it.

“Could I at least have my bike back?” I asked.

She looked at me and the bike. “Oh, right! Yeah. Sorry about that. Here you go.”

I grabbed the bike from her and the three of us left the collapsing school building. As we followed her I recognized the path we were taking. It was the same way Jessica and I would go home every day from school. Imagine Jessica's disappointment when we were standing outside of our apartment complex.

“Behold!” Elizabeth cheered. “My secret hideout lies just beyond this magnificent gate. Only those with the know-how may enter these sacred grounds.” She dug into her skirt pocket and pulled out a cellphone. “Give me a second.”

While she waited for the call to go through I pulled out my access card and opened the gates. Elizabeth watched the gate open with a look of mild agitation and hung up her phone.

“We live here,” I told her.

“I see,” she said as she put the phone in her pocket and walked through the gate.

“Who were you calling?” Jessica asked.

“Nobody.”

Walking past the gate we headed to the other side of the apartment complex Jessica and I don't normally go to. We were near the small weight-room when Elizabeth led us to the back of some apartments. Elizabeth climbed onto the fence of a first floor patio and up onto the second floor balcony.

“It's in here. Come on and climb up,” she said waving her arm at us.

“Why can't we use the front door?” I asked.

“Because you have to go through this way. It's the secret entrance.”

Jessica started climbing up to the balcony but had some trouble with it. I ended up helping push her up.

“All right. Your turn,” Elizabeth said.

“I’m going around to the front door.”

“What? That’s boring!”

I ignored her comments and walked around. When I reached the stairs I saw Elizabeth standing with the door open.

“You could at least try to humor me,” she said.

“I’m a terrible climber. This way was faster,” I replied.

“I see,” she said as she walked into the apartment.

The inside of the apartment was a mess. A futon was pushed up against the wall facing a small flat-screen TV with a couple game consoles hooked up to it, wires and controllers strung all over the place. On top of the futon was a scrunched up blanket and a few pillows on one side while some costumes were stacked on the other side. Video games and comics covered a small coffee table. Several portable racks with even more costumes were placed along the side of the wall. A bookshelf with dozens of DVDs haphazardly tossed onto its shelves stood next to the TV. There were several brown spots stained onto the carpet. On the walls were numerous posters of cartoons.

The kitchen looked like a tornado hit it. A mountain of dirty dishes sat in the sink. There was a large trash can overflowing with garbage with a bag on the floor collecting more. The floor and counter were sticky with spilled drinks. Numerous half-emptied bottles of alcohol stood like a series of sky scrapers over a bunch of crumbs from who knows what. A cabinet door hung open with a box of ramen noodles keeping it from closing.

“This is sooo cool!” Jessica said as she ran around the apartment looking at everything. “Do you live here?”

“Nah. It’s my brother’s apartment. I just come over here to hang out and get away from my parents. They’re all super strict so I leave my stuff here that would otherwise get thrown away the first moment they see it.”

“How old is he?” I asked, flipping through one of the comics before placing it back on the table.

“Twenty-two. He's going to college right now, sort of.”

“Sort of?”

“He might take a couple classes one semester then suddenly not feel like taking any the next. Since he's not really going after any degree he only takes what he thinks is interesting at the time.”

“How does he afford his own place?”

“He works. Anyway, enough about that. Have a seat.” Elizabeth grabbed the costumes from the futon and carefully placed them over the rack with the other costumes.

Jessica and I took a seat. Elizabeth gave us each a soft drink and sat on the corner of the coffee table.

“Okay. Now that we're alone, I'll tell you what happened.”

Jessica immediately moved to the edge of her seat.

“It was quite the spectacle,” Elizabeth said. “There we were, just the two of us, alone in the school building, when a giant bear crashed through the windows and chased us!”

“Whoa! It was a bear!?” Jessica asked.

“It was a giant stuffed teddy bear.” I replied.

“Really!? What did it look like?”

“Tall and pink with buttons for eyes. Sort of like your old stuffed animals.”

“Wow. I wish I could have seen it.”

“Yes, yes, it was cute,” Elizabeth cut in, “but it was ferocious! It crashed through walls and smashed everything in its sight! Acting quickly I ran to the courtyard and started planting explosives while Eva here distracted the beast.”

“Okay, yeah, stop,” I said. “That's something I should have asked last night. How on Earth does a high school girl get explosives?”

“I made them,” she answered.

“What? Where did you learn to make bombs?”

“Google.”

I could only imagine how many watch lists she's on because of her internet searches.

“Anyway, while I was planting the explosives, Eva jumped through a window and started running across the rooftop. Shortly after, the bear climbed to the roof and started chasing her to that extension on the roof.”

“It was the gym.”

“So there Eva was, stuck on the roof of the gym while the bear climbed after her. Suddenly the bear falls into the courtyard, where yours truly detonated the bombs, exploding the bear! Bits of burning cotton fell from the sky while Eva and I rode out of there on her bike.”

“That's. So. Cool!” Jessica said. “It sounds just like a movie!”

A loud “thump” came from the wall.

“What was that?” I asked.

“That was my brother. We probably woke him up,” Elizabeth replied.

“You should have told us so we'd be quieter.”

“Nah. It's all right. Besides, I wanted him to get in on this conversation anyway. Be right back.”

Elizabeth left the room. Jessica and I looked at each other while we could hear some yelling in the other room. Moments later Elizabeth returned with a very tall slender man with wild looking black hair and a shaggy beard stumbling behind her, wearing nothing but his boxers. Jessica averted her eyes. He walked into the kitchen and grabbed an energy drink from the fridge and chugged it.

“Yo,” he said.

“Ahem,” Elizabeth said, elbowing him in the stomach. “You're exposing yourself in front of children.”

“Hm? Oh. Hold a sec,” Elizabeth's brother said as he walked back into his bedroom.

A minute later he came back in wearing a wrinkled shirt and a pair of cargo shorts. I tapped on Jessica's shoulder so she could turn her attention to the rest of us again.

"I'm Jessica," Jessica said, her face blushing slightly.

"Kevin," Elizabeth's brother said as he extended his hand.

Jessica shook it and quickly put her hand back to her lap. Kevin let out an audible chuckle and turned to me, reaching for a handshake.

"I'm Eva," I said.

"Aahh, so you're the magical girl."

"A what?"

Jessica looked at me in confusion. There was a soft laughter coming from where Elizabeth stood.

"What you did last night was quite amazing, Eva," she said. "Being able to shoot a powerful beam of energy like that is evidence that you are a magical girl."

"What's she talking about?" Jessica asked.

I turned my head away from everyone. "I don't want to talk about it."

"You don't have to hide it," Elizabeth said. "What you have is a gift. Proof that you are destined to protect this world from evil and injustice. A power that can vanquish all these abominations to reality!"

"A giant stuffed bear," Kevin cut in.

"That's only to confuse you, but I guarantee that they're evil conniving monsters, and we're the only people that can stop them!" Elizabeth cheered.

"Have there been others?" I asked Kevin.

"As far as I know the bear is the only one so far," he said as he lit a cigarette. "She was breaking into that middle school for like a week."

"It's the work of some evil force bent on taking over the wo-" Elizabeth said before getting cut off by Kevin.

"Just because it was an oversized stuffed teddy bear doesn't mean it was evil. Could have been

from another dimension, lost in our cruel world for all we know. But anyway, there's something I want to know.”

Kevin got up and walked over to Elizabeth's bag, pulling out the prop gun from last night and handed it to me.

“According to Elizabeth you somehow managed to shoot a laser from this gun. Can you do it again?”

“I don't know,” I said, placing the gun on the table without bothering to even look at it. “It was a fluke.”

“Can I see the gun?” Jessica asked.

Elizabeth gave her a nod. Jessica picked up the gun and started to rotate it in her hands, looking at the sci-fi looking lights and gadgets all over it, saying “ahhh” in the process.

“Fluke or not, the fact that when you pulled the trigger a laser shot out of a Chinese built cosplay prop,” Elizabeth said. “Not only that, but you're the only one that can do it.”

“How do you know I'm the only one that can do it?”

Right as I said that Jessica tried pulling the trigger. The lights on the gun started flashing as a low quality sounding beeping noise came out of it. Kevin picked up the gun from Jessica and pulled the trigger with similar results. Same for Elizabeth. She then handed me the gun.

“Your turn,” she said.

I gripped the gun in my hand, remembering the destructive blast that shot out from it. As I thought this I felt a tingling sensation run down my arm to my fingertips like last night. My hand quickly dropped the gun.

Everyone started looking at me. My face started to blush with embarrassment, so I looked away and tried to make the coolest face that I could, but I probably ended up looking like a dork.

“T-this is stupid. Why should I pull the trigger because everyone else did? Why am I even here? All of this is dumb. The bear, you guys, everything. I'm going home. Let's go, Jessica.”

Before Jessica could raise an objection I grabbed her hand and led her out of the apartment, slamming the door shut behind me. As we walked I made sure that Jessica couldn't see my blushing face. After that little stunt I didn't think I could show my faces to them ever again. I couldn't remember the last time I felt like such a fool.

“Stop for a sec.”

I stopped. It turned out I was yanking Jessica's arm, hurting her.

“I'm sorry,” I apologized.

“It's all right, but why did you rush out of there so fast?”

“Because . . . all of that was just made up. None of that stuff they said back there happened. It was all a dumb elaborate joke.”

“But you said-”

“I know what I said but I was just lying. Playing along. Ah ha ha! We shouldn't hang out with them anymore. They're crazies.”

“I thought they were cool.”

“Well they're not. Anyway, I'm tired. I think I'm gonna go back to bed. I'll see you later.”

“Oh, okay. See ya, Eva.”

I waved Jessica goodbye with a forced smile and went home.

When I got to my room, I threw myself on the bed face down and placed my pillow on the back of my head. I laid there for a couple minutes before flipping over and stared at my hand.

The tingling that I felt at Kevin's apartment was similar to the tingling I felt before firing the gun last night. I couldn't help but get scared of the idea of shooting another laser like that. It blasted a giant hole in the wall last time, so who's to say the same thing wouldn't have happened again?

At that moment I made a pact to never play with toy guns for the rest of my life. I didn't want this to be the start of me becoming a superhero or end up with me destroying the world somehow. I'm not into those kinds of stories in movies, so why would I want to live one?

“Last night never happened. Last night never happened. Last night never happened.”

And with that, I pretended the memory no longer existed. If Jessica were to ask about it I would immediately change the subject until she'd forget. Life would go back to normal.

I crawled under my sheets and took a nap, hoping that when I woke up I would feel better.

I was woken up by the sound of a car screeching outside. I ignored it and tried to go back to sleep, but the sound of the doorbell ringing forced me out of bed. I walked over to the window in the front room and peeked outside the window.

Standing outside was a woman in her early twenties. She had long black hair with a red streak running down the side. Her eyes had light mascara and dark red lipstick covering her lips. She had on a red hooded winter vest with fur trimming, a tight black long-sleeved shirt underneath, blue skinny jeans with randomly placed worn out holes, and a pair of large black boots. On her back was a bass guitar inside a cloth carrying case.

I opened the door.

“So you blew up the school, huh?” she asked.

I tried closing the door, but she managed to put her foot in the frame and stopped it.

“Hey, I was just kidding,” she said before opening the door and walking inside.

The woman was my aunt Rose. Your typical early twenty something. “I’ve got some bags in the car I need help with.”

I followed her back to her red Camaro. The only reason I knew the name of the car was because she wouldn't shut up about it when she first got it. She had a several suit cases and a small amp in the trunk, along with a couple bags from the grocery store.

“Did you really need to bring all this stuff?” I asked.

“Yes,” Rose replied, staring blankly at me. She then let out a small chuckle. “Nah, not really. I could have just gone back and forth between my place, but that'd be too much of a pain.”

Once we moved all her stuff into the living room, Rose pulled out a six pack of beer and popped one open. She then pointed a finger at me. “Drinking in the afternoon is bad and you shouldn't do it ever.”

“I know,” I replied with a monotone voice.

Rose smiled and chugged half of it before putting it on the kitchen table. “That hit the spot.”

She then put all her food away and sat down on the couch with her beer.

“So I drove by your school after hearing about it in the news. Place looks like it came from World War II era London. They still don't have any leads as to who did it since apparently the security cameras haven't been working for a few years now. Lack of funding or some crap. You're probably gonna have to be transferred to a new school. There's no way in hell they'll be able to fix that place any time soon.”

“Yeah,” I replied. I turned on TV and started flipping through channels.

“What are you gonna do for the time being? It's not like you can just get into a new school while your dad is off on a business trip. Or could he from a long distance? Have you contacted him yet?”

“No.”

“You should probably do that. If he's heard anything about the school getting blown up he might be worried sick about you.”

“I'll call him later.”

Rose pulled out a phone from her back pocket and tossed it to me, apparently not worried that I could have missed and dropped it.

“No time like the present,” she said as she took another sip of beer.

I held up the phone, debating whether to actually call or not. When I looked over at Rose she

waved her hand at me, looking serious. When she did that I twitched, knowing full well what she was capable of if angered. Not wanting to risk starting anything, I dialed the phone and placed it next to me ear.

The phone went immediately to voice mail, so I hung up.

“I got his voice mail.”

“Try leaving a message.”

I dialed again and waited for the beep so I could leave a message.

“Hey Dad, it's Eva. I'm doing fine.”

I lowered the phone and looked at Rose, who whispered “Elaborate.”

“Uh, so, yeah, my school was blown up by terrorists, I guess? Sometime around last night. I, uh, I wasn't involved or anything and not hurt or anything, so yeah. Uh, I'll see you later. Bye.”

I hung up the phone. Eva leaned on the kitchen table.

“That was pathetic. Remind me to teach you some language skills while I'm babysitting you these next two weeks. Strong communication is an important skill everyone needs to have.”

“Okay.”

“You hungry?”

“A bit.”

“Good,” Rose said as she started digging through the bags. “Hope you're in the mood for egg and ham sandwiches.”

“I'm not.”

“Too bad.”

After we finished our egg and ham sandwiches, Rose cleaned up the kitchen and grabbed her

purse and bass.

“I'm heading out to work. There's also band practice after that, so I won't see you until late tonight. Maybe later if alcohol is involved? Who knows. Try not to get into too much trouble while I'm gone.”

“Okay. Bye Aunt Rose,” I said with a bit of sarcasm in my voice.

Rose immediately stopped in her tracks. “Call me 'Aunt Rose' again and I'll have to lay some pain on you.”

The two of us giggled. When Rose opened the door Jessica happened to be standing there, ready to knock.

“Rose!” Jessica squealed as she latched onto Rose and gave her a hug.

“Hey, Jessica! It's been awhile. How've you been?”

“Fantastic! And what about you? How's your boyfriend? Has your band made any new songs recently? Are you touring soon? Are you going somewhere already? You just got here!”

“Broke up, yes, no, and I'm going to minimum wage hell. Sorry I'm leaving, but I'm gonna be here the next two weeks, so you can come by and hang out later.”

“Really!? Awesome! See you later!”

Rose waved bye and hopped into her car and drove off, making sure to leave a black streak on the asphalt.

“I didn't know Rose was coming by! Why didn't you tell me!?” Jessica demanded.

“I've had a rough time recently and forgot,” I answered, closing the door behind her.

Jessica's anger quickly subsided and appeared worried. “Are you all right?”

“I'm fine,” I said, sitting down on the couch and staring at the turned off TV.

Jessica sat down next to me. “You can't fool me, Eva. I've known you too long to not notice when something's wrong. Be honest with me. What happened last night?”

I looked over at Jessica who was staring intently at me. She was getting serious. I always hated

it when she got really serious as it contradicted her usually energetic upbeat personality, making me feel really awkward.

“Nothing.”

“Eva.” Jessica folded her arms. “You're lying.”

I gave up. “I destroyed the school. Everything Elizabeth said was true. ”

“That's so awesome!” Jessica exclaimed, but then caught herself and tried to act serious again.

“Er, I mean, why did you lie and say it never happened?”

“Because ... I don't know. Me shooting a giant laser from a toy gun is weird. That's not something that normally happens with middle school kids. Then again, fighting a giant teddy bear is pretty weird too.

“But, I'm not sure *how* I managed to do that. It's just a toy gun. You guys confirmed that. So that means there's something with me that allowed me to do that. But what does that mean? Do I have super powers? Do I have any sort of control over it? What if I accidentally do it again and injured someone?”

Jessica patted my back. “It'll be fine,” she said with confidence.

“And why do you know that?”

“Because I've seen enough super hero movies to know that you're just starting on the journey to become a super hero! Sure, you're in a rut now trying to figure out your super powers, but by the time we're in high school you'll have them completely controlled and you'll be the savior of our city!”

I let out a sigh. She was mixing up reality with fantasy again. But what was reality anymore?

“Where can I go to figure out how to use my powers? A shooting range? I doubt a kid like me will be able to walk in and go 'Can I practice shooting laser beams in the shooting range? Pretty please?’”

“That's where I come in!”

I let out a small shriek. Standing outside of the balcony was Elizabeth.

“Unlock the door so I can come in!”

Jessica got off the couch and unlocked the door, letting Elizabeth inside. Meanwhile I was shocked that she had been standing outside my balcony and listening in on the conversation. Then that brought up the question of how often does she do that?

“How's it hangin'?” Elizabeth said with a hand raised.

“What were you doing on my balcony?” I asked.

“Oh, don't worry about that. I do it all the time.”

“I, uh, wait a sec-”

Elizabeth hushed me. “Don't worry about it.”

Obviously I could do nothing but worry about it.

“So anyway, I see that you're looking at the more positive side of your situation.”

“Uh-”

“And that's good!”

She wasn't going to let me talk.

“Because the worlds need heroes like us!”

“Us?”

“Yeah! The way you and me teamed up and put the one over on that giant teddy bear from the bottom reaches of Hades was awesome! Now imagine what we'd be able to accomplish if all of us worked together?”

“Who's 'all of us'?”

“Us two, of course, and my brother and Jessica here.”

Jessica's face lit up. “I get to be a part of it too!?”

“Heck yeah!” Elizabeth replied. “You'll be our cheerleader and keep Eva here in line whenever she gets all mokey and depressed-like.”

That last statement made me rather annoyed, but I didn't respond to it.

“How come you aren't sure that teddy bear wasn't a one time thing?” I asked.

“If one can exist, then obviously there's going to be more, plus you exist. There could maybe be more people like you that will want to terrorize the world and we'll be there to stop them!”

“Yeah!” Jessica cheered.

I wanted to say that this was all stupid, but at the same time I felt like she was partly right. There was nothing more I wanted to do than to get off this train of crazy and go back to living a low key existence.

“Now, I can help teach you how to control your powers,” Elizabeth said.

“You can?” I asked.

“Sure. I've done enough research into this sort of thing to kind of get how it works.”

“And where was this research from?”

“Anime.”

“Anime?”

“Japanese animation. Think cartoons, but better.”

I sighed.

“So how about it? Want to team up?” Elizabeth asked, reaching out to me for a handshake.

When I looked over at Jessica she nodded her head excitedly. Elizabeth stared down at me with a smirk on her face and determination in her eyes.

I caved.

“Great! With that, it's official.” Elizabeth cheered and pumped her fist into the air. “I can't wait until the next paranormal being shows up so we can kick its ass! It's gonna be so cool!”

“We should show Eva the training area we set up,” Jessica said.

“I was getting to that.”

“Wait, what? That you two set up?”

Jessica smiled. That's when I realized that the two of them had joined up and were planning on forcing me into this from the start. I'd been had by my best friend.

“Before we head into combat again I think you should get a better grip on your powers, so we cooked up a nice little shooting range for you.”

“Thanks . . .” I mumbled.

“I’m gonna go back to my brother’s real quick and grab something. Jessica, take Eva to the secret training grounds and I’ll meet you there in a little bit.”

“Wait, we’re starting now?”

“Commander’s orders.”

“Who’s the commander?”

Elizabeth pointed to herself. “See ya in a bit!” She walked back out onto the balcony and climbed over the rail, jumping down to the ground.

I closed the balcony door and locked it.

“Isn’t this exciting!” Jessica asked.

“Was your attempt at cheering me up you or was that a part of Elizabeth’s plan to get me to join her group?”

Jessica looked shocked. “You actually think I’d pretend to try and cheer you up just so I could get you to do something?”

I stared at Jessica.

“Yes, Elizabeth did ask me to try and convince you into joining up,” Jessica said. She walked over to me and gave me a hug. “But earlier was me trying to cheer you up, not trying to force you to do this.”

“Yet you really did want me to do this, right?”

“Of course! How many people can say their friend is a super hero!? Barely anyone! You’re like the coolest person I know, Eva.”

I felt embarrassed and looked away from Jessica. “Well, I’m only doing this because you want me to. Not because I want to save the world or anything.”

Jessica smiled. "Let's go!"

We left the apartment and I followed Jessica to whatever it was she and Elizabeth had built.

Minutes later we were standing in a lot across the street from where the apartments were. It was a long stretch of land that had been on sale for years, covered with overgrown grass. You could probably build five houses on it with spacious yards.

"This is the secret training ground?" I asked.

"Yep!" Jessica replied.

"But it's just outside the apartment complex! People at the apartment and the people who live in the houses on the other side of the lot can easily watch us ! How is this secret!?"

"It's the closest place we could find that didn't require a car or anything to get to."

"Does Elizabeth's brother not own a car?"

"He does, but he went to school while you were back at your place."

I spotted a table that looked like it was taken from a dumpster and a couple vegetable cans sitting on top of it.

"Is that the target practice?" I pointed.

"Yep."

The two of us stood around for a couple minutes when a high school aged girl riding a bicycle rode over to us. She had short pink hair with a pair of large goggles covering her eyes, a long red coat that also acted like a dress, black pants with tall white boots that reached to her knees, white scarf around her neck, and a pair of brown gloves.

"Elizabeth," I said.

"Yo," she replied.

"What's with that get up?"

"It's cosplay, where you dress up as your favorite characters from shows and games that you like."

“Why?”

“Because. I always dress up. Get used to it.”

I shrugged, learning not to care about it anymore.

Elizabeth pulled the toy gun from the pocket and tossed it to me. “From now on that's yours.

Try not to break it. It was rather expensive.”

“How much?” Jessica asked.

“Like, thirty bucks?”

“Wow! That's a lot!” Jessica said.

“I know! Anyway, it's yours now, Eva.”

“Thanks,” I said.

“I assume you saw the targets already,” Elizabeth said, pointing at the old table with the cans.

“Yeah.”

“Let's practice aiming today. Gotta know how to aim or else you'll end up shooting everything but your target and end up getting yourself killed.”

“That's not good,” Jessica said.

“Yep.” Elizabeth walked over to the cans and maneuvered them a bit, then walked a few feet away from the cans. “All right! Fire when ready!”

“Don't you think you should get further away?”

Elizabeth shrugged. “It'll be fine. Just do what you did last night, okay? Oh! Yeah. There's a little bit of plastic at the end of the gun. That's the sight. Put it over whatever it is you're trying to shoot and it'll hit it, maybe. Hopefully it's not there just for looks.”

It probably was.

I felt nervous with Elizabeth standing rather closely to the targets. I held up the gun and pointed it at the cans, trying to align the sight on one of the cans.

“Hey, should I turn the gun on?” I asked.

“I don't know. Try leaving it off so we can see if that changes anything.”

I held up the toy gun from before and aimed it at one of the cans. Then I thought about the laser I shot last night. The tingling sensation ran down my arm, but this time I tried to ignore it. I focused on the can I was aiming and pulled the trigger.

A giant laser like that of last night shot out from the gun, completely destroying the table and all the cans on it. Worse, it kept going and blasted through a fence further away from where the table was, and then into the house on the other side of the fence. After going through the house it severely damaged a car across the street from the house, as if the laser had lost some of its power blasting through everything else before it. What was left was a giant hole in the fence and the house that a SUV could drive through. The edges of the fence were starting to burn. Seconds later there was a small explosion from the car. Of course, the table was completely gone.

“Uh,” Elizabeth said. “You kind of over did it.”

My legs collapsed under me. I felt like all my strength was zapped from my body. I couldn't move.

“Eva!” Jessica yelled as she ran over to me. “You all right?”

“Remember that time we stayed up all night watching movies and felt super tired the next morning?”

“Yeah.”

“Well I feel like that right now, except triple it.”

“Dang.”

Elizabeth ran over to us. “I think we better get out of here before anyone shows up.”

“Elizabeth, Eva can't run right now. She's out of energy,” Jessica said.

“Hmm. Okay, here's the plan. Jessica, take my bike and ride back to my house. I'll carry Eva.”

“Okay!” Jessica ran to Elizabeth's bike and rode off.

Elizabeth got down and picked me up like a prince carrying a princess in some fairytale. She

started running back into the apartment complex.

“This is so embarrassing,” I mumbled, half awake.

“Deal with it,” Elizabeth said.

I looked back over to all the damage I had just caused. As I stared, my eyelids grew heavy.

Moments later I was out like a light.

Chapter 3

There was loud pop music sung in a language I didn't know blasting nearby. I tried to ignore it, but the squeaky voices felt like they were puncturing my ears. After resisting for a minute, I forced myself up, noticing a blanket had been placed on top of me. A quick look around the room was all I needed to realize I was back at Kevin's apartment.

“How long have I've been asleep?” I asked to nobody in particular.

“Eva! You're awake!”

Jessica, who appeared to have been watching a cartoon on TV, noticed me getting up and ran over.

“Are you all right?”

I felt like a truck just ran me over. “Yeah, I'm fine. How long was I out?” I asked.

“Quite awhile,” Elizabeth said, sitting across the room behind a curtain of costumes. She was still wearing the getup from earlier with a laptop in front of her.

“You want something to drink?” Jessica asked.

“Water would be fine. Thanks.”

Jessica stood up and walked into the kitchen, opening the cabinets one by one.

“Elizabeth, where's your cups?”

“Don't have any,” she replied.

“No cups? But then what do you use to drink?”

“There's only three things we drink here and water ain't one of them. Well, I guess in your case, there are only two things to drink here: soda and energy drinks. Also Kevin used the last of the plastic cups for single player Beer Pong, so blame him.”

I laid back down, rubbing my head to help soothe the headache that was forming from Elizabeth's voice.

“Better give her the energy drink,” Elizabeth told Jessica.

Jessica, following Elizabeth's orders, grabbed an energy drink from the fridge and handed it to me.

“I'd really prefer water,” I said.

“It looked like you zapped all your energy after creating that laser blast. That energy drink will prop you back up in a matter of seconds.”

“How do you know?”

“It worked last night, right?”

“Yeah, but I was also running for my life from a giant teddy bear that could crush me like a grape.”

Elizabeth leaned back from behind her costumes and looked at me with a twisted smile on her face. “Want me to chase you so you'll get your energy back?”

“I'm fine.” Since there wasn't anything else to drink I popped open the energy drink and gulped it down. “So what were you guys doing while I was passed out?”

“Elizabeth was showing me some of the cartoons that she and Kevin own.”

Elizabeth gave an exaggerated cough as if trying to show her displeasure to what Jessica said. Not sure why exactly.

“It's really cool!” Jessica continued. “I've never seen anything like it! You should try watching some!”

I looked over at the TV to see what she was watching. My brain could only take a minute of the super intense colors and the bizarreness of whatever it was that was going on before I had to turn away, afraid my developing headache would grow worse if I continued watching.

“What about the hole? Did anyone notice?”

Elizabeth started laughing. “Oh man did people notice. Check this out.”

Grabbing the TV remote, Elizabeth changed it to a news station, which was broadcasting a latest

incident that had left a car destroyed and a giant hole in a house. The anchors were discussing who it was that could have done such a thing, claiming it could have been local grown terrorists and linking it to the destruction of my middle school. Station after station, they were talking about my old school and the damaged house and car.

“And it's not just the local news either. The big boys are in on it too,” Elizabeth said, flipping to the cable news networks. It seemed no matter what station you turned to, they were talking about a developing series of incidents here in Arlington. The plus side was that nobody would guess that a twelve year old girl with a laser gun could be the cause.

“You're famous, Eva!” Jessica cheered.

I let out a sigh.

“But you shooting a giant laser and zapping all your energy at once isn't really that useful,” Elizabeth said as she closed her laptop and walked over to Jessica and I. “Why is it that both times you shot a laser the size of a truck? You think you could turn it down a couple notches?”

“It's not like I have control over it,” I said.

“But what if you do?” Elizabeth suggested.

“That . . . uh, what?”

“Try to think about it,” Elizabeth said. “Think about how it began those past two times and your entire thought process. Maybe we'll be able to figure it out if you go step by step.”

“Well, the laser from an hour ago was just me trying to replicate what I did last night.”

“Okay, good start. So what about last night?”

I held up my hand and stared at it. “It was after I found the toy gun. You told me that it was based off some gun from a video game that shot a huge laser, so I held up the gun and then imag-”

As I was talking, I extended my arm and pointed my hand like a gun. When I got to the part about the laser, the tingling feeling that went down my arm appeared again. The second I felt it I immediately pulled my hand down and leaned on my arm. My heart started racing. Sweat started to

form on my brow. It felt like I was going to fire it again, but this time I didn't have the gun.

Jessica moved closer to me. "What's wro-"

"I almost did it again . . ." I mumbled.

"What?" Elizabeth asked.

"The feeling was there."

"What feeling?"

"The feeling I get before I shoot a laser. This weird tingling feeling, like I've laid on my arm for too long, but it just rushes down my arm until it hits the tip of my finger, and then . . ."

I realized that it wasn't the gun that was producing the laser, but my hand. This destructive power that could pierce through buildings and destroy a car with ease.

"What is this?" I whispered to myself. "What's wrong with me?"

"This is interesting," Elizabeth smiled. "This is veeerrrrryyyy interesting. So you say that when you fired the first shot you were just envisioning the laser blast I told you about?"

I looked over at Elizabeth who started scratching her chin, rolling backwards onto the floor with her legs crossed. "I wonder . . ." She stood up and walked over to her front door. "Come here real quick, Eva."

"Why?" I asked.

"Just come over here."

I got up and followed Elizabeth outside the apartment. She led me downstairs and to the side of her building. Between the two sets of apartments was a small alleyway, hidden away from the public's eye.

"Okay, we're going to do a quick test," Elizabeth announced.

"Don't you think we should call it a day?" Jessica asked. "Eva just got up after shooting the previous laser, after all."

"Call it a day? Dear Jessica, we have only just begun to realize the possibilities that Eva here

can wield! This is something that people can only dream of, and you want to quit now!? Eva, come stand over here.”

I walked over to where Elizabeth pointed.

“Now, this is only a hypothesis, but it won't hurt to give it a shot.”

“Give what a shot?” I asked.

“See, what I'm thinking is that the output of the laser you shoot is based off what you're thinking of. The reason you shot that huge laser last night was because you were thinking of what I described to you. Then today you shot the same type of laser because you were going off what you did last night. Now, what if you changed what you thought was going to happen and instead think about what you want to happen?”

“Huh?”

Elizabeth pulled out a laser pointer and produced a red dot on the ground below us. “Imagine that this laser pointer is shooting out of your finger. A tiny stream that's barely thicker than a tooth pick. Now, do that and point at the ground here so we won't lure unwanted attention.”

I looked at the red dot on the ground and pointed my finger at it, imagining a super tiny laser. The tingling feeling rushed through my arm, but it wasn't as severe as the times before. And then, exactly like as I had imagined, a tiny laser shot out from my finger and pierced the ground. I imagined it stopping and it ceased.

Elizabeth placed a hand on my shoulder and started to laugh like a maniac. “You did it!” she cheered. “You figured out how to control your power! It's all in your head!”

Jessica, now cheering as well, ran over and rammed me with a hug. “Congrats, Eva!”

As the two cheered around me, I started to smile.

“Hey! You know people can hear you across the complex!?”

Standing at the other end of the alley was Kevin, holding a bag of groceries.

Elizabeth ran over to Kevin, jumping up and down with excitement. “We did it! We figured out

how to control her powers!”

“Was that before or after you blasted a hole in someone's house?”

Elizabeth quickly ceased her cheering. The atmosphere grew heavy. That tiny moment of excitement vanished as quickly as it had appeared.

“Let's go inside before anyone spots us,” Kevin said, motioning his head towards the staircase.

“Did you seriously think that shooting in the lot would be okay!?” Kevin yelled at Elizabeth as he put his groceries away.

“What's the big deal!? It's not like anyone would bother to look over there.”

“It's called being discreet, Elizabeth. There's a crap ton of houses and apartments surrounding that lot! The chance that someone could see you guys blowing up a car is up to here!” he said, raising his hand to the ceiling. “You should have gone somewhere with little to no people nearby.”

“And where were we suppose to go?”

“I dunno, maybe River Legacy? There's miles of nothing but trees, so you could do it without being spotted.”

“How were we suppose to get there? You're the one with the truck!”

“Why could you have just done nothing! There was no reason to start right that very second! You could have just waited for me and I could have driven you guys somewhere!”

“But time is of the essence!”

“What!? Why!? There wasn't anything going on, but now people think some punks blew up that middle school!”

“What about the bear!?”

“Forget the bear!”

Jessica and I sat on the couch, watching the two argue. It felt really awkward to be watching them yell at each other about something I did.

“This doesn't look good,” Jessica whispered to me.

“Yeah,” I whispered back.

As Kevin and Elizabeth continued to yell, I stood up from my seat.

“This was all my fault. I'm sorry.”

Kevin and Elizabeth looked down at me.

“No, it's not your fault,” Kevin said. “You know what, forget it. What's done is done.” He sat on a chair and opened a can of soda. “I'm gonna give you a little bit of advice. Elizabeth here is crazy.”

“Someone needs to be,” Elizabeth responded.

Kevin waved his hands towards Elizabeth's direction to show his point was made. “I know that Elizabeth's the one dragging you through all of this, and while I think that what you've pulled off is freakin' awesome, you don't have to do what she says.”

“Hey!” Elizabeth interjected. “I'm the leader of the group!”

“And what is it you'll do when another giant toy appears?”

“Lead the group, of course!”

Kevin sighed. “If it wasn't for Eva there would be no group. Hell, the only reason you want a group is so you can hang out with Eva just because she has a super power. Doesn't that seem a little shameless?”

Elizabeth didn't respond.

“Look, Eva. You don't have to do this. Go home and forget all about this if you want.”

“It's fine,” I said.

“You sure?”

I sat down. “Yeah, I'm sure.”

I glanced over at Jessica. The only reason I was doing it was so she could have fun, I thought.

As long as she's having a blast, I don't care what I do.

"If you say so. By the way, Elizabeth, Mom called. You're in trouble."

"What for?" she whined.

"Skipping school. If I were you I'd head home ASAP."

"Ah crap," she said as she headed out the door.

"You might wa--"

Elizabeth closed the door behind her.

"-nt to change your outfit. Meh, whatever."

Kevin turned his attention to Jessica and me. He made a hesitant cough. "Uh, well, you guys don't have to stay here if you don't want to. I'm sure Elizabeth will summon you the next time she wants something."

"That's okay. I wanted to stay here and watch more of those cartoons Elizabeth has," Jessica said, turning the TV back on.

I could tell that Kevin slightly didn't want us hanging out there going through his stuff.

"Let's go, Jessica."

"What!? Why!? I want to see where that show was going!"

"We can come back later when Elizabeth's here," I said.

I grabbed Jessica by the shoulders and led her to the door. I looked back at Kevin and said "Sorry," without making a sound.

Kevin nodded and held up his soda. "See ya later."

It was almost evening by the time we left Kevin's apartment. Since Jessica was disappointed that I had to force her out of there, I invited her to my place.

"Don't you think those two are cool!?" Jessica asked.

"Sure, I guess. Elizabeth's a weirdo, though."

"What? She's the greatest! I can't wait until we can hang out with her some more!"

“Hopefully it won't involve property damage,” I joked.

As we got closer to my apartment, I saw Rose's car.

“Oh hey, Rose is home.”

“Really!? Awesome!”

Jessica started running to my place, where as I continued to walk a leisurely pace. Even though Jessica got to the door way ahead of me, she waited patiently for me to catch up and open the door. The smell of cooked eggs and ham poured into my nose.

“I thought you had band practice,” I yelled the moment I opened the door.

“Hello!” Jessica yelled walking in behind me.

Rose, who was cooking in the kitchen at the time, looked over at us. “What's up, squirts?” she said over the sound of sizzling.

“What'cha cooking?” Jessica asked.

“Egg and ham sandwiches. Want one?”

“Yes please.”

“Then would you kindly bring me a couple more eggs and the sliced ham?”

“Sure,” Jessica said as she went over to the fridge.

“What happened?” I asked.

“Couple of the guys decided to go to a local brewery for beer. Apparently they're doing this thing where they're charging you like five bucks to get in and you get three beers from the current season for free, except it's not really free since you're paying to get in, so yeah,” Rose said as she flipped the eggs she was currently cooking.

“I'm surprised you didn't go,” I said.

“Are you insisting that I should have left my niece home all alone so I could get drunk with a bunch of friends when we're not having practice?”

I stared at her.

“Wow, I'm hurt, Eva. I can be a responsible person too sometimes.”

“Here you go,” Jessica said as she handed Rose the eggs and ham.

“You want hot sauce with your eggs?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I said.

“No thanks,” Jessica said.

“Right, so none for Eva and super spicy for Jessica.”

“What!? No! Don't put hot sauce in mine!”

“Okay, okay,” Rose said as she placed the cooked eggs on some bread with some ham she had apparently cooked earlier. “You can go ahead and have this one, Jessica.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. Go ahead.”

“Thanks!” Jessica said as she grabbed her sandwich and sat down at the table.

“So what were you two up to today?” Rose asked as she placed a couple slices of ham on the pan.

“We met these two cool people who live here in the apartment complex!”

“Oh?” Rose said as she looked over to me, giving me a worried “You didn't drag Jessica into something bad again, did you?” look.

“It was a high school girl and her older brother. They're both nerds,” I said.

“And you're not?” Rose laughed.

“They're really awesome!” Jessica continued. “The girl, Elizabeth, has all these great costumes from a bunch of video games and cartoons while her brother has a huge collection of DVDs! I never knew you could own so many!”

I started to worry what she and Elizabeth did while I was passed out on the couch. Hopefully it wasn't anything too bad.

“Yeah?” Rose said, flipping the ham.

“Yeah! We also helped with Eva to control her new super pow-”

“It was okay,” I interrupted her. “They're nice people, even if one of them acts a little crazy. Her brother is about your age.”

“Really? Maybe I should meet them myself sometime. You know what kind of music they're into?”

The music Elizabeth played earlier was something that I knew for a fact Rose would not like at all. Instead I played ignorant.

“You know, you can tell what kind of person someone is by the music they listen to,” Rose said.

“Oh yeah?” Jessica asked.

“Sure. People who listen to Heavy Metal are the nicest people in the world. Meanwhile people who listen to that new garbage they play on the radio are horrible human beings.”

Rose's statement was likely to offend a lot of people.

“Hey, how do you guys feel about a horror movie marathon tonight? We're two weeks into October and I haven't watched any yet.”

“I'm in!” Jessica shouted.

“Sounds fun,” I said.

“Okay. You two go ask Jessica's mom for permission while I finish your sandwich, Eva.”

“All right. Be right back,” I said as Jessica and I left the apartment.

We went over to Jessica's place to let her mom know she was gonna be staying late with me and Rose watching horror movies. Of course Jessica's mom was okay with it, so the two of us ran back to my place. The three of us proceeded to watch old black and white horror movies, getting scared at the legit scary movies while making fun of the super low budget monster movies where the flaws were evident and hilarious.

Around midway through the fourth movie Jessica was out like a light. When I checked the clock it was barely eleven at night.

“Let's take her home,” Rose suggested.

“Kay.”

Rose carried Jessica on her back and we walked over to her apartment. Luckily her mom was still awake, so we handed Jessica over to her. She and Rose began talking, thanking for letting Jessica hang out with her, thinking that Rose was just babysitting her. After a few minutes of conversation Rose and I walked back over to my place.

“Jessica's mom is really nice,” Rose said.

“Yeah.”

“Just too bad they're going through some deep bull right now.”

I didn't quite get what she was talking about, but I gave a nod.

“So you better not be corrupting Jessica's innocent mind. I don't want her to turn out to be a bad egg like we are.”

“I take offense to that,” I said.

“But do you deny it?”

I didn't say anything.

“I'm just joking. You're not a bad egg.”

“Don't you mean 'we'?”

Rose chuckled. “No, I'm preeetty far gone, but don't let what I say and do influence you.”

“I won't.”

When we got back to the apartment Rose sat down on the couch and started playing on her phone.

“You want to hang out some more?”

“Nah. I think I'm gonna try to go to bed. Good night,” I said.

“Okay. Night, squirt.”

I went into my room, changed into my pajamas, and climbed into bed. While laying down and

staring at my ceiling, I thought about the laser I created. It seemed that I could create one from just my hand, which I thought was pretty cool, especially since I didn't have to hold a stupid looking toy gun anymore.

I made a gun with my finger and thumb and pointed it up towards the ceiling. As I thought about shooting something bullet like, I felt the tingling sensation build up in my arm, but when I thought about something else the tingling went away.

"I guess I do have some sort of control," I mumbled to myself.

It felt nice knowing I had better control o it than I originally thought. I just can't imagine shooting anything out from my hand anymore without actually doing it. Guess that was the end of pretending to shoot a gun for me.

As the minutes passed I tossed and turned, wide awake. All the sleep I had today completely wrecked my sleep schedule. There was no way I was gonna be able to get to sleep at this point.

Looking over at the clock I noticed that only thirty minutes had passed. Giving up on sleep, I put my heavy jacket on and shoes and left my room.

"You going somewhere?" Rose asked, still messing with her phone. I could hear soft music playing from it.

"I can't sleep, so I thought about walking to the park and relax for a bit."

"You want some company?"

"Nah, I just want some alone time."

Rose looked a bit disappointed, but then had a small smile on her face. "If someone tries to kidnap you, what do you do?"

"Kick him as hard as I can in the crotch and scream real loud."

"And if it's a woman?"

"Kick her as hard as I can in the crotch and scream real loud."

Rose let out a small laugh. "All right, see ya."

I left the apartment and unchained my bike, riding to the small park I was at with Elizabeth the night before.

The roads were illuminated by the occasional pinkish streetlamp. The autumn cold was slowly getting a bite to it as the wind from riding my bike stung my hands. As it wasn't too late out for the night life there was still a couple of cars driving to and fro in the streets, so I didn't feel particularly in danger.

When I reached the park it was empty. There was a single lamp illuminating a bench next to the playground, but the giant soccer field and the surrounding brush was dark. I sat down on the bench and looked up at the pink tinged overcast. Raising my arm I made a gun with my finger and imagined tiny little bullets of light shooting out of my finger whenever I would pull the “trigger”.

When I lowered my thumb, a tiny, light blue speck of light quickly shot out from my finger with a slight buzz sound. This humored me, so I did it a couple more times, making a “pew” sound effect with my voice. Then I tried pointing towards the cold cement ground and did it again. The light bounced off the the cement like it was just a tiny pebble and evaporated into the darkness.

“Huh,” I said as I did it a couple more times with the same results. Appeared that depending on how much energy I was exerting the amount of damage that could be done would adjust. So the smaller the weaker, or so I thought at the time.

I reclined on the bench again, deciding to experiment a little more. This time I tried imagining a ball of light on the palm of my hand. Lo and behold, a ball of light blue energy the size of a baseball appeared, illuminating the area around me with a blueish hue.

“This is awesome,” I said to myself.

“Hey!”

I jumped out from the bench and dropped the ball of light, causing it to shatter on the cement, leaving a burnt mark.

“Crap,” I said before turning my attention to the shadowy figure wearing a long trench coat

walking toward me.

Maybe he saw what I was doing and came to investigate. Words jumbled into my head to come up with some sort of excuse, while a part of me thought about running away. As I quickly tried to think of something, I just blurted something out.

“It's not my fault!”

I screamed in my head. “Why the heck did you say that for, you idiot!?” I thought.

“Whoa, chill.”

Walking from the shadows was Kevin smoking a cigarette. “Yo,” he said.

I let out a huge sigh of relief.

“If it was just you, why didn't you say something?” I asked.

“I said 'hey'. You want me to say 'A wild Kevin appears' or something?”

“No, but you could have just said something else.”

“I'll keep that in mind,” he said as he walked over to the vending machine and put in a couple bucks. Producing two sodas he hands me one and opens up the other for himself. The smell of tobacco washed over the area.

“Are you constantly drinking soda and energy drinks?” I asked.

“It's a bad habit,” he said as he held onto his cigarette and took a sip. After he was done he put the cigarette back into his mouth. “Just like this.”

“You know, drinking soda all the time is bad for your health.”

“I'll worry about it when I'm dead.”

I opened the soda and took a tiny sip. Afterward I closed it and placed it on my lap.

“It's a pretty chilly night,” Kevin said between puffs of smoke.

“Yeah,” I replied.

“So, came out here to work on your powers?”

“Couldn't sleep, so I came out here for fresh air and alone time.”

“Oh. Sorry then. I'll go.”

I shook my head. “Nah, it's okay.”

“I'm sorry that my sister is messing with you like you're some kind of new toy.”

“It's fine. My friend Jessica is having fun, so it's all right.”

“She a good friend?”

I nodded.

“It's nice to have a good friend. Even only having just one good friend separates you from utter loneliness and depression. Someone you can talk to, have fun conversations with, do stupid things.”

“Do you have a good friend?”

Kevin didn't reply. He took a drag of his cigarette and blew a smoke ring.

“Elizabeth doesn't have any friends at all. I don't need to really explain why, do I?”

I didn't say anything.

“Yeah, it was sort of my fault that she's the kind of person she is today. I got her hooked into anime and video games, thinking it would be cool to have someone to talk to face to face. But then she went way deep into the fandom. You could say I created a monster.”

I chuckled. “At least she makes things more lively,” I said.

“I guess, but it's too bad she doesn't put her energy into good use instead of trying to play superhero and cause property damage.”

“It was my fault.”

Kevin waved his hand. “No, she was doing destructive things before, like stalking people thinking, they were aliens and attacking them or claiming a water treatment plant was a secret factory for chemical weapons and tried to break in with some karate she learned at a hole in the wall McDojo. That teddy bear appearing at your middle school was probably the most exciting thing to happen in her life.”

“Did you honestly believe her when she first said there was a giant teddy bear?”

Kevin looked over at me. “If I were to tell you last week that a bald eagle the size of a minivan was ravaging the mall, would you believe me?”

“If I were me last week I would have thought you were a wacko and tried to stay far away from you as possible.”

“Yeah. Obviously I didn't believe her at first, but sort of played along since she'd throw a fit otherwise.”

I opened my soda and took a sip. “Then what changed your mind?”

Pulling out his phone, Kevin brought up an internet browser and loaded up a video. As I watched my stomach felt like it was filled with lead. I wanted to puke.

“You guys were caught red handed, though luckily for you the picture quality isn't the greatest so I doubt many people will know it was you. Of course the media isn't showing it as they assume it's fake, but it's going through all the paranormal channels and nerdy internet forums.”

“Why was someone recording us?”

Kevin shrugged as he put his phone away. “There's all types of people in the world.”

“And what would you consider yourself?”

“A borderline shut in,” he said standing up. “Want me to walk you back?”

I shook my head. “I have my bike, so I can just ride back.”

Kevin finished off his cigarette and flicked it behind us. It bounced off what appeared to be the face of a giant lion looking creature. A loud, low rumbling noise came from it as it slowly stood up, standing several feet higher than the vending machine. Its eyes glowed red as white sharp teeth stuck out of its mouth. It had a puffy mane that surrounded its head. Staring down at us, it didn't move a muscle.

“Ah hell,” Kevin said.

We stood still, watching the lion as it watched back. It was a minute before I tried speaking.

“What should we do?”

“This is the perfect time to use that power of yours,” Kevin replied.

“Good idea.”

I held up my hand like a gun and pointed it at the lion's eye. I imagined a beam of light similar to that of the laser pointer, thinking maybe I could shoot it in the head or something. In an instant a beam of light shot from my finger and into the eye of the lion.

The lion roared with anger, slamming its head onto the ground as it used its gigantic paws to rub it.

“I think you only made it angrier,” Kevin said.

“Why didn't it kill the thing?” I asked.

A moment later the lion charged toward us. Kevin and I ran away in different directions with the lion turning to focus solely on me.

“What the heck!?” I yelled.

“You pissed it off so it's going after you!” Kevin yelled in the distance.

I turned around and tried to shoot another beam of light, but I was too focused on running away for my life to do anything. This wasn't looking too good.

“Kevin!”

“Just stall it for a second! I'll think of something!”

I dashed through the wooden picnic tables under a nearby shelter, hoping to slow the lion down. The lion blasted through them like twigs. Running to the playground, I jumped onto the playground structure. It was made up of two towers and a bridge with a wall for shielding on each side, raising me to eye level of the lion. It stopped and started circling the structure, looking for a way in. When it got to the side with an opening it dashed forward, jetting its arm into the structure. Two foot long white claws barely grazed me as I fell backward.

I jumped off and ran towards a cage like dome, thinking that the gaps which make the mesh dome would be a good cage for me to hide in while I try to catch my breath. The lion noticed and was

pulling its arm out to give chase, but Kevin managed to sneak up and slam a log into its head.

“Ha ha! Got it!” He cheered.

The lion stood up and turned around, now looking at Kevin.

“Ah crap,” he yelled as he started running towards the soccer field.

The lion started chasing him around the field in laps.

“What are you doing!? You're just running in circles!” I yelled.

“I know! Try using your power one more time, but go for bigger like how you blasted a hole in that house!”

“But what if I hit you!?”

“Try not to!”

Kevin continued running in circles, his pace started to slow down as he grew tired. I held up my hand and tried to aim at the lion, but my hand kept shaking. Using my other hand to keep it still, I aimed at the lion as the two of them ran past. In my mind I thought of a giant laser, but worried about the damage I did last time. What came out was roughly half the size of the previous large lasers. It pierced the air with a static noise emanating from it.

My aim was off and fired in front of Kevin, forcing him to jump over it. The bottom of his trench coat got caught and was burned off. Kevin changed directions and started running towards me. Noticing this I ran away and jumped into the meshed dome. Kevin followed shortly after. The lion jumped onto the dome, too large for him to get in. Only the tips of his paws could fit into the holes.

“Nice aim there,” Kevin said between gasps of breath.

“Shut it,” I replied irritated.

“Well, now he's right in front of us and standing still. Think you can pull it off again?”

“I'll try.”

I held up my hand, ready to fire another shot. I watched the lion ram his paws into the dome, trying to force his way in. With every pound the dome would shake. It didn't look like the dome would

be able to support the lion for much longer before collapsing onto us. As I tried to imagine a giant laser again, nothing would form.

“I think I'm out of energy.” Right as I said that I felt my body get weak. “Yep, definitely out of energy.”

Kevin produced two canned energy drinks from the inside pockets of his trench coat. “Chug these and try again.”

“Where did you get those?”

“Shut up and chug!” he said as he popped them open and shoved them to me, spilling some in the process.

I grabbed the cans from him and downed them one after another. Within seconds I could feel a blast of energy running through my body.

“Okay, get back!” I said as I held up my hand again.

Kevin got behind me as I focused my mind to imagine a laser bigger than the ones I fired before. I didn't care it was overkill. I just wanted that lion dead.

My arm felt like it was being pulled from its socket as a giant laser shot out from my hand. It blasted through the meshed dome and burned through the upper half of the lion. The static noise from the laser was deafening. Once all my energy was zapped from my body, I collapsed.

The metal mesh of the dome was gone. Red hot burning metal dripped from the rim of the hole. The bottom half of the lion was collapsed on the ground. The inside of it was nothing but cotton. It slowly started to catch on fire.

“We better get out of here,” Kevin said as he handed me another energy drink. “Chug it and lets go.”

“Okay, seriously, you have a problem with energy drinks,” I said, as I took the can from him.

“Maybe, but with how many you're downing I wouldn't be surprised if you had a heart attack right about now.”

After I chugged it I felt some energy come back to me. We crawled out from the dome from the opposite side of the hole to stay away from the melted bits of metal.

“Let's go,” Kevin said.

Right as we were about to run away, there was the sound of someone clapping enthusiastically. I jumped when I heard it. Looking around, I could see the silhouette of a man standing in the brush along the side of the playground.

“Bravo,” the man said with a high-pitched, snooty accent. “I say, bravo to the both of you.”

“Who are you?” Kevin asked, annoyed by the mans clapping.

“Who am I?” the man said as he started walking out from the shadows, revealing a man slightly smaller than Kevin. He wore a flamboyant looking magicians outfit. It was black and white checkered with a red cape hanging from his stiff shoulders. A red rose was pinned to his torso. On top of his head was a large checkered top hat similar to his suit. His face was hidden by white mask with blackened eyes and a large red smile stretching across it.

“I am but a man who has traveled from an incredible distance, spreading my wonderful magic and mischief to the inhabitants of this city. A man who brings the joys of destruction and mayhem to the mind of children of all ages. A man who has come down from the heavens to spread his gospel of chaos and fear!”

“Ha ha! It's The Magician. Ah! And that lion was, oh man! That's great,” Kevin laughed.

“The what now?” I asked.

“Oh ho! I see that my reputation precedes me,” the Magician says as he twirls his staff in front of him.

“Okay, dude, I know it's Halloween and all, and I like your costume, but your lion buddy just tried to kill us,” Kevin said.

“Is that so? Then allow me to apologize.”

The Magician ran up to Kevin in the blink of an eye, and before one could realize it he'd tripped

Kevin onto the ground and placed the tip of his staff on Kevin's neck.

“Hey! Get off him!” I yelled.

I ran over to try and knock him off, but he twirled his staff and hit me in the head, knocking me over. A sharp pain pulsed where he had hit me.

“Eva!” Kevin yelled.

Kevin managed to get away from the Magician and ran over to me and helped me up.

“You all right?” Kevin asked.

“I think so,” I said, rubbing my head as a tear formed in the corner of my eye. “Hurt a hell lot.”

“I bet.” Kevin turned his attention to the Magician. “What the hell do you want!?”

“Just a bit of revenge,” the Magician cackled.

“Revenge?” I asked.

“As you are already aware it seems, that lion was a dear friend to me. I can't say that I'm pleased that you found it okay to blow him up to smithereens.”

“It was trying to kill us!” I yelled.

“Such an innocent creature wouldn't harm a fly without warrant such as, oh, I don't know. Having a laser shot in its eye, perhaps?”

I gritted my teeth. I couldn't really deny that I didn't attack first, but who wouldn't have if they were face to face with a lion that dwarfs you in size?

The Magician pulled out a silver watch and chain from a pocket and looked at it. “Sadly, I cannot fight against you on this night.”

“Why?” I asked.

“It wouldn't be entertaining to fight you right now. I enjoy a good bit of theatrics in my fights,” he said.

“You don't say,” I almost said sarcastically, but held my tongue as I didn't want to provoke him any more than we already had.

“Don't worry about trying to search for me. I'll provide the time and place at a future time. Well then, I shall be off before the authorities arrive.”

With that, the magician disappeared into the shadows from where he came.

“Who was that?” I asked Kevin.

“The Magician is a goofy villain from this show called Sentai Rangers, but as for that guy dressed like him? I don't know.”

Off in the distance I could hear the sound of police sirens. I ran over to my bike and jumped on.

“Let's go!” I yelled.

“Right,” Kevin said, running behind me.

Like the night before, I was running away from the cops, but this time with the sibling of the girl I ran with the night before. Neither of us stopped until we got back to the apartment complex. Kevin continued running to his place, giving me a small wave as I turned toward my place.

Parking my bike, I ran up the stairs to my front door and ran inside. I slid backwards on the door after I slammed it shut, breathing heavily. I looked over at the couch expecting to see Rose, but she was gone. It looked like I lucked out.

I walked into my room, tossed my jacket on the floor, and collapsed on my bed.

“Ugh.”

Chapter 4

Have you ever had those days where, right when you get up, you know that day is going to be pretty crappy for the most part? Like, you get out of bed but ended up stepping on a shoe you had just tossed next to your bed and ended up falling over because you're still tired and your sense of balance is out of whack? Or maybe you reach for something like a brush that is usually in a specific spot, except that morning it's not, so you spend a few minutes wasting your morning looking for it?

I bring this up because that was how my day started. I got up and tripped over my shoe and fell to the floor. When I tried to open my drawer for clean clothes it got stuck for some reason, requiring me to force it open, only to almost pull the entire drawer out. After I tossed on a t-shirt and jeans I went to grab my comb, but couldn't find it. In the end I just tried combing it with my fingers and tied it up into a pony tail.

"Meh," I said while looking at the morning wreck on the other side of the mirror.

When I got to the living room I saw Rose sitting with a high school girl with long red hair tied in a pony tail with yellow chopsticks sticking out. Even though it was chilly, she wore only a bikini top with flames on them, black short shorts, pink thigh high socks, white high heeled boots, one long black fingerless glove on her left arm, and a white and pink scarf like thing around her neck.

"Aren't you cold?" I asked Elizabeth.

"It's fine," she said, "but that's beside the point. Why didn't you and Kevin call me last night!"

"What?"

"Sounds like you were up to something," Rose said, drinking a beer.

"Isn't it early for beer?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"So why didn't you guys call me when a giant lion attacked you last night!" Elizabeth cut back into the conversation.

"I don't know your phone number," I responded.

Elizabeth pulled out a cell phone and started pressing buttons on it. "I'll tell you it so you can call me in the future."

I walked into the kitchen and pulled out a sticky note and a pen. "Ready."

Elizabeth stared at the paper. "Where's your cellphone?"

"Don't got one."

Elizabeth let out an exaggerated gasp. "What kind of human being in this day and age doesn't have a cell phone?"

I gave a wide-eyed sarcastic smile and pointed my thumbs at me. "This person."

"You know I'm willing to buy you a phone, Eva," Rose said.

"It's fine," I replied. "I don't need one right now. Maybe I'll take you up on that offer down the road."

Rose smiled then stood up and stretched her arms out. "Wellp, time for me to head out. Gonna be working late tonight. Might be back before my shift stats for a bit, but I can't guarantee that."

"But you just drank."

"I'll be fine. Make sure to lock up when you leave. Also, this girl is crazy as all hell, so watch your back."

Elizabeth gave Rose a cold stare, who only smiled and waved as she left the apartment. Moments later there was a loud screech from her car as she drove out of the complex.

"That's why I don't like normal people," Elizabeth mumbled under her breathe.

I rolled my eyes as I grabbed some orange juice from the fridge and poured myself a glass.

"You want some?"

"No thanks."

I put the juice away and sat down on the couch with my cup and took a sip. "So, what brings you here this morning. It can't only be about me not informing you last night."

“Kevin told me everything that happened, what with you messing with your powers at the park, the lion, and the Magician,” Elizabeth said with a smile. “Wish I was there.”

“Yeah? What about it?” I asked.

“So we're going to have a training day.”

“And do what? Blow up more cars?”

“I'm having Kevin drive us out to a park on the other side of town that has a large wooded area and this really cool abandoned access road where you can practice without having to worry about being spotted. We're leaving in thirty minutes.”

“Don't I get a say in when and where I do these things?”

Elizabeth stood up. “I'm the leader of the group, so my word is law.”

I sighed. “Whatever. Let's go get Jessica.”

“She's sleeping.”

I took another sip of my juice as I stared at Elizabeth. “You planned on doing this regardless of what I had to say.”

“Precisely.”

I was dumbfounded. “Oookaaay. I'm gonna go ahead and say no until Jessica wakes up. She'd be upset if she missed it.”

Elizabeth thought for a moment. “I guess. Actually, yeah, we'll need some extra time to prepare you for what you're up against.”

“The Magician? Yeah, Kevin told me briefly about him last night. A character from a TV show or something?”

Elizabeth held up a small blue case. “Where's your Blu-ray player?”

“Don't got one.”

“DVD player.”

“Don't got one.”

“Jesus! Are you living in the stone age or something? Not even a DVD player? What the heck do you do for fun?”

“I hangout with Jessica.”

“But what do you do when you're not hanging out with Jessica?”

“I sit in my room and stare at my wall,” I said jokingly.

“Man, you need to get some hobbies or something. Well, whatever. Let's go back to HQ for a bit.”

“Sure,” I said finishing off my juice, tossing the cup in the kitchen sink.

It was pretty cold outside, but not enough to get me shivering. Gray clouds covered the sky in a thick sheet, preventing the sun from pouring its warmth to the Earth. Every once in awhile there was a breeze that would send a chill down my spine, but I managed to hide that fact. I didn't feel like bringing the heavy coat as I felt it would get in the way.

“Are you really only wearing that?” I asked, pointing to Elizabeth's outfit. Compared to her, I was dressed as an eskimo.

“There's a coat that goes with this character's outfit that I plan on wearing once we get back.”

The two of us started walking in the direction of Kevin's apartment.

“So, you were able to make an orb of light?” Elizabeth asked.

“Yeah. It was pretty cool. I'll show you later.”

“You know, there's a character that I think you should cosplay.”

“What's 'cosplay'?”

“Dressing up as a character from a work of fiction. So yeah, there's this character that I think you could really pull off.”

“No.”

“You should! She wears this cool dress and has a large bow in her hair, and she can shoot orbs of energy as an attack and-”

“No. I'm not doing that. The moment you force a costume on me I quit.”

Elizabeth begrudgingly accepted my stance.

When we went inside Kevin's apartment, my nose picked up a sharp stench. I saw Kevin sitting in the middle of the room, wearing the same clothes I saw him in last night, watching the same sort of cartoon Elizabeth was showing Jessica yesterday. It didn't take long for me to figure out what the stench was.

“Can you believe that Eva here doesn't own a DVD player!?” Elizabeth announced to Kevin as she walked into the kitchen.

“Really?” he asked.

“Yeah, I don't,” I replied. “By the way, you reek of B.O.”

Kevin sniffed his armpits. He noticed a smell and walked out of the room. Elizabeth came back with a bottle of air freshener and started spraying it all over the place.

“Do you do that often?” I asked.

“Occasionally,” she answered. “Anyway, allow me to show you your new archenemy!”

Elizabeth placed the disc she brought over to my place into a game console hooked up to the TV. I took my jacket off and made myself comfortable on the couch. As the FBI warnings and other copyright messages that nobody ever bothers to read was displayed, I can't deny that I might have felt a tiny bit of excitement as to learning more about who the Magician was. He seemed like a crazy lunatic based off the few words we exchanged last night, and from watching what he pulled off, I thought he might pose an actual threat.

Then Elizabeth started the show. Sentai Rangers. A live action series targeted to young kids aged five starring high school teenagers wearing colored coded outfits fighting people in monster costumes. Eventually a giant robot, which was a guy in a robot costume, shows up and fights the guy in the monster costume in a mediocre model of a city that appeared to have been built on a shoe-string budget. Anytime a punch landed on them or a building there were explosions. Lots and lots of explosions.

Any excitement that I might have had, which wasn't much, was washed away in the course of twenty minutes. The few moments that the Magician was on the air it was made to look like he was some sort of evil menace from the way the other characters reacted to him, but he was such a goofball. He was overly flamboyant in his acting and mannerisms and appeared to be a joke. The giant lion that I fought last night suddenly appeared, but he just used to move around and to never attack the heroes.

Then the next episode started, which was the same as the last, except the monster was different.

And then the next episode was the same as the last.

And again.

And again.

It was obvious the Magician was a terrible villain who was incapable of defeating an anthill.

"Yeah, he's a pretty terrible villain," Kevin said, having come back from taking a shower at some point without me noticing due to my brain leaking from my ears caused by the stupidity of this show. "But the design is pretty cool. I'm almost tempted to go to the store and pick up his action figure."

"And you got your ass handed to ya by him," Elizabeth said, mocking Kevin.

I was about to say that he also hit me in the head with a staff, but Kevin cut me off.

"He kicked Sentai Red's ass too in the later episodes, remember?"

"Well, yeah, but that's when the Magician started to actually accomplish something after getting the enhancements from what's-his-face."

“He did get pretty ugly right before the series finale.”

“Okay, stop for a second,” I said. “I can't watch this anymore. The guy in the show is a freaking joke! Does that guy we met even have any connections to this crap?”

“Dunno,” Kevin said. “He could be some asshole who's using that get up to attack random people with hopes of letting their guard down because they see he's the Magician.”

“But would your average person know who he was dressed as?” I asked.

Kevin thought about it for a second. “Probably not.”

“Maybe he's the real Magician from the show!” Elizabeth suggested.

“And if that's the case, we have absolutely nothing to worry about,” Kevin assured me. “Unless he's like the Magician in the last couple episodes.”

“Then can I just watch those episodes instead of all of them? Honestly this show sucks,” I complained. “I just want to know what I'm up against, not watch . . . whatever that was.”

Kevin shrugged. “Suit yourself, but if you took the time to really analyze the deeper themes I think you'd like it.”

I imagined the themes Kevin spoke of were probably as deep as a puddle on a sidewalk, but I kept to myself.

“We burned almost two hours. It's training camp time!” Elizabeth cheered.

“Oh yeah,” I said, honestly forgetting that was the purpose of our meeting. “I bet Jessica's up by now.”

“Then let's get her and go, go, go!” Elizabeth said, pulling on a blue and red colored jacket.

When we went outside, I noticed it had become slightly warmer to my enjoyment.

“You gonna be all right with only a t-shirt and jeans?” Kevin asked, putting on his trench coat.

“I'll be fine. I'm used to this kind of cold. Besides, it'd be hard to train with my coat in the way.”

“But it's still pretty cold out here, and we'll be outside for awhile. Hey Elizabeth, think you have something warmer for Eva?” he asked.

“I got the perfect cosplay outfit that might fit her and keep her warm!” Elizabeth suggested.

I gave Elizabeth a sour look that Kevin noticed.

“Something that won't embarrass her,” he elaborated.

“Mmmmmaybe.”

Elizabeth walked back inside the apartment. As I stood there, I started to notice the cold against my bare arms, but after having claimed I was fine I didn't want to look like I was lying, so I put my hands in my pockets casually and tried to pretend that I was perfectly fine.

“Hurry up!” Kevin shouted.

“Oh man! This is perfect!” Elizabeth shouted back from inside. She returned shortly later with a black hoodie. “Here you go.”

The hoodie was black and had the word “Nevada” written on it. There was a red stain on the front, but I shrugged and put it on anyway. It was incredibly baggy, with the bottom reaching the top of my thighs and the sleeves almost covering my fingers. My lack of height was incredibly obvious in this getup, and it smelled like Elizabeth, but it was indeed warm and not overkill like my coat would have been.

“Thanks,” I said while pulling my hair out of the hoodie.

Kevin and Elizabeth started smirking, holding in their laughter. It was obvious they weren't telling me something and was really starting to get on my nerves.

“If only she had short hair, she'd be perfect,” Elizabeth snorted.

“This is too awesome,” Kevin said.

“What is?” I asked.

“Nothing,” Elizabeth insisted. “You know what? You should keep that.”

That took me by surprised. “R-really? Thanks, I guess.”

Kevin fell to his knees. “Oh my God! That was so tsundere!”

“Yet she's yandere looking! This is too much for me!” Elizabeth squealed. “Start wearing that

from now on! That's your uniform!"

I had no idea what they were talking about anymore, and to make it worse I started feeling really embarrassed for not knowing if what they were saying was a compliment or if they were making fun of me. I placed the hood over my head to hide my face.

"Let's just go get Jessica," I said.

"Right behind you."

"Another training day? I'm in!"

Jessica didn't give it much thought before showing her interest in coming to training camp. Then again, there was no doubt she'd want to go.

"Are we going now?" she asked.

"You bet. We need all the sunlight we can get as there's no light sources where we're going," Elizabeth answered.

Jessica's eyes lit up as she grabbed her jacket. Somehow her bed hair didn't seem to bother her. "Let's go!" she cheered.

Kevin, Elizabeth, Jessica, and I walked back nearby Kevin's apartment where he led us to an old beaten down red pick up truck. There was a large dent on the side of the bed, where I assumed someone had hit it with their car.

"Door's unlocked. Hop in," he said, climbing into the driver's seat.

"Shotgun!" Elizabeth yelled as she jumped into the front passengers seat.

The inside the truck was just as worn out as the outside. The cloth on the ceiling was torn at

places, revealing the yellow padding underneath. There was a hole on the back of the front passenger's seat that could fit a two liter bottle of soda. The seats in the back of the truck were fold-out chairs that would face one another with barely enough room for a small person to sit in. It was rather uncomfortable sitting back there. The interior reeked of pizza, even though a air freshener hung on the rear-view mirror. There was a sticker consisting of three golden triangles on the back window with writing under it, but I didn't feel like spending the time deciphering the backwards text. I looked over at Jessica, who was bumping up and down in her seat with excitement.

“You look like a wreck already, Eva,” Jessica said as she touched my messy ponytail. “One of these days you need to let my mom try to give you a makeover.”

“Mmmeh,” I replied, rolling my eyes as I looked out the window.

“So where we going?” she asked Kevin.

“You know that large park on the other side of town?” Kevin replied.

“Veteran's Park?” Jessica answered.

“No, that's, uh, nowhere near the other side of town. I mean the large one at the end of Fielder River Legacy.”

“I don't think I've ever been that far.”

Kevin chuckled. “Well, if you think Veteran's is huge, wait until you check this place out. Though, to be honest, we're not going to the park proper, but an old access road that's been closed off for who knows how long.”

“It's next to a water treatment plant, so prepare for a nasty stink.”

Kevin looked back at me and nodded his head toward Elizabeth. I remembered our conversation last night about Elizabeth's past. That must have been the place that Elizabeth thought was a chemical weapons plant.

“So how'd you find this place?” I asked.

“I came upon it during one of my numerous walks at the park a couple years ago. It's a nice long

road with plenty of trees so nobody will see us, and it's far enough in the park that nobody really bothers to walk over there,” Kevin said.

“Are we going to have to walk there?” Jessica asked.

“Nah,” Elizabeth answered. “Even though the road is closed, it's still connected to the street, so we're gonna be dropped off while Kevin leaves the truck at the park proper and walk back to us.

“Is that a far walk?” I asked.

“Only like thirty minutes from the parking lot, and that's if I'm walking leisurely. It won't be that long until I rendezvous with you guys.”

It was getting late in the morning, so the amount of traffic on the road was pleasantly low.

Approaching a grocery store, Kevin pulled into the parking lot.

“What're we doing here?” I asked.

“Supplies,” Kevin said.

We all exited the truck and walked inside the grocery store. The place was pretty deserted, making us stand out. Since it was the middle of the day few people that were there gave us looks, probably wondering why we weren't at school. The stares didn't last long, luckily.

Kevin grabbed a cart and started heading towards the edge of the store.

“Hey, I'm gonna go get some stuff,” Elizabeth said as she started running towards the opposite direction of the store.

“Wait for me!” Jessica said, chasing after Elizabeth. I could hear the two of them laugh as they wandered off by themselves. It was becoming pretty apparent that those two were hitting it off really well.

I let out a sigh. “Jessica should know better.”

“Nah, Jessica's still a kid. Elizabeth, however...”

I followed Kevin to an aisle containing numerous assortments of drinks; from energy drinks, sport drinks, specialty sodas, to plain old water. Kevin pulled the cart next to the energy drinks and

started piling them into the cart.

“What's all the energy drinks for?” I asked.

“You,” he quickly responded.

“What for?”

“This is a hypothesis, but it seems that whenever you use up all your energy, one of these babies will refill your energy level. Like last night, you said you were out of energy after those lasers, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, after you chugged the energy drink you were fine and able to shoot off another laser. What I'm hoping is that with these, you'll have plenty of energy to use for the training today.”

“But what if it doesn't?”

“Then I'm gonna be good for energy drinks for a loooong time.”

Kevin filled the basket with only one brand of energy drink, ignoring the others. It's the same brand as the ones I've been seeing him drink.

“Why are you only buying that one brand? Shouldn't we be getting the others just in case?”

Kevin picked up a four pack. “You see, Eva, no other energy drink can compare to the awesomeness of this brand.” Turning his head away from me and into the empty aisle, Kevin continued.

“Why yes, with only one of these, you'll have energy for hours upon hours, and won't feel any repercussions like a crash either. With its patented natural formula, you get your *bang* for your *buck*.”

He put the four pack back in the basket and grabbed the rest of them off the shelf. I stared at him for a few moments.

“What was that?”

“What?”

“That. Just now. You talking to nobody.”

Kevin pointed his thumb behind him to the empty void he was speaking to a moment ago.

“That? Oh, I like to pretend that I'm in some large scale reality TV series where my entire life is a TV show for the rest of the world, so I gave them some free advertising.”

I thought for a few seconds to figure out which reply of the many that I had was best to start with, but Elizabeth and Jessica arrived with a bunch of candy and other assortments of snacks.

“We gotta get these too,” Elizabeth said.

“We got to or you want to?” Kevin asked.

“We need them for science,” Jessica said.

Elizabeth gave a big smile after Jessica said that. Obviously that was something she told Jessica to tell Kevin. Kevin pushed the tip of his glasses with his middle finger and let out a mad scientist like laugh.

“In that case, we need to drink of geniuses. Assistant, please acquire some.”

Elizabeth folded her arms. “Don't call me assistant. I'm only in this country until the end of August anyway. But I'll do it just this once.”

The more I hung out with Kevin and Elizabeth, the more I thought that they were from a different planet. Half the time I don't understand what they're doing or what's going on. Jessica seems to be amused by it, however.

When we approached the front registers, there was only one open. The four of us pushed the cart to the register and emptied it onto the conveyor. A college aged guy was running the register. He looked at all that we were buying, gave a look, but shrugged and scanned it all anyway without saying anything. After Kevin paid for everything, we went back to the truck and tossed everything in the bed. I worried about some of the stuff flying out of the truck, but as I watched while we drove off, it didn't move as much as I thought it would.

“That's a lot of stuff,” Jessica said. “I've never seen a grocery bill that expensive before!”

“Yeah, well, dems the breaks when preparing for war,” Kevin said.

“And this is all for Eva?”

“The energy drinks, yeah.”

“Make sure to let me have one!” she told me.

“All the energy drinks are barred to us except Eva,” Elizabeth said. “The soda is for us. She needs as much ammo as possible.”

Kevin reached over to his radio and started playing some music. It sounded old and terrible.

“Eighties new wave is the best,” he said as the music blasted from three of the four speakers in the truck. The speaker next to my head happened to be broken.

“This music is pretty bad,” Jessica said.

“Bad? Bad!? This happens to be one of the best songs every created by the human race. I pity that you don't realize that. All that new pop music is ruining our country's taste for music,” Kevin said.

“Or you just have bad taste,” Elizabeth jabbed.

“Touche.”

Minutes later, we arrived at a small driveway that was blocked off by a gate. The road behind it was in severe need of a repair job as tons of plants had grown between cracks in the asphalt. There was a weird but sweet smell in the air.

“Huh, can't really smell the water treatment plant today,” Elizabeth said as she hopped out of the car.

The rest of us followed suit and opened up the bed of the truck.

“So how are we gonna move all this stuff?” Jessica asked.

“Carry it,” Kevin said.

“Whaaaat!? But this road looks like it stretches down forever!”

“Nah, it's not as bad as it looks. You see those trees at the other end? We're gonna set up there. Elizabeth, put the light stuff down. Jessica and Eva get to carry that.”

“Whaaaat!? I have to carry all these energy drinks!?” Elizabeth complained.

“I can carry some of the energy drinks,” I offered.

“If you want,” Kevin said. “But you're still not carrying the light stuff, Elizabeth.”

“Man, you suck,” she complained as she picked up several cases of energy drinks. “And I'm suppose to be the leader.”

“In that case you should be carrying most of it,” Kevin joked.

“But you're the muscle.”

“Does it look like I have any muscles?”

“They're hiding underneath your trench coat.”

I grabbed a couple cases of energy drinks along with a bag of snacks. Meanwhile Jessica carried only the rest of the snacks. Kevin and Elizabeth divided the rest between them two. Even with all of us carrying stuff, we ended up having to leave a few cases behind with Kevin offering to bring them with him after he parks the truck.

After some time walking the road turned slightly into a group of trees. The driveway Kevin parked the truck was out of sight. Trees and bushes lined the tattered access road, with the number of pot holes increasing in number. Kevin stopped before a spot where a giant empty field could be seen behind some of the trees.

“We're here. We'll leave the stuff here while Eva practices in the field over there.”

Jessica walked through the trees and onto the field. “Wow!” she said as she walked into the two foot tall grass. “It's like something from a movie! I never knew a place like this existed in this city!”

There was a small rustle in the grass. Jessica wandered over to investigate it, letting out a high pitched scream once she reached it.

“Eva! Come here! It's an armadillo!”

“Really?” I said as I walked over. True enough, there was an armadillo. When I took another step forward it ran off, lost in the field of grass.

“I thought armadillos only lived in the desert!”

“There's a bunch of them out here. There's also some bobcats too,” Kevin said.

“Really!?” Jessica cheered. “I want to pet one!”

“I wouldn't. They're wild cats.”

“So are the cats at the apartment and they always let me pet them.”

“Bobcats are much larger and dangerous. Anyway, I'm gonna head back to the truck and move it into the park. See ya'll in a bit.” Kevin raised his hand as he walked away.

“Eva, help me set up our base,” Elizabeth said, waving me down.

“Okay,” I said climbing out of the field of grass and back onto the worn out road.

We stacked the cases of energy drinks in a nice pile separate from the other stuff. Jessica eventually came back and opened a can of soda and grabbed some candy for herself.

“Okay! Attent hut!” Elizabeth commanded.

“What?” I asked.

“Just stand in front of me.”

Jessica and myself lined up in front of Elizabeth.

“On this day, we begin a new rigorous training exercise for Eva to prepare for the eventual battle against the Magician, who is a formidable opponent.”

“Who's the magician?” Jessica asked.

“Some guy dressed as a magician attacked me and Kevin last night,” I answered.

“What!? Did you guys called the cops?”

“Couldn't. The two of us destroyed a playground after fighting a lion.”

“There was a lion too!? Was there a circus I wasn't aware of!?”

I shook my head. “If they were all coming from a circus then that's one circus I would stay away from. Can't keep their animals and employees contained, you know?”

“I guess.”

Elizabeth let out an over the top cough to get our attention.

“Anyway! There's not much time before the Magician will strike and we'll need to be prepared.”

“I have a question,” I asked, raising my hand.

“Yeah?”

“What is it that you'll do exactly when he attacks?”

Elizabeth chuckled. “Why, command you of course.”

“I . . . see . . .”

So basically she's gonna do jack diddly squat.

“Let's go back over to the field and we'll start testing your powers. Jessica, bring a case of energy drinks.”

“Yes ma'am,” Jessica said while raising her hand to her forehead like a military salute.

Elizabeth marched into the field with me following closely behind her. We walked a small distance away from the snacks so that they were still in sight yet far enough so I wouldn't accidentally blow it up.

“First off,” Elizabeth demanded, “can you show me the orb thing you did last night?”

“Sure thing,” I said. I placed my hand out and imagined a small light blueish orb the size of a baseball floating above my hand. As I imagined it the orb sparked into existence.

“That's so awesome!” Jessica yelled as she ran over to me and inspected the orb. “Can I touch it?”

“No!” I yelled as I moved my hand away, causing the orb to fall to the ground, shattering upon impact with the ground like the night before.

Elizabeth walked over to where the orb had fell and inspected the ground. “Looks like you slightly singed the grass. Is it because the orb isn't as powerful as the laser?”

I shrugged.

“Try making another one except imagine it being more powerful if that makes sense.”

“I'll try,” I said.

I looked at the palm of my hand and imagined another orb, except imagining it having more

power to it. The orb appeared with a darker shade of blue.

“Oooo,” Elizabeth said, looking at the orb. “Try throwing it!”

“All right.”

I tossed the orb as far away as possible from where we were standing, which ended up being nowhere far enough. The moment the orb touched the ground it exploded. A large gust of wind from the explosion caused all three of us to fall backward. Bits of dirt fell from the sky as we stood back up. Where the orb had landed was now a crater.

The three of us looked at the crater.

“Do that again!” Jessica cheered.

My legs started to feel weak. “Uh oh,” I said as I fell to the ground.

“Energy drink!” Elizabeth commanded.

“Right!” Jessica shouted.

She ran back to the snacks and grabbed a 4-pack of energy drinks. She ripped open a pack and handed me one. I tried chugging it, but a drop tried to go into my lungs, causing me to have a coughing fit.

“You okay?” Jessica asked.

“Yeah . . . I'm . . .”

It took another minute to get over the coughing and finish the can. When I was done I tossed the can behind me. A surge of energy spread through my body. I stood up and did a little jump. I then turned to Elizabeth and Jessica and smiled with a thumb up.

“Works like a charm,” I said.

“That's good to hear,” Elizabeth said. “Want to try the orb again, except maybe see if you can shoot it outward?”

“Sure.”

I imagined another blueish orb in the palm of my hand. Instead of physically throwing it, I

imagined the orb shooting outward from my hand, which caused the orb to launch at a large tree, snapping it like a twig and exploding behind it. A strong gust of wind blew past us, but it wasn't strong enough to push us over like last time.

"I wish I had a camera right now," Elizabeth cried. "This is too awesome."

"It looked like something from an action film, like when you see an explosion in front of the hero, but he doesn't move and such," Jessica said. "You should be in a movie and do all your own stunts, Eva."

"Maybe I should," I joked.

I started to imagine another sphere. Again it appeared in my hand. This time, however, I imagined it growing bigger. The size of the sphere started to grow larger and larger until it was the size of a basketball.

"Oh man!" Elizabeth said.

Like before it, the orb launched from my hand and a distance away from us, again exploding when it hit the ground. The explosion, however, wasn't any stronger than the smaller orb.

"Mmmmm," Elizabeth hummed as she inspected the three craters.

"Maybe the size doesn't matter but how much energy you put into it?" Jessica said innocently.

Elizabeth snorted. "Yeah, that's it. Totally."

Jessica looked dejected. "Was I wrong?"

"No, I think you're onto something. Just, never mind me. Eva, try making one as large as possible."

I attempted to create another orb, but when it started to take form I felt weak again. The orb ended up disappearing. "Wow, I need another can already."

"Really?" Jessica asked. "Okay, hold on." Jessica grabbed another can and handed it to me. I drank it and was refreshed again.

"Man, you're running out of energy quick. What's the deal?" Elizabeth asked.

I shook my head. "Not sure."

"You need to build up your stamina."

"I guess. How do I do that?"

"No idea," Elizabeth answered without a thought.

"Let's stick with what works then," I said, drinking another energy drink. "These seem to be doing fine, and it looks like I can determine the power output, so I'll just be careful and use small bits of energy instead of larger ones."

"Okay. Let's switch to lasers. I'm gonna toss this empty can into the air and you shoot it with a laser that's strong enough to send it flying but not destroy it. Like, the power of a BB gun. Ready?"

Elizabeth tossed the can into the air. As it floated for a split second I raised my hand up like a gun and pointed it toward the can. By the time I could imagine a laser that was on the weaker side and able to fire it, the can had already hit the ground. My laser shot the empty air.

"Uh, yeah. Think you can do it faster?" Elizabeth asked.

"I'll try."

Elizabeth tossed the can up into the air. I was able to fire the laser quicker, but there was still a large gap between the laser firing and the can falling from where I aimed.

"I'm getting hungry. Can I have some of the candy?" Jessica asked.

"Sure. Can you bring me a bag of chips and some more energy drinks?" Elizabeth asked.

"Kay."

Again, I tried shooting the can, and there was still a noticeable lag. Finally, after a few more tries, I managed to shoot in time with the can. Sadly, my aim was pretty terrible and I still had trouble shooting the can.

"I think we're gonna be at this for awhile," Elizabeth sighed.

When Kevin finally arrived, he stood in shock, dropping the supplies in the process. I was on the ground, tired from shooting hundreds of lasers at cans. All the cases of energy drinks that were dropped off before Kevin left were empty. I had managed to consume all of it. Jessica was walking around picking up the empty cans with Elizabeth.

“Did you really drink all of those energy drinks!?” Kevin shouted in shock.

“We ran out pretty quickly,” Jessica said, placing the cans in a neat pile. “She drank them one after another.”

Kevin walked over to the field, seeing the dozens of cans in the tall grass. “How on Earth did you manage to drink a month's worth of energy drinks in thirty minutes!?”

“I don't want to think about it,” I managed to speak up. “I'm starting to get a headache.”

Elizabeth tossed the cans at the pile Jessica had made. She then walked over to where Kevin dropped the few cases of energy drinks we had left in the truck earlier. “We're gonna need another energy drink run. This ain't gonna cut it.”

“Another run? You know how much those things cost? I mean, sure, I was able to afford that first supply, but I expected that to last all day! You drank them all before I was able to get back!”

Elizabeth grabbed her wallet and pulled out a credit card. “Money's not an issue.”

“Who's card is that?” Kevin asked, pointing at the card.

“Dad's.”

Kevin started laughing. “I can't believe you! How long have you had this thing?”

“For a few weeks. There's still time before he notices, so use that to buy more energy drinks.”

Kevin placed the credit card in his pocket. “If he asks about it later I'm putting the full blame on you.”

Walking over to me, Kevin knelt down and shook his head. “You know, for a such a tiny body you can hold your liquids pretty well. Don't you need to use the bathroom?”

I shrugged. “Must be a black hole in my stomach.”

“Obviously. Okay. Guess I'll head out. Try not to drink so fast before I get back.”

Jessica, Elizabeth, and I all waved to Kevin as he walked back into the park. Elizabeth then grabbed a can of energy drink and tossed it onto my stomach.

“Round two.”

Later that night I was dropped off at my place. Even though it was early evening, I was completely exhausted. We ended up spending hours practicing my aiming skills as I sorely lacked in that department. My powers weren't useful if I couldn't manage to hit a target. My stomach and head were throbbing, probably due to the amount of energy drinks I drank to keep me going. In total, I drank thirty five cases. You can do the math.

“You should be dead right now,” Kevin had said.

Climbing the stairs to my apartment, I could hear some loud chatting coming from the apartment next door.

“Please tell me they aren't having another party,” I complained as I grabbed the stupid advertisement hanging on the notice clip and slid inside.

Once I got inside, I collapsed onto the ground. I didn't feel like walking anymore. When I noticed Rose wasn't here, I looked around from the floor if there was a note somewhere. I didn't see any from where I laid, so I rolled across the floor, refusing to get up to walk like a normal human. When I slammed my shin into the coffee table I finally stood up.

There was a note in the kitchen with two ham and egg sandwiches wrapped in foil. Turned out

she was gonna have band practice tonight and throw the sandwiches into the microwave. I stared at the sandwich for a moment. Unwrapping the foil I took a bite, felt ill, and then spit it out into the trash can.

“I’ll eat later,” I mumbled to nobody.

Wobbling into my room I collapsed onto my bed. My shoes still clung to my feet, but I didn’t care. Since I was still wearing the hoodie Elizabeth gave me I felt warm enough and didn’t bother to try and get under the covers.

“Tomorrow, I’m doing nothing.”

Nobody heard my decree, but that didn’t matter. As long as I knew that I planned on doing nothing tomorrow that was good enough for me.

My eyes began to grow heavy. The train to dreamland was before me. All I had to do was take one step to get on and then off I’d go, away from the exhaustion and pains I had.

But then something smashed through my bedroom window.

The crash caused me to jolt up. I looked over at the window, where there was now a small hole. My immediate thought were one of the neighbors were being rowdy. I stood up, prepared to march over there without anything to prove they did it, when I saw a red rose sitting on the floor in the pile of broken glass. A small piece of paper was attached to it. Picking up the rose and removing the paper, I noticed it was a note.

“Dear Little Lion Killer. I would like to inform you that I plan to appear at highway I-30 tomorrow approximately 11:00 AM. Do please show up or else I’ll feel saddened by your absence.”

I looked at the note and read it over twice. Then I looked at the rose. Then the window.

“Did he just to break my window with a rose!?”

Chapter 5

“He's late!”

Wearing a white shirt and white pants with a brown jacket adorned with patches featuring crossing swords, a brown cloth wrapped around her waste, numerous thin brown belts wrapped around her legs and body, and knee high leather boots, Elizabeth stood on top of Kevin's car with a pair of binoculars, overlooking I-30 while taking a bite of a hamburger we bought not too long ago.

The three of us were in the parking lot of a shopping center containing three big box stores. One was an electronic store famous for people using it as a preview guide for whatever they want to buy online. Next to it was a store specializing in interior housing goods, from bed spreads to curtains to bathroom décor, with a large scale pet store sitting at the end of the chain. The few trees that dotted the over saturated green grass were still in their infancy. Facing the stores was probably the busiest highway in the area, connecting two large scale cities and the numerous suburbs that surround them.

“We still have a few minutes,” I said as I laid down in the bed of the truck, watching the gray filtered sky hang above us.

“That's no excuse to not be here early!”

Kevin slept in the driver's seat with his large yellow headphones covering his ears, listening to music I assumed. I wish I had something to listen to right now other than the speeding cars on the highway and Elizabeth's whining. Too bad Jessica wasn't home for whatever reason and missed out on all this (non-existing) fun.

“You would think we'd be able to see some sort of sign of him, like setting up somewhere or something, you know!? I mean, we got here two hours early for Christ's sake!”

I held my hand up outside the protection of the sides of the bed. A cold wind blew through my fingers. I lowered it and stuffed it inside the front pocket of the hoodie Elizabeth had given me. It was much easier to wear than the heavy coat I had before, which I was thankful for, but I didn't want to say

any more to Elizabeth or else I'd let her ego grow even bigger.

Standing up, I jumped out of the bed and started walking toward the row of stores.

“Hey, where you going? We need to stick together in case the Magician shows up!”

“Bathroom,” I replied, waving a hand to her.

I didn't need to go to the bathroom, but I thought that would get her to be quiet while I got away for a couple minutes. Walking across the sparse parking lot I went into the large electronics store. The moment I stepped inside, a man wearing the store's uniform asked me “How's it going?” I gave a nod and quickly walked past him. Since there wasn't a real reason for me to be in here, I started aimlessly walking through the aisles, looking at the random merchandise on display.

A worker standing in the cell phone area asked me if there was anything I needed. I shook my head and quickly turned away to get out of there. I headed towards the movies when another worker asked me how I was doing. Again, I shook my head and changed directions.

Were they all that bored that they had to bother me when all I wanted to do was kill time? I mean, yeah, they're there for customer service and want to make sure that I was all right and everything, but can't they just give a kid a few minutes of alone time?

In the end I walked over to the bathroom and splashed my face with water. I stared at a young twelve year old girl with her hair held back by a headband and dark bags forming under her eyes. She wore a large black hoodie with “Nevada” written across it, wrinkled all over the place. Her blue jeans were worn and lost most of its color. The girl rubbed her cheeks in front of me.

“They must think I'm a shoplifter,” I mumbled to myself.

I remembered the time when Rose told me that I should keep up appearances otherwise people would have a poor perception of me. There was a ring of truth in her words, I thought. Again, I washed my face and dried it off with some super rough brown paper towels.

As I walked out of the bathroom, I saw Elizabeth walking toward my direction.

“You done yet!?” Elizabeth yelled at me.

All the workers and the few customers were staring at her. Some pointed while a few took out their phones and snapped photos of her. There she was, a girl dressed in some fantasy military uniform, talking down to a middle school girl who looked like she was gonna steal something. A peculiar scene, I'll admit.

“Yeah, I'm done.”

Elizabeth started going off on a tangent at me when I looked over at a clock. It said “10:59 AM.” I watched it for a moment. When it changed to “11:00 AM,” there was an ear piercing scream that sounded like someone took two violins and scrapped the strings against one another. Everyone covered their ears to drown out the sound. The windows shook from the loudness of it.

“Oh my God!” Elizabeth cried with excitement. “Did you hear that!?”

“How could I've not!?” I yelled to overpower the ringing in my ears.

Elizabeth grabbed my wrist, leading me out of the store. When we stepped outside, an incredibly large orange blur swooped down in front of us. It brought with it a gust of wind that blew Elizabeth and I into the side of the indentation of the building. The roar of wind was deafening, flipping a few cars in the parking lot with its strength. Another loud screech like before echoed around us. People who were still inside the store poured out to see what was happening.

Standing up, I ran out to the parking lot and looked toward the direction the orange blur went. Soaring in the sky was what I thought to be a giant orange dragon.

“Eva!” Elizabeth yelled as she started running toward the truck.

I dashed toward the truck. When I looked back I could see the dragon turning around and starting to descend toward our location. I started running as fast as I could. At the truck, Elizabeth threw the door open and jumped inside while I hopped onto the bed.

“Kevin! It's showtime!” Elizabeth cheered to Kevin, who was still oblivious to what was going on due to his headphones blocking out all sound. Annoyed, Elizabeth punched him in the arm.

“Ow! The hell was that for?” Kevin said.

“There's a dragon!”

“It's coming at us!” I screamed as I watched the dragon descending at an alarming rate.

Kevin looked at his rear view mirror and saw the giant orange dragon for himself. He cursed as he turned the car on and threw the truck into reverse, slamming on the pedal. The jolt of the truck caused Elizabeth and I to fall forward. I grabbed onto the side of the car and held on for dear life as the dragon flew above us.

Its wings stretched across about two 18-wheelers with sharp spikes extending out from the edges, along with a white swirling pattern near the end tips. Its body was around a third shorter than its width. An exotic crest ran across its chest, appearing to be made of spear and circle shapes. There was an armor-plating covering its face along with bits of its neck.

When the dragon swooped down in front of us, another huge gust of wind tore up the grass in front of us like paper to a shredder. Just as quickly as it swooped down, the dragon soared back into the sky.

“We need to get onto the highway!” Elizabeth yelled.

“Sounds good to me,” Kevin said as he put the car in drive and sped out of the parking lot and onto the access road.

I managed to work my way to the front of the bed of the truck and crawl through the tiny window onto the pile of energy drinks that was to be my ammo for the fight today.

“How the heck am I suppose to fight that thing!?” I yelled.

“Just shoot at it,” Elizabeth replied while digging through a CD case.

“It's too difficult to stay still in the bed. I keep bumping around and almost fly out of it.”

“How about sticking half your body out the window while using your legs to secure yourself inside so you don't fly away?”

“But what if I lose my grip or something?”

“I'll hang onto ya. Just let me find the perfect CD for the moment.”

“Put on some EoSD,” Kevin said as he sped through a red light and turned onto a overpass.

“Kevin. Look at me. Obviously we're listening to AoT.” Elizabeth said, pulling out a CD.

“Meh. That works too I guess.”

Elizabeth put the CD in as Kevin ran through another red light, almost crashing into a few cars, and took us onto the highway. The music started with a large rumbling bass that made my insides churn, eventually bringing with it the sound of people chanting and a full orchestra with a fast tempo. If I could only describe it with one word, it'd be “epic.”

“Isn't that too loud!?” I attempted at shouting over the music.

“No! It's fine! Climb out the window and I'll hang onto ya!” Elizabeth yelled back.

I followed Elizabeth's command and climbed partly out of the truck, sitting on the window sill. It was highly uncomfortable, but there wasn't time to complain about it. The wind ripped through my hair, caused it to whip around behind me. It was hard to keep my eyes open from the air ramming into my face.

“Do you have something to cover my eyes!? It's really hard to see!”

Elizabeth pulled out a pair of fancy looking goggles that I could only assume was a part of one of her costumes. It kept the air from stinging my eyes, so that was a relief.

Kevin sped down the highway as fast as he could, driving between cars. In the sky, I could see the dragon flying above us. I extended my hand toward the dragon and attempted to aim at it. A giant blue sphere shot out from my hand like a rocket toward the dragon, which somewhat expectedly missed. After the sphere flew by, the dragon made a descent towards us.

“Here it comes!” I yelled at Kevin.

The dragon came in from the side, swooping over us. The gush of wind caused the side of the truck to lift off the ground, but it managed to land back on its wheels without a problem. A car we sped past wasn't so lucky as I watched it flip over and started doing cartwheels along the highway until it ram into the cars behind it. Some of the cars slammed their breaks while a courageous few started

speeding up.

The dragon soared back up into the sky. I quickly held my hand out and launched another energy orb at it, hitting its foot.

“All right! Got it!” I cheered.

The dragon let out a ear shattering screech that overpowered even Kevin's speakers. It then sped ahead of us a good distance and turned around, somehow managing to fly backwards.

“What's it doing!?” Elizabeth yelled.

A large glowing pentagram appeared before it. Seconds later, a giant blinding pink like laser shot out from the dragon, slamming into the road ahead of us. With quick reflexes Kevin swerved to the shoulder of the road, barely dodging it. When we drove past the laser I could feel an intense heat emanating from it.

“Jesus Christ! It can shoot lasers too!?” Kevin yelled. “That's suppose to be our schtick!”

The dragon swooped down at us again, causing Kevin to lose control momentarily and me almost flying out of the window. Now behind us, the dragon turned around and slowed down to our speed, readying to fire another laser.

“Elizabeth!” I yelled, extending my hand into the truck.

Quickly, Elizabeth placed an energy drink in my hand, which I took out and chugged as fast as I could and tossed the can into the air, which flew behind us like a bullet. I held out my hand like a gun and then fired a giant laser at the dragon. The dragon noticed and shattered its pentagram like glass, soaring back into the sky to dodge my attack.

Grabbing another can, I chugged it and started focusing on shooting a round of smaller orbs in rapid succession like a machine gun. As they flew into the air, I saw the dragon take a hit, causing it to let out a screech again.

“How much do you think I have to hit it before it comes crashing down?” I yelled.

“Dunno! Just keep at it!” Elizabeth yelled back.

As we continued to speed down the highway, I spotted police cars coming up from behind us.

“The police!” I screamed.

“You'd think they'd worry more about the dragon destroying stuff than a truck speeding,” Kevin laughed.

“I think they're gonna catch up to us! Can you go any faster!?” I yelled.

“Eva, this is an old ass truck. This is as fast as this baby can go.”

We started driving towards construction for a series of new overpasses. The dragon kept its course with the unfinished overpasses in its sight.

“It's gonna ram the road up ahead!” I yelled.

As we got closer to the construction, the dragon didn't make an effort to move out of the way. It sped up and slammed into the overpasses. Chunks of the road fell around us, which Kevin miraculously managed to dodge. Two cop cars weren't so lucky and were crushed.

Just then, a black SUV jumped down from who knows where and landed next to us, easily keeping pace with Kevin's truck. Elizabeth and I looked at the SUV with confusion. The windows rolled down, revealing two young men who looked like they were in their early to mid twenties.

“And how are you lovely ladies doing on this fine day?” the driver asked. He had blond hair and blue eyes, with a huge grin stretching across his face, waving to us with a free hand. He wore a white silk buttoned down shirt with blue swirls going up it.

The other man sat in the back passenger seat behind the driver. He had short brown hair, a pair of sunglasses, and a blue t-shirt. There was something large sitting in his lap that he was fiddling with.

Elizabeth rolled down her window. “Hiya!” she yelled, turning down the music.

“The two of us happened to be driving by when we noticed that you had a dragon problem. So what's the deal with it?” the driver asked.

“There's this guy called the Magician, who's been releasing these giant evil monsters across town and we're trying to defeat them!” Elizabeth replied.

“Is that so?”

The dragon, now in front of us, descended with the intent on flipping our vehicles. Again, Kevin lost control while the SUV was perfectly fine.

“That isn't the best vehicle to drive in this situation,” the passenger said as he stuck his head out to look at the dragon soar behind us, then noticing the police chasing us. “Looks like you have some company.”

“Don't you mean we!” I yelled as I held out my hand and fired another giant energy sphere at the dragon.

The passenger raised his sunglasses when he saw the energy blast. He leaned over to the driver and whispered something to him.

“Thanks for the info. It was mighty helpful for our cause. We'll probably be seeing you guys later,” the driver said.

“But before we go.” The passenger opened the door and leaned out of the SUV. In his hand was a large rifle of some sort. He started firing it at the police, shooting out their tires and causing them all to slow down and stop.

And with that the two slowed their SUV down and exited the highway.

“Who were those two?” Kevin asked.

“Dunno, but that was nice helping us like that,” Elizabeth replied.

“Isn't it odd for complete strangers to help us like that?”

“Who cares. They helped us out, so it's all good!”

I looked up and saw the dragon flying above us, keeping our speed.

“Here it comes again!” I yelled.

The dragon descended, moving over next to us. I noticed the figure of someone standing on its back, looking at me. After realizing who it was, I let out a gasp.

“It's the Magician!”

“What!?” Elizabeth yelled as she climbed out her door's window and peered over the hood.

Standing straight up with his arms crossed like it was nothing, the Magician stared at us. He held out his hand and waved his fingers at us.

“What's he doing?” I asked.

“I think he wants us to go over to him. Maybe fight one on one?” Elizabeth replied.

The Magician gave a thumbs up and the dragon moved behind the truck.

“He can't possibly expect us to go over to him, can he?” I asked.

“Sure he can,” Elizabeth said as she kicked my legs up and out of the door.

I fell backwards and rolled into the back of the truck, slamming my shin onto the edge of the bed door. I gripped my shin, trying to soothe the pain.

“What was that for!? You trying to kill me!?” I screamed at Elizabeth, who was struggling to climb out of the rear window.

“Not necessarily, but it's nice that you didn't fall over.” Once she fell out of the window, she stood up. “Okay, grab hold of my arm.”

“Why?”

“Trust me.”

I grabbed Elizabeth's arm and she grabbed mine. She then stepped onto the edge of the truck.

“Jump!”

Elizabeth jumped off of the truck, dragging me with her. The two of us flew in the air, the gravel shooting by like a wall of bullets below us, waiting to tear our flesh apart. In front of us was the dragon, rising up and extending its massive claws from its hind legs. The dragon clenched us in its claws and then soared high into the sky.

I watched as Kevin's truck grew tiny in an instant. Elizabeth and I were now riding on the dragon.

“Oh God! I'm gonna die!” I cried as the dragon continued to soar.

The dragon started to do a loop-de-loop in the air. As it reach the peak it let Elizabeth and I go. The two of us floated in the air for a second as the dragon flew below us. When gravity started pushing down on us we landed on the back of the dragon. The landing was painless as its body turned out to be as soft as a giant stuffed toy.

The dragon slowed down, softening the intense wind that was hitting us until just a moment ago. I gripped the skin of the dragon and held on as tightly as I could. My heart was pounding in my chest, threatening to jump out of my ribcage and parachute back to the ground.

Elizabeth, being all cool like, stood up without a care. Across from the dragon stood the Magician, resting on staff.

“Well well, that was quite the interesting display,” the Magician said.

“And likewise,” Elizabeth said.

“Eva dear, you can let go of the dragon and stand up if you'd like.”

“W-why would I-I-I!? We're waaaay too high up a-and the l-l-last thing I want to do is f-fall to the ground and end up flat as a pancake!” I said with an intense stutter due to fear.

“Now that's a shame. I was hoping that we could fight one on one. Man to man like civilized people.”

“This is the part where someone would say 'But we're girls,' but I'll save you the time and instead challenge you myself,” Elizabeth said.

“You just said it!” I complained.

“Oh ho? This will certainly be fun,” the Magician said. “Since you have no means to defend yourself like Eva, I'll try and go easier on you.”

“No need for that,” Elizabeth said as she reached to her sides and pulled out a pair of brass knuckles. “I got everything I need to kick your ass right here.”

Where she had gotten a hold of those and where she kept them, I'll never know.

“Now that's the spirit!” the magician laughed as he charged at Elizabeth with his staff extended

like a sword. Elizabeth dodged and swung her fist at the Magician's face. He dodged Elizabeth's attack with ease and kneed her in the stomach, which caused her to hold her gut as she stumbled backward with a pained expression on her face.

“Ouch! That must have hurt!” the Magician squealed.

“Not as much as this!”

Elizabeth jumped back and danced around the Magician, landing a kick into his back. This caused him to stumble towards me. He gave me a thumbs-up and turned back to Elizabeth. Jumping into the air his cape extended outward, where he twisted it around himself and vanished into thin air. Elizabeth was shocked as she looked to see where he had disappeared off too.

“Behind you!” the Magician whispered. He then jammed his staff into Elizabeth's back, thrusting her forward.

Elizabeth cried in pain, but forced herself into a smile. “Now that wasn't fair,” she said.

“First you ask me not to hold back and now you tell me I'm not being fair? I'm sorry. I'll try to be more fair starting now.”

The Magician dashed towards Elizabeth and went to throw a punch, which Elizabeth blocked with her arm. The Magician quickly threw another punch before Elizabeth could notice and landed square in her face.

Elizabeth stumbled back a bit, rubbing her face and spitting out some blood, which flew in front of her and landed near me. She charged at him and tried to kick his feet to get him to lose balance, but he jumped over her attack with ease. She quickly jumped back up to her feet and punched the Magician in the stomach. She then landed a couple more hits at him, causing him to stumble backward. When she went in for another punch, the Magician grabbed her fist and flipped her onto her back and kicked her in the chest. Elizabeth tried to get back up, but the Magician started hitting her repeatedly.

I watched as the Magician gave Elizabeth an awful beating. He constantly kicked her while she was down, then lift her up in the air, only to punch her back down. The entire time I did nothing except

watch the painful display. Eventually it became too much for me to stand.

“Stop it!” I yelled.

“Stop?” the Magician said as he slammed his staff into Elizabeth's chest, pinning her down. She screamed out in pain.

“Yes! Stop it! Now!” I said as I slowly got to my feet. I held up my hand like a gun and pointed it at the Magician.

“If you hit her again I'll fire!”

The magician stared at me before lifting his staff off her chest. “If that's what you desire.” He started walking towards me.

“Don't move!”

He stopped moving. “Why do you continue to fight, Eva?” he asked.

I looked at him confused. “What?”

“Why do you continue to fight?” he asked again.

“That's stupid! I'm fighting because you're fighting me!”

“But is that all, Eva?”

“Well, yeah? I mean, why else would I be fighting you?”

The magician chuckled. “I see that you have yet become mature enough to understand what I'm talking about. You are still yet a child, Eva.”

I had no idea what he was talking about.

“He's. . . trying. . .” Elizabeth tried to speak, but couldn't get the words out as she barely held onto consciousness.

“That's enough out of you,” the Magician said as he walked over to Elizabeth and kicked her.

“What did I just say!?” I screamed.

A laser erupted from the palm of my hand and screeched as it cut through the air and sliced the Magician in half like a hot knife to butter. His insides melted from the extreme heat and burned into a

black bubbling substance. The laser continued forward into the back of the dragon's head and blew it right off. Its neck started spewing burning chunks of cotton.

The dragon's wings crumbled as it began to free fall onto the ground. The Magician, while cut in half and burning, started to laugh. That's when I noticed his body grew stiff and suddenly had a shiny gleam to it. His joints were that like an action figure.

“You're a toy too?” I said.

But it was too late for an answer. The rest of the Magician's body melted and burned from the heat.

When I finally snapped out of it, I saw Elizabeth falling next to me above the stuffed dragon's back. I stretched my hand as far as I could to the back of the dragon. My elbow felt like it was gonna break apart when I managed to pull myself to the dragon's body and push myself to Elizabeth.

“Elizabeth!” I yelled, but there was no response.

I looked around and noticed that we were seconds away from slamming into the ground. Without thinking, I grabbed Elizabeth and held onto her, then started to pray. I prayed that, somehow, there's enough cushion from the giant stuffed dragon that we'll somehow live. Sure, it was wishful thinking, but there was nothing else I could do.

Just as we were about to hit the ground, my hand began to glow. I put it front of me before the dragon's corpse, focused all my energy, and fired as large as a blast that I could.

My body ached. There was an intense pain coming from my finger.

“Eva!”

“Eva!”

I could hear someone calling my name. When I slowly opened my eyes I saw Elizabeth crouching over me behind a layer of cracked plastic and dirt.

“Eva! You all right?”

I grabbed the goggles that I had been wearing and ripped them off. “Does it look li-”

Before I could finish speaking I started coughing uncontrollably. I held my hand up to my mouth to cover it. There was a taste of blood in my mouth. I looked at my hand and noticed blood all over the place. And that's when I saw it.

“My finger!”

My pinky finger was missing. I sat up and started looking around the small crater that I sat in. Large sections of what was once the dragon burned around us.

“Wh-where's my finger?”

“Your finger?” Elizabeth asked. Then she saw it. “Holy crap! Your finger's gone!”

“Help me look for it!”

“Okay!”

The two of us looked around the small crater, but couldn't find anything. Elizabeth walked onto the grass and found a small pool of blood.

“I think I found it! Yeah, here it is!”

“Let me see!” I shouted as I grabbed the finger from her. I stared at it and the missing gap in my hand, covered in blood. “What should I do!?”

“How should I know!”

I stood up and limped out into the grass field, then collapsed to my knees. The pain was horrible.

“Kevin!” Elizabeth shouted when she saw Kevin's familiar red truck pull up nearby.

She ran over to him and said something I couldn't hear, which caused him to dart over to me.

“Eva! Oh my God!”

“Kevin! My finger!”

“I'm taking you to the hospital! Can you walk?”

I managed to stand up. “Yeah, I think I can.”

“Let's go.”

The three of us walked over to Kevin's truck, and he sped off into the street.

“What the hell happened? Last thing I saw were you two jumping from the back of the truck and getting caught by that dragon.”

“It was crazy!” Elizabeth cheered. “The Magician and I were fighting on the back of the dragon, but then Eva came in with her laser and shot him through the gut, cutting him in half!”

“Jesus.”

“By the way, you know that philosophical debate the Magician tries to have the with the blue ranger? Yeah, Eva saw right through how incredibly stupid it was just like in the show.”

“Really? Man, I thought that was a cool bit,” Kevin complained. “But how did you guys survive the fall?”

Elizabeth shrugged. “Luck I guess?” she said as she looked over to me, hoping for a comment.

I held my four fingered hand in my hoodie pocket while I held tightly to the other finger, trying to not think of the burning like pain. Elizabeth saw I was in no mood to talk, so she turned her attention back to Kevin.

“I gotta say, the Magician is definitely the later episodes Magician.”

“It became pretty obvious that was the case,” Kevin replied with a whistle.

We arrived at the hospital in a few minutes. Kevin and Elizabeth jumped out of the car and helped me out.

“You all right, Eva?” Kevin asked as we walked towards the entrance.

“Yeah, for some reason it's not hurting as much now.”

“Is that a good thing?” Elizabeth asked.

“I don't know.”

I pulled my hand out from the hoodie pocket to look at it. My legs stopped walking, causing Kevin and Elizabeth to almost trip.

“Eva?” Kevin asked.

Where was once a empty spot for my pinky was a brand new finger covered in blood. Staring at it, I tried moving it, which it did.

“What the hell?” Elizabeth said.

“Eva, where's the pinky that broke off!” Kevin shouted.

I opened the palm of my hand, revealing my severed pinky from earlier. Except now there was a new pinky in its old place. A finger had grown during the ride to the hospital.

I started walking back to the truck, but I fell to the ground.

“Eva!” Kevin and Elizabeth shouted.

Some bystanders started to walk up, noticing me covered in blood and dirt, holding onto a severed finger. A few started shouting at people to go into the hospital and get a doctor while one person asked if I was all right. Kevin and Elizabeth tried to keep them back and give me room, but it was a futile effort. I looked at my hand and started to freak out.

“What the heck is this?” I thought to myself. “No, really, the heck is going on? Why do I have a new finger where my old one used to be? Is this some other weird power? Am I even human? Who am I? What am I? Is this real?”

“What the hell am I!?” I screamed.

A couple nurses and a doctor ran out from the hospital and toward me. When I saw them I became scared. How was I suppose to explain this? What if the police get involved? What am I suppose to tell Rose? What would Dad say?

I got up to my feet and broke through the crowd of people and ran away. I dashed across the street into traffic, causing some cars to slam their breaks. When I made it across the street I started running as fast as I could.

“Eva!” Elizabeth called out, but I ignored her.

“Run,” I thought to myself. “Just run and go home!”

When I reached my apartment complex, I was exhausted. I don't know how I managed to run the entire way home after that intensive fight, but somehow I did. At the gate I sat down and took a minute to catch my breath. Some of the clouds were breaking up, allowing a few beams of sunlight to shine around me. The temperature was slowly rising. It was silent, other than an annoying ringing in my ears.

I was covered in sweat under my hoodie. When I looked at it, I saw it and my jeans were covered in blood stains and dirt. My hands too were stained with blood, and I didn't want to imagine what my face looked like.

After I felt like I had rested long enough, I stood up and dug around in my pockets to grab my security key card to open the gate. It was nowhere to be found. Not only that, but the pinky finger that I was holding at the hospital was gone as well.

“That'd make someone's day,” I thought, imagining some passerby finding a severed finger on the street somewhere.

My chuckle quickly vanished when I realized that I was locked out of the apartment complex. Then I remembered that I could call the home phone and Rose could open the gate if she was there. But

if she were to see my like this it'd be a huge pain in the butt.

In the end I decided to jump the fence. Taking off my hoodie, I used it to grapple the top of the fence and haul myself over. When I got to the top I lost my balance and fell face first on the concrete. The pain was horrendous, and worse I was bleeding again.

“Fantastic!” I complained out loud, holding in some tears.

I walked across the silent apartment complex and arrived at my building. The stairs took more effort than usual to climb, or at least it felt like it did. When I cracked the door open I saw Rose on the couch, texting or whatever it was she did on her phone.

“Hey,” I said as nonchalantly as possible in hopes that she wouldn't see how much of a wreck I looked.

“What up,” she replied, still glued to her phone. “I thought you were out hanging out with that weirdo.”

“Elizabeth? Yeah, we did. And now we're done. So, here I am, I guess. Yeah.”

I almost made it around the corner when I heard Rose yell “Jesus Christ!”

“What?”

Rose jumped out of her chair and ran over to me. “What the hell happened to you!? Why are you covered in dirt and blood!?”

“I dunno,” I replied, looking away from her.

“Eva! What on Earth did you do!? Are you hurt anywhere!?”

“It was nothing.”

I tried to walk away, but Rose grabbed my wrist and pulled me back. She looked down at me angrily, a face I rarely ever see unless I did something seriously bad. “No, not this time. I can't look away when you come home looking like this! Tell me what happened!”

“I said it was nothing, so leave me alone!” I yelled, trying to yank my wrist out of her grasp.

“Eva!” Rose was seriously pissed off by this point, but I didn't cave in.

“You're not my mom! I don't have to tell you crap!”

Rose raised her hand and slapped me in the face. Tears began to form in my eyes, followed by pathetic whimpers. Everything was catching up to me and I couldn't hold it in anymore. I fell to the ground and started to cry.

Rose immediately held me in her arms. She rubbed my back as I cried on her shoulders. I hugged her.

“What am I!?” I cried out.

Rose continued to hold me as I kept crying. After that I didn't say another word and Rose too was silent. It wasn't until after my tears ran out did Rose say something.

“Take a shower and wash those tears away,” she said, her voice now kind and gentle like that of a mother figure in a TV drama.

I replied with a nod and got up, leaving my hoodie on the floor. In the bathroom I started the shower and tossed my blood-soaked clothes in a corner. I stood under shower head with my eyes closed with water hitting my face. For twenty minutes I stood there, doing nothing. It was like a sort of meditation as all my problems washed away into the drain.

After drying myself off I realized that the cuts and bruises on my face were gone. I thought that was weird and remembered the cuts I should have had from the incident at school but seemed to vanished the next day. I've always thought of myself to be a pretty fast healer when it came to scrapes and cuts, but it seemed to be getting ridiculously fast now.

A thought came to mind. I dug through the bathroom drawer, finding one of my dad's razor blades. I placed my finger in the sink and then sliced it open. There was a sharp pain that made me cringe as blood spurted out from my finger.

“You all right in there?” Rose asked through the door.

“Y-yeah. I'm fine,” I said rinsing the cut.

The bathroom door cracked open and Rose's hand popped through, holding some of my clean

clothes.

“Here's something clean to wear,” she said.

“Thanks,” I replied, grabbing them from her.

After getting changed I walked to the living room where Rose was putting stuff in her purse.

“I'm late for work,” she said.

I sat down on the couch and watched her as she scurried around, fixing herself up a bit.

“Look, you don't have to tell me what happened right now if you don't want to. I did some crazy stuff when I was your age too, but remember that I care about you, Eva. If there's anything wrong or you feel lost, talk to me.”

“Okay,” I mumbled.

“What?”

“Okay!” I said louder.

Rose smiled and pulled out some money and handed it to me. “Try to have some fun while I'm gone. Oh, before I forget! That window, yeah, you're gonna be in a lot of trouble once your dad gets home, so enjoy your freedom while you got it.” After that she walked out the door.

She handed me forty bucks. I stuffed it in my pocket and looked at the clock. It was a little past one. The apartment was deathly quiet. Noticing Rose's bass in the corner, I walked over to it and plucked a string. A soft note hummed in the air. When I looked at my finger, the cut was gone.

Chapter 6

It was getting late into the afternoon. I ended up napping my free time away. After getting up I fixed my appearance a bit so it didn't look like I just crawled out of bed, grabbed my heavy coat, and walked over to Jessica's.

When I got there nobody was home, so I went over to a tiny playground that sat behind a couple of the apartment buildings and laid down, watching the gray clouds float by. Whenever I heard the sound of a car passing by I would sit up to see if it was Jessica, but it was always someone else. It grew pretty warm in the coat, but as long as I wasn't doing anything much physically it was fine.

Eventually some younger kids came over to the playground to play. Their appearance made me feel uncomfortable as I felt too old to be hanging around there, so I got up and started heading back to my place. When I walked by the entrance to the complex, I saw Jessica's Mom's car drive in. When it drove by Jessica waved to me from the window. I stood there watching them drive towards their place before slowly following them, acting like I just happened to be out here and not waiting for them to come home or anything.

Jessica's Mom's car stopped briefly in front of their apartment just long enough to let Jessica out before it drove off again. As she drove by, I waved. She gave me a small wave back as she drove off.

“Eva!” Jessica called out as she ran over to me.

She was wearing her “super important event” outfit, which consisted of a white formal dress and a small black sweater. Her long hair was curled at the ends with a black ribbon in it. She had on white stockings with a pair of black formal ball like shoes. There was a small amount of makeup on her face, with some blush and a thin layer of red lipstick. Hanging from her shoulder was a small bag that matched the dress.

When I saw her dressed up I knew something was up.

“Uh, did someone die?” I asked.

“What!? Pffft! No way! I had to go with my mom to court today,” she replied happily. “And it was sooo boring! I was like 'ugh, kill me!' the whole time I was there. Believe me, you never want to go to court.”

“Court? Why?”

“Something to do with my dad or whatever, but it was dumb stuff. They asked me to talk a few times, but honestly what am I suppose to say about him? I barely know the guy.”

“Yeah, I guess that's true. Still, that sounds pretty serious,” I said, my voice becoming melancholy. “I didn't realize you had a dad.”

“You never met him. He was a bit of a-” Jessica held up her hand like she was holding a can and quickly rotated her hand while making a “glug” sound with her mouth, then slapped the back of her hand as hard as she could, waving it in front of her to relieve the pain she had just inflicted on herself.

That was quite the way to put it. “I didn't know that,” I said in a depressing tone. “Sorry to hear that.”

“Nah, it's okay. I was so little when he was around I don't remember any of it. My brother, on the other hand, had the worse of it. Oh! By the way! He sent me a letter recently from Germany! Check it out!”

Jessica pulled out a photo of her brother, Jack, who was serving at a military base in Germany, next to a girl holding giant mugs of beer.

“They took this during Oktoberfest.”

I chuckled at the picture, which I thought was a funny coincidence after having learned that her dad was an abusive alcoholic. Hopefully this won't be a like father like son type thing in the future.

“How's he doing?” I asked.

“Doing really well. That's his new girlfriend, Beatrix. He said they started going out a couple months ago.”

“That's good to hear,” I said.

I don't remember her brother too much, but what I do remember about him was that he always had a serious, if slightly pained, look to him. After hearing that nonchalant bombshell it made sense, but judging from the photo he seemed to be doing fine.

“It's at times like these when you think you really know someone, only to realize you don't know them as well as you think.”

“Hm?” Jessica said as she put the photo away.

“N-nothing. Just, well, a-anyway, me, Kevin, and Elizabeth fought the Magician today.”

“What! Really!? And I missed it!” Jessica cried out. “What a load of crud! Why did I have to go to court today! So how was it!? Where did you fight him!? What happened!? Did you win!?”

I sighed. “Want to go somewhere to talk about it? Rose gave me forty bucks to spend on whatever.”

“Ooh! Let's go play mini golf!” she cheered.

“Why mini golf?”

“Because I went by it when coming home from court and thought it'd be fun.”

I thought about it. “Well, it's not that far. If we both ride my bike, we can get there pretty quickly.”

“Then let's go!”

Jessica started running towards the bike rack where I always left my bike.

“Hey, don't you want to change out of that?” I asked.

“But then I'd have to turn back! There's no time for that! Let's go!”

I shrugged and chased after her to the bike rack. I checked my pockets to see if the money was there. Satisfied, I hopped onto the bike and rode it up to the gate, which Jessica opened for me. Outside the gate she hopped onto the back of the bike and we rode down the hill.

“Aren't you afraid you're going to ruin that outfit? Your mom's gonna be pretty pissed if you do,” I said trying to look behind to Jessica while trying to see where I was going.

"I'll just have to be extra extra careful," she replied in her cheery voice.

I smiled and turned my focus back to where I was steering, only to hit a ill placed rock and lose my balance for a second. With luck I managed to keep us from falling.

"Nice one!" Jessica cheered.

"Let's try to not do that again," I said.

"Yeah."

We rode through the neighborhood, at one point on some old road without a curb that was breaking apart on the edges, making it dangerous if a car happened to pass by us. There was a bit of an adrenaline rush whenever we'd ride as close to the edge, fearing that we'd fall off the rode and into the grass and dirt, but it was fun. Whenever there was a hill Jessica would jump off and help push the bike from behind as I kept pedaling.

Eventually the neighborhood merged into a business area by the highway, where a few hotels, a bank, and some fast food places were located. The road instantly became ten times nicer once we got into the area, along with a sidewalk for us to ride on again so we could get off the street. Numerous cars roared past us as the end of the work day traffic was in full swing, bringing about a gust of wind whenever one would pass us. I imagined we probably looked weird to the drivers, but I didn't care.

After we ran for our lives across the street between passing cars, we made it to the mini golf course that was attached to a bowling alley with a large arcade and pool hall. The place was packed with cars filling up the parking lot. Not surprising for a Friday evening, to be honest. As there wasn't a place to park my bike, I ended up securing it to a metal fence along the side of the golf course.

Walking inside, the place was pretty crowded with kids of different ages playing on old arcade games. Music and chatter filled the room. Holding onto Jessica's hand, we squeezed through a crowd of people who decided it was a good idea to block the only hallway to the mini golf course. What's worse is the fact that they appeared to be in high school and should know better than to do something like that.

No, wait, the terrible stench emanating off one of them was worse. Take a shower ya hippy.

When we made it through the building and arrived outside to the mini golf course, numerous groups of people stood around most of the holes on each of the three courses available. I walked over to the counter and paid for two clubs and two balls.

“You know, if we never play on the last holes on any of the courses we can keep playing for as long as we want!” Jessica told me.

“Sounds good,” I replied while handing her a club and ball. “Want to go through all three difficulties then?”

“Sounds good,” she said, swapping balls with mine after not liking the color I had handed her. “Let's start with easy and build our way up.”

There were a few people ahead of us at the first hole on the easy course, so Jessica and I waited patiently for our turn.

“So what happened today?” Jessica asked.

“Well, the monster this time turned out to be a giant dragon.”

“A dragon!? Awesome!”

“Not really. This thing was so huge that every time it flew down close to us it'd almost flip Kevin's truck over with just a gust of wind.”

“Can you explain to me how that's not awesome?”

“You had to be there. Anyway, we're chasing it down the highway, flipping cars here and there while I try and shoot it with my laser attacks.”

The people in front of us were finished. Jessica placed her ball down and carefully lined up her shot. Hole in one.

“Nice,” I congratulated her.

“Thank you! So, did you hit it?”

“A couple times, but it wasn't anything that really did damage to it,” I said as I placed my ball

down and got ready to putt.

Jessica chuckled. "Guess you still need to work on your aim."

"Tell me about it. So then this black SUV shows up with two guys in it, we talk for a bit, and then they drive off."

"What did they say?"

"Mmm. I don't remember really. Mostly just asking what we were doing."

"Ah."

"Then the dragon comes down with that Magician guy on it, so we jump off the truck, zoom high into the sky with the dragon, and got onto its back."

"Whoa! You were riding the dragon!? That's so awesome!"

I wanted to correct her again about how it wasn't awesome, but decided not to.

"Anyway, magician guy was up there, Elizabeth and him fought, then I ended up shooting and killing him along with the dragon at the same time. Then we sort of fell from the sky and landed in a grass field."

"You fell from the sky!? Like, literally!?" Jessica became wide eyed.

I nodded.

"How on Earth did you survive!?"

"Excuse me." A man tapped me on the shoulder with a couple little kids with him. "I don't mean to cut into your conversation, but we'd like to play if you're done with this hole."

"Oh"! I said, embarrassed. "I'm sorry. Y-yeah, we're done. She's all yours. The hole, I mean. No, wait, what am I saying! Here, just, here you go."

I picked the ball back up without ever hitting it.

The man laughed and said "Thank you."

I walked away, hanging my head in shame. I must have sounded like some shut in who hasn't spoken to a person in years.

Jessica and I walked over to the next hole.

“So how did you two survive?” Jessica asked.

“Dunno,” I said. “Just woke up on the ground and that was that.”

“That was that?”

“Yeah,” I said, glancing away for a split second. I thought about mentioning my pinky finger breaking off along with a new finger growing in its place, but I still have a hard time believing that actually happened. I held up my hand and looked at my pinky, then gave it a tug. It hurt. It was definitely my finger.

Jessica stared at me as I did this. “Why were you tugging at your finger just now?”

“Hm?”

“What were you doing?”

“N-nothing. Just hurt a little bit. Must have swung the club weird. Let's keep playing!”

Jessica stared down at me. “You're hiding something from me again.”

“Man, how can you always tell!” I said, waving my arms.

“Because I'm awesome,” Jessica said with a thumbs up.

“Sorry, but this time I'm not gonna talk about it.”

“Come on,” Jessica said, leaning on my shoulder.

“No way. It's, I don't know. I'm still trying to wrap my head around it. You know what, I promise I'll tell you. Just not now.”

Jessica glared at me as she rested her arm on my shoulder. “Okay. If that's what you want.”

She finally dropped the subject and switched over to talk about how her mom is currently looking into transferring her into a new middle school since ours was gonna remain closed for the rest of the school year. As my dad hasn't come home yet and Rose doesn't know anything about that stuff, I couldn't add to the conversation, other than hope that I go to the same school as her.

“Of course you will!” she told me.

We ended up playing through all three difficulty courses. Jessica managed to get a hole in one every time during the easy course, about half of the medium course, but struggled with the hardest difficulty course. Of course I was terrible and gave up halfway through and just watched Jessica play.

“That was fun,” Jessica said as she hit the ball one last time into the final hole of the hard course, with me simply dropping it into the hole after her.

“Yeah, until that last course.”

Jessica giggled. “You shouldn't have given up so easily.”

“Maybe,” I smiled. “But whatever. There's still the rest of my life to try again.”

“So, where to now?”

Where to now? That caught me off guard. I didn't expect us to keep going to places. “Where to now,” I mumbled.

“Oh! Let's go see a movie!” Jessica announced. “There's a new comedy that looks pretty funny, at least from what I saw in the commercials. You still have some money left, right?”

I dug through my pocket and pulled out a wad of cash and some change. “I should have plenty, so sure, why not? I haven't been to the movie theater in years. But if the movie turns out to be a stinker you owe me.”

“I'll work the rest of my days to repay my debt to you,” Jessica bowed.

The two of us laughed as we left the mini golf course and returned to the front of the building. I unchained my bike from the fence and we set out to the mall, which wasn't that far from the mini golf course and had a really nice movie theater attached to it.

Downside is that it was located across an incredibly busy and dangerous street, or as Rose liked to call it “the street from Hell.” It took only a few minutes before we were at the crosswalk, watching hundreds of cars speed down the road. Jessica jumped off my bike and sighed at the idea of having to wait. A gap in the clouds allowed the evening sun to pour through, causing the clouds to look like a giant sheet of gold. This sight caught Jessica's attention.

“Eva! The sky is made of gold!” Jessica cheered as she pointed at it.

“Awesome,” I replied.

“Imagine if there was a field of gold in real life. I'd run out there and hold onto as much as I can. Then we'd be able to do whatever we want!” she said, waving her arms.

“I dunno,” I commented. “I kind of like the way things are right now.”

Jessica put her arms down and smiled at me. “Yeah, you're right.”

The two of us continued to stare at the clouds as our chance to cross the street came and went, and another cycle of waiting for the light began.

“We missed our turn,” I said.

“Darn,” Jessica replied. “We'll get the next light.”

Headlights on the cars left streaks of light as they passed us by. The sound of the tires rubbing against the asphalt made them sound like a herd of animals storming past us. A car with its windows down blasting music sped by, sounding like the cry.

When the light changed, the two of us ran as fast as we could. A car that was attempting to turn didn't notice us for a second and quickly slammed the breaks, making a loud screeching noise. If he'd hit us we'd be in the right of way and then could sue. Probably. Maybe. At least that's what I heard at some point in my life but don't remember where.

Once we made it across the street, Jessica hopped back onto my bike and we rode up a small street and into the mall parking lot. A small four lane road circled the mall, which we rode down, passing by large stretches of parking spaces until we reached the location of the movie theater, situated next to a multiple story parking garage. The inside of the garage was full of cars with numerous people walking to and from an entrance to the mall. By the entrance there was a very small bike rack, hinting that nobody rode bikes in this city. Not that the lack of a bike rack at the mini golf course was any indicator, but whatever. I chained my bike to the rack and the two of us followed behind a large group of people into the mall.

The inside of the mall was loud. People chattered and yelled to each other as a game of ice hockey was being played in the ice rink next to the entrance while a merry-go-round at the second story entrance on the other side of the ice rink played a children's tune. A pair of escalators next to the ice rink led us to the second story, dropping us off in front of a frozen yogurt place. When Jessica saw it she immediately felt hungry.

“I can't afford that,” I told her.

“Could we get a drink at least?”

I counted the money in my pocket. “Yeah, we should be fine. I think.”

Before heading to the entrance to the movie theater that sat next to a large sporting goods store across the way, we walked around the frozen yogurt store and a video game store to where the bathrooms were located next to an over crowded food court. A couple of soda vending machines stood against a wall. I popped in some of the dollar bills I had and bought two bottles of soda, which I cracked open, secured it close, and placed them in my coat pockets discreetly. I wasn't about to drop five bucks for a soda at the theater.

There was a long line waiting to purchase tickets, but it ended up moving pretty quickly. After purchasing our tickets we climbed the escalator into the theater and presented our tickets before being allowed it. A large concession stand stood front and center with a tiny bar for adults off to the side, stools and all. Jessica stopped and stared at the huge selection of candy and other goodies. I grabbed Jessica's hand and led us to the theater.

“But they have a Halloween discount on candy!” she cried.

“You're gonna have some in a few weeks.”

Inside the theater the place was barely half full. If this was a first weekend run then the movie studios are gonna be sweating by Monday. People were scattered across the seats, leaving several empty seats between them and the people around them. Jessica and I sat on aisle seats near the middle. I pulled out the sodas and handed one to Jessica. We sat there and talked until the movie started.

“Wasn't that hilarious!?”

Jessica and I were outside the entrance to the mall where I was getting my bike.

“It was,” I replied.

The movie was, to be honest, pretty amusing. There were a few jokes that I felt ashamed about laughing, but after what had happened earlier today it felt nice laughing at something dumb.

“That scene where they crash down the mountain in that car and the guy says 'Well, that was close,' but then his airbag deploys finally!”

“That was pretty funny.”

Grabbing my bike, I hopped on with Jessica about to get on when we heard a commotion coming from the parking garage. There was some yelling echoing against the concrete walls.

“What do you think's going on over there?” Jessica asked.

“Dunno. Should we go check it out?”

Jessica stared inside the parking garage and then nodded. “What if someone needs our help? You can shoot your laser at them and save the day!”

“I'd rather not. But maybe we can call for help if there's something going on.”

We walked into the parking garage, passing by the cars as we got closer to the source of the commotion. What we saw was a couple of punks harassing an elderly couple. When I looked around I saw a couple of other people watching from a distance, some with their phones out.

“Those guys are picking on that old couple!” Jessica whispered.

“I think there's some people calling the cops. Let's just bail and go ho-”

“Hey!”

Jessica walked toward the punks. All of them turned their attention to her, ignoring the elderly couple. The old woman managed to pull her husband away from the punks.

“What'd you want?” A tall, muscular man with bleached hair and red shot eyes wearing a red hoodie with the logo of what I think was a band on it, and a pair of loose fitting black jeans started walking towards Jessica along with his two friends who dressed in similar style fashion. Their eyes weren't nearly as bad looking.

I ran up to Jessica and grabbed her hand. “Quit it, Jessica. This isn't the time for this.”

“And why not?” she asked.

“Because they're obviously much tougher than us.”

By this point the punk looking guy towered over us. Taller than anyone I've ever met. This guy could get into any basketball team if he'd try.

“You have a problem with what we're doing?” he asked.

“Yeah I do!” Jessica shouted. “You shouldn't pick on old people like that!”

“So what?”

“It's mean!”

“They got the point, so let's go,” I said, trying to pull Jessica away.

The man grabbed my shoulder and forced me away from Jessica. “This ain't your problem, shorty,” he stared down at me. “She started it, so she's gonna finish it.”

“Run away, Jessica! You do-”

A powerful force slammed into my stomach, causing me to fall onto my knees. The air in me was knocked out along with some saliva. As I lay on the ground I held my stomach, cringing in the pain.

“Eva!” Jessica knelt down beside me. “You okay?”

I coughed. “Why do people say that when they're obviously not?”

The punk and his two friends started laughing. “That was pretty amusing. I think I kind of like you, kid.”

Jessica stood up, filled with anger. She charged forward to the punk and punched him in the stomach to no effect. When she saw it accomplished nothing, she punched him again, and then again, repeating the process until her punches turned into mere smacks of her hands. She grew discouraged as she realized she couldn't do anything.

“You done? My turn.”

The man raised his hand and slapped Jessica across the face, causing her to fall over. I watched as she slammed onto the cement. Her face was bleeding as she struggled to get back up.

Hatred filled my entire body. I looked up at the man, who was laughing at the scene. This guy was an asshole. He just hurt Jessica and was laughing. I wanted to get at him. I wanted to do something. I had to get back at him. A tingling feeling began to grow from the pits of my stomach.

My eyes grew wide as I caught what I was about to do.

I was about to shoot a laser at this guy. He could get seriously injured, but he had just hurt Jessica. I've never tried shooting at a regular person. All I've attacked so far have been giant toys. But this guy? Yes, he just hurt me and Jessica, but is it worth maybe killing him over? Why isn't anyone calling the cops. Why are all those people just standing around, watching?

“Hey! Pick on someone your own size!” someone from the enlarging crowd shouted. “You wouldn't pick on little girls in front of a large crowd and expect to get away with it, do you?”

It was someone who looked to be in his thirties. He had on a buttoned down shirt and a tie. A woman was grabbing his arm, telling him not to get involved, but the man looked like he wouldn't have it anymore.

The punk chuckled. “Like I care.” He then reached into his pocket and pulled out a pistol and fired. I watched in terror as the blast echoed in the parking garage, increasing its volume. My ears hurt.

One of his friends cursed in shock.

The bullet hit the man in the shoulder. He fell to the ground where the woman dropped down and started screaming. Everyone who was watching instantly turned and began to run away, screaming. It was chaos. The punk stood there, laughing, even as his friends were not amused by his severe case of stupidity.

“We gotta get outta here,” one of them said.

“I’m not done yet,” the punk said.

His friends started looking around and started backing away. The punk walked up to Jessica and grabbed her wrist, hoisting her up.

“Let her go!” I cried.

A bullet hit the ground by me and ricochet off somewhere. I flinched, letting out a small cry while I held my head. His friends, realizing that the police would be there any second, abandoned him.

“Shut up,” he said. “You two ruined my night.”

He lifted Jessica into the air, who was screaming and trying to fight the man off. He placed the gun under Jessica's chin.

“If I have to go down, I’m taking you with me.”

“Stop!” I yelled.

The tingling sensation grew intense. I couldn't hold it back anymore. Even though I was holding my head, looking down at the ground, crying, a laser formed and severed both of the man's arms. The laser's heat instantly cauterized the wounds, leaving a black burnt area where it had hit. Jessica fell with arms in tow, the ends hitting her dress and leaving large black ashy marks.

Jessica shook with fright, but surprisingly she didn't cry or scream. She looked in awe at the arms and then at me. The punk, on the other hand, screamed out in terror as he stumbled backwards into a car and fell to the ground, unable to get up. His screams filled the entire parking garage, mixing with the screams of people nearby. It sounded like he was being murdered.

My face was covered in tears. I shakily stood up and looked at the scene. Jessica lying on the

ground, two severed arms with one holding a pistol, and a crying, screaming man rolling around on the ground. I looked back at Jessica and helped her up. Holding her hand, we started to back away, then ran. We ran out of the parking garage, mixing in with a crowd that was surging around the parking garage filled with curious bystanders and people who were running around panicking. Police sirens started going off as security and police officers showed up to the scene, trying to move through the crowd and attest the scene.

We followed a crowd of people towards the other side of the mall and out of the parking lot. As they continued running away Jessica and I slowed our pace down as we neared the street we crossed earlier that evening. We sat down on the curb, taking deep breaths. I laid down on the grass behind me, staring at the night sky. The chilled wind hit my teared covered face, making it cold. Cars continued to race down the busy street, as if nothing had happened just now. More police started to show up, prompting Jessica and I to leave so we wouldn't get caught up in the mess.

We crossed the street and headed to the worn out road we rode down earlier. As we walked I realized that I left my bike at the parking lot. I stopped walking and looked back toward the mall. I turned my attention to Jessica, who had stopped and looked at me. She looked like a wreck. Her dressed was beaten and stained black. Her hair was a mess and her cheek was red with bits of blood coming from a small scrape. One of her stockings was ripped.

I stared at her for a second and then looked down at the ground, placing my hands in my pockets and started walking again. The two of us didn't say a word to each other as we traversed the streets and started up the hill that led to our apartment complex. On a balcony of an apartment complex next to ours were several people, talking loudly and drinking. When they spotted us they yelled get our attention, saying "Nice night, huh!?" I ignored them, which probably made them slightly miffed.

When we reached our complex I instinctively reached into my pocket to pull out the card to open the gate, then remembered that my stuff was still at Kevin's. Jessica, with her card already out from her purse, placed it next to the scanner and opened the gate. She walked passed me and headed

inside with me following behind her.

As we approached her apartment, she stopped. She turned around and looked at me with tears in her eyes. With a sniff, she hugged me tightly.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

I thought about hugging her back, but I ended up not doing it. I should have, but for whatever reason I didn’t. Probably because I felt like I had lost something back there at the mall, something that I won’t ever get back, and didn’t feel like I deserved to give Jessica a hug.

“I won’t tell anyone what happened,” she said as she let me go. With a wave she walked to her apartment and entered the front door, where the living room light was on.

I stood there, hearing yells coming from inside her apartment. My gut felt like it was twisted in a knot as I knew she was being scolded for what happened to her clothes. Her mom’s voice would stutter as she shouted. After it grew silent I started to walk away.

At first I was going straight home, but then I started to turn and ended up heading to Kevin’s apartment. I walked down the street and cut through a grass alley way, appearing before the stairs to Kevin’s front door. I didn’t realize it at the time, but I had been running. I shot up the stairs and started banging on his door as I caught my breath.

It was a full minute of nonstop banging before the door swung open. Kevin stood there wearing a shirt with some girly looking cartoon character on it and boxer shorts. At first he was incredibly pissed off looking, but his face quickly softened when he saw it was me.

“Eva! You all right!?” he asked. “What happened to you after you ran from the hospital!? Elizabeth picked your finger up off the ground and tried yelling at you to get your attention, but you just sped off.”

“I just cut off a man’s arms at the mall.”

There was a dreadfully painful silence. Kevin stood there, looking down at me with a blank face. Then slowly, he closed the door, causing me to start banging it again.

“Open up the damn door, Kevin!”

He opened the door. “The hell did you do!?”

I walked past Kevin and went inside his apartment. He looked around outside briefly and then closed the door behind him. Moving some junk off the couch, I sat down with Kevin sitting down across from me, turning off the TV that was playing cartoons.

“Me and Jessica were hanging out this evening and went to a mini golf course, then decided to go see a movie,” I said with a wavering voice. “But then as we were leaving we saw this elderly couple getting harassed by some punks. Jessica ended up getting involved. Then they punched me and hit her, then this guy showed up and was shot, and then he pointed the gun at Jessica, and then-”

Kevin sat there, looking at me with his arms crossed. He waited patiently for me to finish as I tried to recover my voice.

“And, and then I shot him with a laser and cut off his arms. But I didn't mean to shoot him. They just sort of shot out on their own! I just shot off a guy's arms like it was nothing and it happened on its own! Why did that happen!? I thought I had complete control of my powers, but I didn't aim or anything at the guy. I was curled up like a little kid, crying.”

Adjusting his seat, Kevin sat there, scratching the end of his chin. I could feel myself starting to cry again, scared to death about what's happening to me. A repeat of earlier this afternoon. But before I could say anything else, Kevin cut in.

“Well, from the sound of it, the guy was bad? I guess? He was a bad guy? So, that, uh, means what you did was good, I guess, maybe? So I wouldn't worry about that. I mean, the guy that is. As for the laser going off, well, hmm. Man, I could really go for some pancakes right now. Do you like pancakes?”

“What?” I said, confused by the weird turn the conversation had taken.

“Sometimes I like getting pancakes at night at this one restaurant. There's this really hot waitress there and, uh. Do you like pancakes? Let's go get pancakes.”

Kevin stood up and walked to his room, coming out a few minutes later with pants, his trench coat, and yellow headphones.

“I'm buying. Let's go.”

He walked up to the front door and opened it. I sat there, confused, but ultimately got up and walked out the door. I guess we were going to get pancakes.

Chapter 7

I sat on the front passenger's seat of Kevin's truck. My chair was leaned back as I watched the night sky: an empty black void with occasional dots of light from street lamps zooming by. Kevin had cracked the windows a bit to let in fresh air, but it ended up making the inside of the truck cold. Air whistled as it squeezed through the cracked window. Awful music from the eighties whispered from the speakers.

“So, this place we're going to, I tend to frequent there a lot,” Kevin said as he watched the road. “To be honest, there's a girl that works there that I kind of like. Problem is that whenever I try to start a conversation with her I end up falling flat, or I end up stuttering a lot, or talk about something stupid that she doesn't care about, like the early works of Hayao Miyazaki. I mean, why would I think she'd even care about that sort of thing? She probably thinks I'm a loser, but I keep going there anyway.”

“Why are you telling me all this?” I mumbled.

“Why?” He paused for a moment. “I don't know? I mean, uh, well, there's a, hmm. I guess I'm just trying to have some conversation so the ride isn't so boring? Actually, what the hell am I doing? I'm taking a twelve year old to buy pancakes. I'm twenty two for God's sake! Why the hell am I not going to the bars and picking up chicks?”

I shrugged.

“Jesus Christ. Okay, hold on a bit. Kind of getting a very depressed feeling right now. Aaaaaaand gone. No, wait. Okay. So, uh, how's the, um, life? Sure is swell, right?”

A small bit of laughter escaped my lips. This guy was hopeless.

“Heeey, I heard that. You laughed. Got that flipped turn upside down smile thingy swapped around.”

“You mean a frown?” I asked, chuckling at his horrible speaking skills.

“Yeah. Apparently I've forgotten the English language. Please excuse me as I hurl myself out of

this truck real quick.”

He didn't, of course.

“No wonder you don't have any friends. Your conversational skills are shot.”

Kevin sighed. “Yeah, I know. I'm pretty terrible at small talk. But anyway, I don't know how it feels to be in your situation right now, but I'm hoping maybe I can help take your mind off things for a bit.”

“Thanks,” I said, going back to staring out the window.

Sadly that brief moment was already over as my mind fell back into a pit of despair. I mean, how couldn't I? I just shot off some guy's arms off like they were made of butter. Plus I did it in front of Jessica, who not only had a gun pointed at her, but fell to the ground with the guy's severed arms. That's nightmare fuel that will never leave you. Burned into the brain for the rest of your life.

And I was partly the cause.

“Life sucks,” I muttered.

“Sure does,” Kevin said. “Life sucks then you die.”

“That should be written on a poster.”

“Actually, I have de-motivational poster with that written on there. I could print it off for you if you want to hang it in your room.”

“Not really, no.”

“Oh, all right. Wellp, we're here.”

I lifted the seat up as we arrived at a 24/7 restaurant with breakfast foods as its specialty in case you wanted breakfast at one in the morning. Then again, there's people who work graveyard shifts where their day might start at one in the morning, so who am I to judge?

The restaurant itself looked okay. Not trashy but not really attractive either. From looking outside there were brown chairs and tables with white walls and some paintings of scenic scenes hanging on the walls inside. The outside attempted to look like a house of sorts, with white washed

walls and a red shingled roof. The place was partly packed, with half the restaurant full of people.

When we walked inside there was a small line of people waiting to be seated. The inside of the restaurant was noisy with numerous people chatting among one another. A strong smell of pancakes made me hungry all of the sudden.

“How many people?” a hostess asked when it was our turn. She wore a white buttoned down shirt with a green apron with the logo of the restaurant. Her hair was slightly messy, meaning she'd probably been here for a couple hours working already.

“Just two,” Kevin said holding up two fingers.

“Right this way,” she said, making a quick glance at the two of us and then shaking her head.

We sat down at a booth and were given two menus.

“A waitress will help you in a minute,” the hostess said before walking away.

I opened the menu and started looking through it. “You're buying, right?” I asked.

“I thought that was sort of the point.”

“So I don't have to worry about the price.”

“Please don't order anything too expensive.”

I looked through the breakfast menu, checking out the different assortment of pancakes with different toppings. Kevin tapped his finger on the table, not bothering to open the menu.

“You're not gonna look?” I asked.

“Nah. I get the same thing every time I come here.”

I went back to looking at the menu. A few moments later Kevin's tapping stopped.

“Oh crap. I just realized.”

“What?” I asked.

“It looks like I'm taking my younger sister to a restaurant.”

“I guess,” I replied.

“But you're not, which makes it weird. Oh God, what if people think you're not my little sister

and that I'm some kind of creep?"

I rolled my eyes. "Nobody is thinking that."

"But what if? Ah hell. I totally look like a creeper, don't I? Oh! She's working tonight! Dammit! Now she's gonna think I'm some sick freak! She's coming over here. I think she's gonna be our waitress. No, go away. Oh, she's looking angry. What? Why!? What'd I do?"

Kevin slammed his head on the table.

"The hell are you doing!?"

I looked up from the menu and saw Rose standing above me, wearing an identical uniform like the rest of the staff. To my disbelief the person who Kevin had a crush on was my aunt.

"R-rose!?" I said, shocked.

"What?" Kevin said, lifting his head up.

"You know this freak!?" Rose asked, pointing her pen at Kevin.

"Wait, you know each other!?" Kevin asked.

"Uh." was all I could respond with.

"What the hell are you doing with my niece?" Rose said, looking angry.

"You're her aunt!?" Kevin shouted.

"Yeah, and what of it!? Don't tell me now you're creeping on kids too!"

"See, they do think that!"

Rose grabbed my wrist and pulled me out of the seat. She then grabbed Kevin's wrist and led us outside.

"Hey Rose!" A tall man wearing a uniform sans the apron called out to Rose.

"I'm going on break!" she yelled at him as she led Kevin and I out the door.

Once we were on the other side of the parking lot on the grass by the highway, she let go.

"I demand an explanation."

Kevin and I looked at each other then back at Rose.

“First off, why the hell are you taking my niece to a restaurant this late at night?” she asked, pointing at Kevin.

Kevin was at a lost for words, not sure what to say without worsening the situation. Getting irritated, Rose grabbed Kevin and slammed him on the ground.

“I-I'm sorry!” he shouted.

Rose punched him in the face.

“Rose! Stop it!” I shouted.

“Why!?”

“Because! He's my friend!”

“And how come I didn't know you were hanging out with a stalking creeper!?”

Seemed like Kevin was unintentionally being creepy whenever he saw Rose at the restaurant.

“He's the older brother of the girl who came to the apartment the other day.”

“That crazy bitch!?”

Rose placed her hands on her face and leaned her head back. She let out an audible moan of frustration. “What the hell are you doing when I'm not around, Eva? Why are you getting involved with these creeps?”

“Because-”

The words wouldn't come out. I wasn't sure how she'd react to me saying I had super powers and that I just shot someone's arms off. Would she be accepting or freak out? Heck, would she even believe me?

Rose grabbed my shoulders and ducked down so that we were the same eye level.

“Remember earlier today when I said you can tell me anything? This is one of those times. I won't do anything if you just tell me what's going on.”

I took a deep breath. “Apparently I have the power to shoot lasers and stuff and this guy and his sister have been helping me overcome the struggles with finding a new super power. Also I shot some

guy's arms off at the mall. And I shot the hole through a house and blew up the car. And I was responsible for blowing up the school.”

Rose stared at me for a minute with a deadpan look on her face. Then she stood up and walked over to Kevin. With her foot swung backward, she kicked Kevin in the side.

“What bullshit are you feeding her!?”

Kevin cursed as he was kicked repeatedly. I quickly grabbed Rose's arm to get her to stop.

“Rose! Stop it! It's true! Just look!”

I held up my hand and pointed it at a nearby tree. With no effort a laser the size of my arm shot out from my hand, hitting the tree, and caused it to fall over. The laser continued to knock over a few more trees before hitting a sign and blowing it up.

Rose stood there dumbfounded, looking at the damage that I had just cause. The trees soon caught fire. Traffic on the highway had come to a standstill while people in the restaurants that lined the highway were looking out their window at the spectacle. People inside the restaurant that Rose worked at had pulled out their phones and started taking pictures.

She looked down at me, where I tried to give a smile to say, “It's okay, sort of?” Her face, on the other hand, was incredibly pissed off looking. She stormed into the restaurant, yelled at the manager for a minute, then stormed outside, tossing her apron on the ground.

“Grow a pair,” she said to Kevin, still lying on the ground.

“You'd just kick them,” he complained, which resulted in a kick in the back.

“We're going home. You're coming too creepy stalker dude, but drive yourself.”

“My name's Kevin,” he coughed.

“The two of you have a whoooooole lot of explaining to do when we get back. Eva, get in the car,” she said, pointing to her car.

“What about work?” I asked.

“I'm unemployed. Get in the car. Now.”

Back at my apartment, Rose had Kevin and I sit on the futon in front of her while she paced back and forth.

“Do you know all the kinds of trouble you can get into!?” She shouted.

“Yeah,” I said, dejectedly.

“But do you really? I mean, look at all that you've done already! You blew up your school, you tore up I-30 so now that's gonna take freaking forever to fix, you blew up some guy's car, and to top it all off you shot off some guy's arms!”

“And she blew a hole in someone's house,” Kevin added.

“Just, shut up. There's probably a ton of people out there freaking out about all this crap and you're to blame! And it's not like you can just go and apologize for it. The media and police would rip you to shreds!”

“Then what should we do?” I asked.

“Nothing. Absolutely nothing. You're grounded from doing any of that stuff.”

“But-” Kevin tried to cut in.

“I don't care!” Rose yelled. “Eva, you're only in middle school! You shouldn't be doing this. And you! You're old enough to know that you shouldn't be doing this! I mean, how old are you?”

“Twenty-two,” Kevin mumbled.

“Twenty-friggan-two! You're one year younger than me! You should be fully aware to leave crap like this to the police or the military or whoever! You don't drag a twelve-year-old kid into a life threatening situation, you dumbass!”

“But-”

“No! Don't give me any of your bullshit! Jesus! I knew you were a freak when you'd show up at the restaurant, mumbling and staring at me like a lunatic, but this!? You've finally crossed the line. You and your sister aren't allowed to see Eva anymore, and if I do see you with her, I swear I'll slice open your throat and shove habanero peppers down your wind pipe! Now get out!”

Rose pounded the floor with her foot, shaking the floor. Kevin, looking like he had just lost a fight, quietly got up and left while Rose watched. After he closed the door, Rose stared down at me.

“Why the hell didn't you tell me any of this earlier!?”

I lowered my head.

“This is something you're supposed to tell an adult about! At any point did you stop to think 'Maybe I shouldn't be shooting stuff up?’”

I kept quiet.

“Look, I know things are weighing heavy on you, but you can't keep doing this. What's done is done. You can't fix the things you've already done, but you can still walk away and stop trying to play super hero. You're too young for this.”

“Okay,” I said, looking down at the floor.

Rose let out a huge sigh and fell backwards onto the couch next to me, causing me to bounce a little.

“And the worse part is I'm out of a job now.” She covered her face with her hands and pulled her cheeks down. “This sucks.”

I kept silent.

“Tomorrow I'm gonna buy you a phone and you're going to start calling me anytime you do anything. Your delinquent freedom is over. I want to know what you're doing at all times, okay?”

I nodded.

“I'm gonna call your dad, so go to your room and go to bed.”

I stood up and slowly dragged my feet into my room. Once in my room I kicked off my shoes, tossed my jacket on the ground, then fell onto my bed. On the window where the hole used to be was a piece of cardboard covering it. A small stream of cold air squeezed through the sides of the cardboard, making my room colder. Rose's pacing footsteps could be heard as she walked in circles.

“Dammit, Chris! Why don't you ever answer your phone!?” she yelled while punching the wall.
“Ugh!”

The front door slammed shut, making the apartment quiet again. A soft whistle blew from the window. I huddled under my blankets and closed my eyes.

I woke up with the sound of cars driving in the distance, trees rustling in the wind, and birds chirping. The inside of my room was cold, like I had left the window opened on accident.

“My window didn't break again, did it?” I mumbled as I rubbed my eyes.

When I opened my eyes I saw that the window was in the same condition as it was last night. The ceiling, however, had a giant hole that a car could fit through. My jaw dropped.

“What did I do!?”

At some point while I was asleep, I must have fired a laser into the ceiling. The idea of using my powers in my sleep terrified me.

I jumped out of bed and put on my shoes and my coat. I ran out of my room into the living room, ready to bolt out the door, when I saw a cell phone and a note placed on the coffee table.

“Your new phone. Call me when you see this.”

The phone she had bought me was a small black flip phone. When I flipped it open it displayed a generic background on the tiny LCD screen. A small clock in the top corner of the screen indicated it

was early afternoon. I had slept half the day away.

For a moment I thought about just pocketing the phone and leaving but decided to give Rose a call. After a few rings she answered.

“Why did it take you so long!?” she demanded.

“I-I just got up. Sorry.”

“Really? Man. Anyway, it's not the best phone in the world, but considering all that you've done recently, be thankful I didn't get you an old brick phone.”

“Where are you?”

“Job hunting with a friend. I'll be back in another hour or two. In the meantime, stay in your room and do nothing. I mean it.”

I looked back at my room, where sunlight poured in from the hole in the ceiling.

“Uh, yeah.”

“You better! See ya in a bit.”

“Okay. Bye.”

I flipped the phone closed, hanging up.

When I opened the front door to leave, a woman was about to knock on the door. She had short black hair with large bangs hanging down her face. She wore a pair of dark gray pants and jacket that looked like they had a green tint to them. Several external pockets of the same color were attached to a brown leather belt and a gun holster hanging next to her hip.

“Uh, can I help you?” I asked, not quite sure who this person was.

“You broke my goggles,” she said.

The moment I realized it was Elizabeth I furrowed my eyebrows and closed the door behind me. Seems her attempt at being a normal human for once and using the door threw me off. Ignoring her, I walked down the stairs and started walking away.

“Hey! Where're you going?” Elizabeth shouted, jumping down the stairs to catch up with me.

“Nowhere,” I muttered.

“So hey, yesterday after the fight I went to this gym and started working out. After getting my butt kicked by the Magician, I felt that I needed to get stronger for when an even stronger opponent shows up. I'm planning on going again today if you feel like going.”

“I can't hang out with you anymore.”

“What?” Elizabeth said, stopping in her tracks. “Who said that?”

“My aunt.”

“Her!? Pfffft! She's a dumb rocker bitch anyway. Don't listen to what she has to say.”

I felt a surge of energy rush through my body, causing me to stop momentarily. She was the last person who could criticize Rose, I thought. Once it went away I started walking again, but faster.

“H-hey! Don't walk away from me! We're a team, remember!?” Elizabeth shouted.

“The team's done,” I said as I walked out of the apartment complex and towards a small convenience store across the street.

“But there's more out there! See, I read up about a sighting of a giant strange creature at an abandoned building! It could be another one! We need to go after it!”

“Not my business anymore.”

“But it is your business! We started this thing together, remember? Are you really just gonna run away?”

“Yeah. Later.”

I started running to a nearby gas station, trying to get away from Elizabeth. To my dismay, she was easily able to match my pace.

“Just hold up a sec and let me talk,” she said.

I walked into the gas station. The inside was small and rather dark with fake wood paneling and advertisements for stuff like food, cigarettes, and beer taped up. There were only three small aisles with stuff placed haphazardly on the shelves. I walked over to the refrigerators and grabbed a milk coffee,

wanting something I could get a boost from that wasn't an energy drink. Honestly, I don't want another energy drink for as long as I live.

“You drink coffee?” Elizabeth asked.

I ignored her and walked up to the cashier, who was reading a magazine at the time, and paid for it. Elizabeth grabbed a soda and started paying for it as I walked out of the store. Elizabeth burst through the door and ran up to me.

“Look, I know it's been rough, but we need to see this thing through. It's not cool to just up and quit just because things get a little bit hard,” Elizabeth said while she opened her drink.

I stopped. “Just a little bit hard? You should know all the crap I've been going through is more than just a little bit hard! I've been attacked by giant stupid stuffed animals that could rip me to shreds, had my window broken with a dumb rose, almost died falling from the sky, had my finger broken off, had my finger grow *back*, shot off a man's arms off without meaning too, and woke up with a giant hole in my ceiling! This isn't just a little bit hard or a little rough. This is insane! Crazy! My whole life has been jumbled up because of this! I don't know what to believe anymore! I mean, I don't know if I'm even human for God's sake! That guy who's arms I shot off? He's crippled for life! And that's if that didn't end up killing him! I could have just murdered someone, Elizabeth! Murdered! And this stupid bottle won't open!” I screamed, struggling to open the bottle of milk coffee with my trembling hands.

Elizabeth grabbed the bottle from me, opened it, and handed it back to me. “Here.”

I snatched the bottle from her and took a sip, instantly regretting it. “This sucks!” I screamed as loud as I could, throwing the bottle into the street. It shattered on impact with the road, leaving a large brown puddle. “I can't take this anymore! I'm done! I don't want to see you, Kevin, or any more giant toys! I'm sick of this!”

“Now just wait a second!” Elizabeth tried to interject, but I didn't let her.

“Shut up!”

A blueish glow appeared before me and fired near where Elizabeth was standing. It pierced the

road, leaving a foot deep crater the size of a basketball. Afterward I fell backwards to the ground, horrified. I had just tried to kill Elizabeth. I looked at my hands, which quivered in front of me. Just like last night, my power had acted without me needing to do anything.

Quickly, I got up and ran away, scared of what else I might end up doing if I stuck around with Elizabeth.

“Eva!” Elizabeth called out to me.

I ignored her and ran back into the apartment complex. Once inside the gate, I remembered that I couldn't go back home, so I ran over to Jessica's place. When I got to the door I rung the doorbell as I tried to calm myself down.

“Eva!” Jessica said when she opened the door. “What's wrong?”

“Can I come in?” I asked.

“Of course.”

I walked into Jessica's apartment, which was of similar same style as my apartment, except numerous family photos and memorabilia decorated the inside along with a second bedroom in the back. I walked into Jessica's room, which was somehow even sparser than my room. The walls were bare and the floor was spotless. She had a white dresser decorated with flowers and a red lamp sitting on top of it. And that was it. A mostly empty room.

I walked over to her bed and fell backward onto it, covering my face with my hands.

“What happened?” Jessica asked, sitting next to me.

“I almost killed Elizabeth.”

“You what!?”

“The same thing that happened last night happened again just now. Last night I told Rose about everything that was going on, and she grounded me and banned me from seeing Elizabeth and Kevin. Then when I was leaving my place Elizabeth showed up, and then she started following me and telling me not to quit now, which made me angry. And then without me thinking it an orb appeared and fired at

Elizabeth.”

“That doesn't sound good,” Jessica commented.

“It's like I'm losing control of my powers or something. Like, now my subconscious is controlling my powers and acts without me giving time to stop it. I don't know what to do anymore.”

Jessica laid down next to me. “It's probably due to all the stress that's been building up inside you. After hearing and seeing glimpses of what you've been through, I'm not surprised you haven't just exploded yet.”

“That would be bad,” I said. “I'd rather not do that. Besides, I'm quitting.”

“You're quitting!?” Jessica jumped up.

“I don't want to do it anymore.”

“Then what's gonna happen if more of those toys show up?”

“Not my problem. Let the police deal with it.”

“Oh,” Jessica said, looking down. “Yeah, I guess that makes sense.”

“Yep,” I replied.

Jessica grew quiet. “I'm sorry.”

I pushed myself up. “Sorry? For what?”

“It's my fault that you were dragged into this.”

“No, you're not at fault.”

“Yeah I am. It was my idea to sneak onto campus that night, and then I teamed up with Elizabeth to get you to make a team so I could watch you fight like you were a super hero.”

Jessica looked pretty depressed. It was a rare sight to see Jessica like that. Seeing it in turn made me feel bad.

“At any point I could have stopped it,” I said. “I could have just walked away from the very beginning, but I didn't. All you did was bring up the possibility, whereas I was the one who decided to go with it, so don't blame yourself.”

I reached over and hugged Jessica. The fact that she worried for me was all it took to make me feel better. I thought about how she never actually got a chance to see me fight yet, which was the only reason I started in the first place. I kind of felt like I had to at least do that for her once before I quit.

“How about you come with me and watch me fight at least once.”

Jessica looked over at me. “You mean you aren't quitting?”

“I never said I wasn't quitting, but it feels kind of lame that you never got to see me fight, and Elizabeth mentioned that there could be another one of those toys wandering around, so why don't we go and defeat it?”

Jessica beamed. “I finally get to see you fight!?”

I nodded.

Jessica jumped on top of me. She hugged me as tight as she could. “Thank you!” she cheered. “I won't ask you to use your powers ever again after this! Cross my heart!”

“Okay,” I replied. “Let's go talk to Elizabeth about it. I need to apologize to her anyway.”

“All right!”

Jessica and I approached Kevin's apartment and knocked on the door. A few moments later the door opened, revealing Elizabeth. She moved her sleeve back and looked at her watch.

“Ten minutes. I was honestly expecting a little bit longer.”

“You were seriously counting the time?” I asked.

“Doesn't matter,” Elizabeth said as she whipped out her phone and started texting someone.

“So, what's up?”

“I'll fight the toy,” I said.

“Mhmm?” Elizabeth replied as she finished her text and put her phone away.

“But the next fight is gonna be the last.”

Elizabeth looked up at me with a surprised look on her face. That got her attention.

“What? Why? There could be a whole lot more out there, so why make this the last one?”

“Because,” I said. I glanced over at Jessica, who noticed me looking at her and smiled. “I have my reasons, so this is the last time I'll fight. After this you're on your own like before.”

Elizabeth stared down at me, visibly annoyed. She heaved out a sigh as heavy as a boulder.

“Fine,” she grumbled. “It's not like I can't do it by myself anyway. Just harder. Man, why couldn't I be the one with powers instead of you?”

I shrugged.

“Let me grab my stuff and we'll go camp out for it. Not sure how long it'll take for it to show up, but if we wait long enough maybe we'll be able to get it by surprise.”

“Sounds cool,” Jessica said.

Elizabeth walked into the apartment while she started calling someone on the phone.

“Should we wait inside?” Jessica asked.

“Nah! I'll be out in a sec.”

Jessica and I stood by the opened door, peering inside Kevin's apartment. Warm air flowed out like a stream. Elizabeth had left the TV on, which I leaned in a bit to see what she was watching. Before I could get a good look, I heard her yell.

“What!? Why not!? Who cares what that bitch said! Eva said she's going through with it, so screw her! No! Just skip it! Hey! Dammit Kevin!”

Jessica and I stared at Elizabeth, who went back to packing her bag.

“Looks like we're gonna have to hoof it,” she said, tossing her bag onto her back.

“What's wrong?” I asked.

“That moron Kevin said he's not taking us because of what happened with your aunt last night. He's just chickening out because he got his feelings hurt. Also, apparently school is more important than stopping an evil force of nature from destroying the city. Wah wah! I need me associates degree! Whatever! Just fail college and try again later!”

“Uh, I don't think fai-” Jessica tried to speak but was quickly cut off.

“It's gonna be a couple hour walk from here. You guys ready?”

I looked over at Jessica, who smiled and nodded.

“I'm ready!” Jessica cheered with a fist pump.

“What about you, Eva? Ready to face your destiny and conquer it?”

I recalled the giant hole in the ceiling of my room and the ticking time bomb that was Rose's eventual arrival home and discovering of it. “Yes. Yes I am.”

“Then let's get going!” Elizabeth cheered.

She kicked opened the door and walked outside. “Tonight we dine in the blood of our enemy!”

I hope nobody heard that.

Chapter 8

It had been a while since we left Kevin's apartment. We walked down a long street that had the backs of fences for bordering neighborhoods on one side and tiny arms that consisted of five acres each on the other. The street was busy with passing cars.

“My feet are starting to hurt,” Jessica said, stopping for a moment.

“Yeah, and my legs are dying. No, wait, dead,” I replied.

“Quit whining and keep walking,” Elizabeth said without showing any signs of being tired.

“Once you get into high school you'll be running much longer distances than this.”

“Is it because gym is much harder in high school?” Jessica asked.

“No. It just takes awhile to skip school and go somewhere interesting. I never go to gym class.”

“Oh.”

Jessica started walking again with me following behind her. As I watched the passing cars, I let out a sigh. Then I remembered that Rose bought me a new cellphone, which I thought might help Jessica and I take her mind off walking for a bit.

“Jessica, check it out. I got a new cell phone.”

“Really? Let me see!”

I pulled out the phone and handed it to her.

“Cool! I wish I had a cellphone! Then I could call and text you whenever I wanted!”

“Yeah,” I agreed.

“New phone, eh?” Elizabeth said as she took it from Jessica's hand. “Thank you!”

Elizabeth started fiddling with it. “One of those cheap-o phones? Hmm. You don't get 4G? That's lame. Oh, no, wait, I bet if I could get in here . . .”

“Don't break it,” I told Elizabeth.

“Nah, it's fine. I won't do it. Mind if I put my information on here?”

The idea of having Elizabeth's contact info on my phone bothered me, but I didn't think it'd really hurt to have it. Worst case I can just ignore her. "Sure, I guess," I answered.

"Cool."

A moment later, my phone started to ring, but Elizabeth quickly hit a button, which caused it to stop. My heart sunk, thinking that Eva had just tried to call.

"Did I just get a call?" I asked shakily.

"N-nah. Just me adding you to my contacts and giving it a whirl."

I sighed with relief. "Good."

After Elizabeth fiddled with the phone some more, she handed it back to me. "Here ya go!" she said. "Didn't even break it."

"Thanks," I said.

I put the phone back into my pocket.

In the end it took a couple hours of walking to reach the location of where the fight was to be held. Locked away behind a fence with a sign warning "No Trespassing" stood a three story tall building that had seen better days. The windows had been boarded up. Tall grass poked through what was once the parking lot. The building stood alone on the grass field, with its neighbors having been demolished some time ago. With a little research it turned out this area was going to be the future location of a high end hotel, as the city struggled to create a image for itself so it could stand in the ranks of the cities nearby and not be lumped with the rest of the suburbs that made up the metroplex.

Elizabeth looked up at the fence and threw her backpack over it.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"What's it look like? I'm climbing over it."

"Can we do that?"

"I don't see anyone telling us not to."

Jessica looked at the sign attached to the fence. "It says not to right here."

“But that's not a living creature saying it, so it's fair game.”

Jessica and I watched Elizabeth climb over the fence and managed to jump down without a problem. With a shrug, Jessica started climbing up the fence.

“You all right?” I asked once she got to the top.

“I'm good,” Jessica said with a thumbs up. She struggled a moment when moving her legs over the fence, but once they were over she jumped down.

I looked around to see if there was an easier way to get through the fence since I didn't want to climb over it. On the fence perpendicular to the one they climbed I saw what I thought was a hole. When I jogged over to it I noticed that it wasn't merely a hole, but a gate that was left open. With a single step I was on the other side of the fence.

“Way to kill the fun by taking the easy route,” Elizabeth grumbled as she led us to the building.

The front door was chained shut with a notice taped to the door, warning about explosives having been put into place earlier that day.

“That doesn't look good,” I said, looking at the notice.

“It's fake,” Elizabeth said. “They put that up to scare away the homeless from setting up camp inside the abandoned building so they don't accidentally kill them whenever they tear it down.”

“Has that happened before?” Jessica asked.

“I read about it once on the internet.”

Elizabeth grabbed the chain and lock. She stepped back and looked at the long, boarded windows. She started hitting them one by one. Once she seemed satisfied, she walked back, took a deep breath, then rammed a boarded window with her shoulder. Using all the strength she had, she managed to pop half the board off the wall, creating a slip space for us the crawl through.

“Nice,” Jessica said.

“I know,” Elizabeth replied, rubbing her shoulder.

We each took turns holding the board while one of us crawled through. Once we were inside we

let the board go, which slammed into the windowsill. Elizabeth took out a flashlight and turned it on.

The inside of the building was covered in dust and dirt, making the air thick. It was completely empty, as everything had been removed from it a long time ago. The walls appeared to have been painted light brown. Small beams of light shone through tiny cracks from the boarded windows, but without Elizabeth's flashlight we'd be partially blind.

The three of us walked down the hallway, peeking into the random rooms that were probably once offices. Tiny, empty rooms were all there was to look at. When we climbed to the second story it was more of the same, and the third story could be said as well. A series of empty rooms and corridors containing nothing but dust and broken pieces of the ceiling.

After we felt like we looked around the building enough, we head back downstairs to the first floor lobby.

“Now what?” I asked.

Elizabeth pulled her phone and checked the time. “We wait. I heard that it shows up around early evening, so it should only be a little while longer.”

“Where did you hear about this?” I asked.

“From a friend.”

The three of us sat down and waited. Time slowed to a crawl as there wasn't much for us to do. Elizabeth started texting someone on her phone while Jessica started playing with a tiny rock she found. I sat quietly and watched.

After awhile of this I spoke up. “How much longer?”

“An hour-ish,” Elizabeth said.

“How long has it been since we started waiting?”

“Fifteen minutes.”

“Ugh.”

I looked over at Jessica, who had abandoned the rock and stared off into space.

“Ah! Shouldn't you call Rose?” she asked.

“The last thing I need right now is a lecture from her,” I said, thinking about the hole in the ceiling. The moment I call her would be the moment I sign my own death certificate. If she were to see me hanging out with Elizabeth again she'd flip.

Then I thought how it was strange that I hadn't gotten a call from her yet. I remembered her saying she was going to be at the apartment within that hour, and it had been a long time since then. Did she end up going somewhere instead and forget about it?

I dug in my pocket and pulled out my new phone, which had numerous missed calls.

“What the-”

The missed calls were all from Rose. I let out a gulp.

“What's the problem?” Elizabeth asked.

“Rose had been calling me.”

“Uh oh,” Jessica said. “She's gonna be super mad whenever you get back.”

“What's weird is that the phone didn't go off.”

“Oh, I muted your phone whenever I grabbed it from you.”

I looked at Elizabeth, stunned. “You what?”

“When she called earlier I didn't want you to turn tail and go back home after deciding to fight again, so I muted your phone.”

“She called earlier!? You mean, when you had my phone!? And you hung up on her and muted it so I wouldn't run away!?”

I jumped to my feet. My anger levels were through the roof. Elizabeth had finally done it. She broke the last straw.

“What are you mad for? Isn't it better that you didn't get her calls? It wasn't until I mentioned it that you got mad.”

“You don't just mute people's phones without permission, Elizabeth!”

“Eva,” Jessica said, but I ignored her.

“I had to do it!” Elizabeth said. “If I hadn't then we wouldn't be out here waiting to fight the next monster! It's my duty as the leader to make sure we're all prepared to fight without anything getting in the way!”

“But you don't do things like that! Right now my aunt is worried sick about me and all you care about is the stupid fight!”

“It's not a stupid fight! People's lives are at stake!”

“You don't even care about that! The only thing you care about is your super happy fun adventuring time! You couldn't give a crap if anyone's life was in actual danger. All you've wanted to do so far was to command a little army to fight your boredom! We're just toys to you!”

“So what!? Every day I have to go through a boring, miserable life, living up to the expectations of my parents, and for once something awesome happens! For once, I get to have fun!”

“Eva.” Jessica tried to get my attention, but again I ignored her.

“It may be fun to you, but it blows for me! All this crap that's been suddenly dumped on me, it sucks! This has been the crappiest week of my life, and you haven't helped it at all!”

“I helped you learn how to control them!”

“But I don't want to! I don't want them! I want to go back to living a dull, regular life!”

“If you leave then it's all over! I don't want that!”

“I don't care what you want! All I care is what I want! I'm leaving!”

I started walking to the window with the loose board, but Elizabeth grabbed my hand.

“I'm not letting you go! Not until we finish this!”

“Let go!”

My body began to glow. When Elizabeth saw this she let go and stepped back. But it was too late. Numerous lasers shot out from my body like a porcupine. They twisted and turn, cutting holes in the ceiling above. Bits of debris started falling down.

“Eva!” Jessica cried.

“What!?” I yelled at her.

The lasers ceased, but the damage was done. The ceiling started to collapse around us. Elizabeth ran over to a boarded window, trapped. I stood there, dumbfounded by what was going on.

“Oof!”

I was shoved into the wall. The ceiling collapsed where I stood just a moment ago. Chunks of the second and third floor came crashing down. I crouched and held my head by the wall, praying that nothing would crash down on me. Seconds felt like minutes as the debris smashed into the ground, causing it to shake. Dust flew up in the air, choking my lungs.

Once everything settled down, I stood up. The center of the room was filled with broken remains of the floors above us and parts of a wall. The pile filled the room, but luckily the edges of the room where we stood weren't hit as bad. It looked like someone took a cookie cutter to the floors and roof above, exposing the first floor to the falling sun. The floating dust and sunlight made it appear that a cloud had formed around the debris.

When I stood up, I noticed Elizabeth on the other side of the room, dusting herself off.

“You all right?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I replied, checking for cuts and scrapes. “What about you, Jessica?”

There wasn't a reply. I looked around the room and didn't see her.

“Jessica? Oh God!”

I jumped onto the large pile of broken wood, asbestos, concrete, metal, and piping. Without worrying about how dangerous it was, I started grabbing the debris and throwing it off to the side. Tears started to form in the corners of my eyes but were dried by the cloud of dust.

“Elizabeth! Help!” I cried.

Elizabeth slowly made her way around the fallen debris to where I was and helped me move the debris from the pile. After working our way down, I saw blood.

“Jessica!” I cried as I kept removing the debris.

With help from Elizabeth we lifted a large chunk off Jessica. Her body was covered in blood. There were large gashes cutting her side with blood pouring out. A large slab of concrete had crushed her legs.

“Jessica! Jessica!”

Elizabeth and I pulled her from under the concrete slab. I held her up.

“Jessica,” I cried, hoping for a response.

But no response came.

Elizabeth pulled out her phone and called Kevin, yelling at him while she explained what had happened and demanded that he get over there as soon as possible, which turned to her arguing about not calling paramedics.

I hugged Jessica as tears rolled down my cheeks. An intense anger swelled within me. The area around me began to glow blue.

“Eva! Quit it!” Elizabeth yelled.

The light grew more intense. And with a scream, the area was engulfed in blue. A loud roar had muted my voice. I could feel the ground below me falling as I kept screaming.

The idea of Jessica dying due to my stupidity threw me off the edge. More and more power shot out from me as I kept holding onto Jessica. Elizabeth had gripped onto me, holding for dear life as she feared what would happen if she entered the blue glow that surrounded us.

And finally the light vanished. The building was no more. We sat inside a crater as I kept crying. Elizabeth stood up in awe, looking at the large crater that had formed. It looked like a meteor had struck where we sat, but I didn't care. The whole world could look down at me like a freak right then, but I wouldn't have care. They could make me an outcast, or hang me for having so much destructible power, but I wouldn't have care.

I had hurt my only friend. Never in my life had I ever wanted to die so badly.

Chapter 9

A stench of cleaner and anti-bacterial lotion filled the lobby, where I sat on a cold plastic chair, staring at the spotless floor. It had a sickening shine to it which made me feel uneasy. Muffled voices poured in through the giant yellow headphones that Kevin let me borrow. "It helps when you want to distance yourself while in public," he told me. However I couldn't stand to listen to anything, so I left the mp3 player off, opting to pretend I was listening to something so nobody would try to engage me.

It wasn't long ago when Kevin arrived in his red truck, looking at the crater I had created in shock. With the help of Elizabeth, the two of them got Jessica into his truck and drove to the hospital, all while I sat there, having ran out of emotion. Elizabeth sat in the back, holding onto Jessica, as she and Kevin argued with each other. Even with all the screaming the two had done on the ride to the hospital, Jessica didn't move a muscle. Her eyes remained closed as the blood covering her face dried up.

When we got to the hospital, Kevin drove up the curb near the entrance and laid his horn down to get someone's attention. In seconds someone came out of the hospital and, seeing Jessica's condition, quickly ran back in to get help. A stretcher was brought out and the doctors took Jessica into the hospital. Kevin followed them in, saying he would take care of it. His voice wavered when he said it, which made me think he felt really uncomfortable with doing it, but he went anyway.

So here Elizabeth and I were, sitting in the front lobby. She messed around on her phone while I ignored everything. My mind was filled with thoughts of utter despair. To think that I sent my best friend to the hospital. The image of her laying under the debris, covered in blood, was burned into my eyes. I couldn't stop thinking about it.

What if I had just killed Jessica? What if she doesn't recover and dies? It was all my fault. There's no other way to look at it. No scapegoat exists. It was a hundred percent my fault.

Beads of sweat started to form on my face as my stomach continued to churn. I closed my eyes,

but all I could see was Jessica's mangled body again. An intense pressure rammed my throat. I got up and ran to the bathroom. I kicked open a stall and knelt over the toilet. Then I threw up. My mouth burned as the stench clogged my nose. I gasped for breath, and then threw up again.

“Do you need help?”

I heard an older woman's voice coming from behind me. Turned out I left the stall door wide open.

“No, it's fi-”

I threw up again.

“Are you sure?” the woman asked again. “I could go get someone.”

“I'm fine! Please!” I cried before another wave showed up.

Once my stomach had been emptied, I continued to kneel over the toilet, spitting. After a minute or so I got up and slowly walked to the sink and washed my face. My reflection looked like a wreck. There was still bits of dust caught in my hair. Apparently at some point I had cut my neck on something as there was blood, but no visible cut. The bags under my eyes were the darkest I have ever seen. I was a complete wreck.

I left the bathroom and sat back down in the lobby.

“It'll be fine.”

I looked up and saw Elizabeth giving me a thumbs up. She had the same stupid smile she always wore. It was obvious she was trying to cheer me up, but this had the opposite effect on me. I grew angry. Just looking at her made me seethe with rage. I couldn't stand being near her anymore. Without skipping a beat, I took off Kevin's headphones and mp3 player and dumped them onto Elizabeth's lap.

“I'm going,” I mumbled.

Elizabeth didn't say a word. I walked over to the exit and left the hospital with tears in my eyes. There was nothing for me to do there. I couldn't save Jessica. Everything was out of my hands now. I

had to get out of there before anything else happened, like losing my control again. In fact, I thought about just running away completely. Leave the city and move into the woods or something. Live off the land, I thought. Of course that was a stupid, immature thought. There was no way I'd last a day in the wilderness. I was stuck here.

I stood at the crosswalk, waiting for the light to change for me to walk. The sun had sunk into the Earth, turning to twilight. I grabbed my phone and checked the time. An entire hour had passed while I was in the hospital. After putting my phone away, I went back to staring at the red hand that forbid me from crossing the street.

“Eva Guile!”

I turned around to where I heard my name being called. Two young men stood in front of a black SUV, parked in the hospital parking lot. They were the two guys that drove along side of us on the highway briefly.

The man with the blond hair, a white silk shirt, and slacks waved and walked up to me while the other man with short brown hair and black polo shirt stayed in the SUV.

“Sorry to hear about your friend,” he said.

I looked at him perplexed, trying to wipe away the signs of my tears. “How do you know about Jessica?” I asked.

“We saw the whole thing,” he said with a sly smile on his face.

“You were watching?”

“Yeah. And not just then. Your mini golf game, you shooting that guy's arms off, which I must say was pretty cool looking, and you blowing the roof off your apartment. We've been watching you, Eva,” he said, pointing back to the other man who continued to watch us from a distance. “We have a lot of info on you, like the fact you're losing control of your powers. That's why we're here, actually.”

I glared at him. “Why?”

“Hm?”

“If you knew I was losing control of my powers, then why didn't you stop me? Why didn't you do anything before I hurt Jessica!?” My voice grew louder without me intending it.

The man sighed. “We were waiting for the right opportunity to come in, and we needed clearance before jumping into action. Sadly, things don't always go as planned. But we're here now.”

“You're too late,” I said before dashing across the street.

“Hey! Wait!” the man said.

I ignored him and continued walking across the street. Before I made it to the other side, the familiar black SUV screeched to a halt in front of me, blocking my path. The other man had apparently driven over the curb of the parking lot to block me. Other cars had to slam their breaks, almost causing a large scale wreck. Multiple horns blared at him.

“Eva, your life is in danger. You need to come with us for a bit,” he said from the driver's seat.

“I'm not going with anyone,” I demanded.

“How about you let us talk for a bit and then come with us? I imagine you have a lot of questions, like, who are you, why can you shoot lasers like in a video game, why the police haven't shut down the city what with all the destruction, et cetera. We'll explain everything. Oh, I know! You hungry? Let's talk over dinner,” the blond haired man said, pointing at a fast food restaurant next door to a drug store down the street.

“I'm not hungry,” I said.

“Not after barfing like that. You need food to get your strength back.”

I stared at the man. “How did you know I just barfed?”

“Like I said, we know everything, mostly. Hey Mark, just drive the SUV over there. We'll walk.”

The man named Mark nodded then drove toward the restaurant.

“There. Now you'll be free to run away if you want, but I'd highly advise against that. You don't want to get Mark mad. C'mon.”

The man crossed the second street toward the restaurant. For a moment I felt like walking the opposite direction, but my curiosity got the best of me. I wanted to know what they had to say and why they've been following me. In the end, I followed him to the restaurant, leaving the hospital behind me.

Mark ordered random stuff on the menu while the blond haired man and I sat down at a table.

“This place is pretty good I think,” he said.

“I guess,” I mumbled while I rested my head on my arms.

“Hey, I know things are tough now, but they'll get better. We're here!” he cheered, pointing to himself.

“And why's that?” I asked.

He didn't answer. We sat in silence while Mark waited for the food to be ready. Once the staff member handed him the food, he brought it over and sat down with us, placing a tray with a burger and fries in front of me. I didn't touch it.

“So, I think an introduction is in order,” the blond haired man said.

“Why didn't you do it back there?” Mark asked.

The blond haired man shrugged. “Dunno. Anyway, I'm Doug Sears and this Debbie Downer is Mark Goodrich.”

Mark took a bite out of his burger without responding.

Doug grabbed a fry and ate it. “We're members of an organization called D.E.U.S.”

Took me a second to wrap my head around his description of the organization. “Day us?” I asked.

“No, D.E.U.S.”

“Deus?”

“You need to add a little more oomph on the E.U. part,” Mark said while chewing his food.

“D.E.U.S.”

“I don't care,” I commented. “So, what do you guys do? Stalk little girls?”

“If we have to,” Doug cut in. “We're agents that deal with special individuals with special talents, such as yourself, that end up causing lots of problems for the day to day activities of humanity.”

“Does it have to do with my powers?”

“I thought that 'special talents' got that across, but yeah, your powers,” Doug said as he took a bite out of his burger.

“So, what, you guys know what the heck it is that I am or something? Am I not human?”

Mark looked at me with a blank face. “The truth is-”

“You're a wizard, Eva.”

Doug had cut into Mark's speech. He punched Doug in the arm.

“A wizard?” I asked with a sarcastic tone.

“No, he's just incapable of being serious,” Mark said. “You're a fallen deity.”

I raised my head. “A what?”

“A fallen god, or goddess if you want to be politically correct,” Doug said. “You see, we deal with fallen deities from the land of gods or whatever the hell it is that gods come from. What happens, you see, is that sometimes a deity does something so incredibly bad in Godsville that it pisses off all the other gods, so they send the troublemakers to Earth as a punishment-slash-rehabilitation. If the fallen deity gets their crap together while living as a human on Earth then they're allowed back.”

“But if they do something that displeases them while on Earth, they erase them from existence,” Mark said.

I sat in silence before I could muster up the words “That's bullcrap.”

“Believe it or not, that's the truth. But how else would you explain your ability to create such immense beams of energy that can destroy practically anything on Earth?”

“I,” was all I could say before cutting myself off. There wasn't a good explanation that I could think of that would explain my powers. Even though what Mark and Doug said sounded completely insane to me, I couldn't simply ignore it.

Mark pulled out a notebook full of papers and started flipping through them. “You see, ever since you were an infant, D.E.U.S. has been watching you closely, making sure that you don't go around blowing everything up under the sun. And for most of your life, except for one other occasion, you didn't.”

“Wait, I blew stuff up before? I don't remember that.”

“Of course you wouldn't. You were a newborn when it happened.”

I sunk in my chair.

“Three people died that day. A nurse, a doctor, and your mother.”

“Wait, are you saying I killed my own mom?”

“That's what it says here in the documents. I could ask them to clarify if you want, but it'll be a little while due to the levels bureaucracy involved.”

“I killed her?” I mumbled. “Wait, what about my dad!”

“Classified.”

“Doesn't he know any of this?”

“Classified.”

“Have you guys talked to him?”

“If by talked to him you mean exchanged words from our mouths to form complete thoughts as to express one's ideas to each other within the past several years, then yes, we've talked to him,” Doug said.

“But regarding this topic, that's classified,” Mark said.

“When did you guys speak to my dad? How do you know him?”

“Not allowed to answer that right now,” Doug said. “However, moving the conversation back to why we’re here, you’re in deep crap. You’ve caused a lot of property damage and made things difficult for everyone, but worse of all, you’re partly to blame for the deaths of five people and injuries to over twenty. That’s pretty bad.”

“What!? I haven’t killed anyone!” I shouted, slamming my fists on the table. “I mean, unless you count those toys.”

“We’re not talking about the toys which, by the way, made our jobs a hell of a lot harder, but the people who were killed by you using your powers.”

“When!?” I demanded.

“Geez, haven’t you been watching the news at all? They’ve been listing them off every day!”

I sat back down in silence. Mark flipped some more pages in his notebook. “The car you blew up sent someone to the hospital, where they died shortly after. Three people died on the highway when you were fighting that dragon, and then you killed a young man in the parking garage. And I’m not talking about the guy whose arms you blew off, either.”

I sat there, shocked. “W-what about those t-toys I’ve been fighting? Th-they must have hurt some too, r-right?”

Doug sighed. “To tell you the truth, the toys didn’t harm anyone. In fact, if you were never around, the toys wouldn’t have ever done anything. They only reacted because of your actions.”

“We were actually on the case about the toys when we ran into you and your friends on the highway,” Mark said. “The toys were actually created by a five-year-old who had the power to breath life into inanimate objects and give them a personality somewhat. Once we figured that out, all we had to do was talk to the kid’s parents and have him checked in with D.E.U.S. All the toys dissolved back into their original forms yesterday evening.”

“So, that means...” Jessica and Elizabeth and I, what we did, was all for naught. I hurt Jessica

for nothing.

“Your powers are going out of control, Eva. We need to stop it from getting worse.”

My stomach felt queasy again as everything sunk in. I couldn't take it. I stood up and ran to the bathroom, ran to the sink, but nothing would come out. All I managed to throw up was air. For a moment I thought my stomach would turn inside out.

“I can't take this,” I said to myself, standing in front of the mirror.

I didn't want to do anything anymore. If only I could just crawl into a ditch and cease to exist. Just, poof from existence. If there was a way to do that I would do it. But instead I'm forced to suffer from my mistakes. I wanted to cry, but my eyes had nothing left to give. My tears were gone.

With much struggle, I exited the bathroom and walked back over to Mark and Doug.

“You okay?” Doug asked sincerely.

I didn't respond. Not even a simple nudge of the head.

“Let me get straight to the point,” Mark said. “You're in danger of hurting yourself and everyone around you.”

“I've already hurt everyone around me,” I muttered, looking down at the table.

“Well, yeah, a little, but it's only going to get worse unless you let us help you.”

I chuckled. “How are you going to help me? I'm a lost cause. I should just die.”

Doug frowned. “There's no reason for you to die. Everyone makes mistakes, but it's what you do to atone those mistakes is what matters. You can still change your situation around.”

“You know how you got a yearly check up?” Mark asked.

“Yearly check up?” I asked.

“Don't you get a routine check up at the doctors around the same time every year? See if you're healthy or not, get a vaccination, et cetera?”

“What about it?” I asked. “Doesn't everyone?”

“Sort of. Your situation is different, however. The doctors you've been going to were not regular

doctors, but members of D.E.U.S. Every year we've been giving you a shot to help suppress your powers, except for whatever reason it wore off quicker than normal. It could be because you're hitting puberty and your body's changing, or maybe something else for all we know, but the bottom line is that we need to inject you with the medicine.”

I looked at Mark. “So you're saying if I go to the doctors and get that shot I'll be fine?”

“Technically yes,” Doug said, “but even we're not sure. That's why we want to bring you back to the base so we can administer the medicine and keep an eye on you.”

“So I'm just gonna become your prisoner?” I asked.

“It's for your own good, Eva,” Mark said. “We're trying to help you before you hurt yourself and anyone else.”

I started to think maybe it was a good idea to go with them. They seemed to know what they were talking about. While I still couldn't fully trust them, it was enough to give me a sense of hope that things could maybe turn out all right.

And then my phone started to ring.

“Go ahead,” Mark said.

I picked up the phone and answered it, thinking it might be Rose.

“Hello?” I asked.

“Eva! Where the hell are you!?” It was Kevin, screaming into the phone.

“I'm with two guys who are apparently from something called D.E.U.S.”

“Where!?”

His yelling startled me. “At the restaurant near the hospital. Why?”

“Get out and wait for me at the street.”

“What's wrong?”

“After you left the hospital a bunch of armed guys burst in. They captured Elizabeth and were looking for you. I managed to get out of there without them noticing, but I think they're gonna be

coming for you next, Eva. You gotta run!”

I looked over at Mark and Doug. Doug continued eating his burger while Mark grabbed his phone and stared at it emotionlessly.

“Where are you?” I asked.

“I thought you were heading home so I started driving that way, but I'm turning around right now and heading to where you're at. Get outside and wait for me at the street.”

“We also took Jessica into our care,” Mark chimed in. “If you just come with us everything will be fine.”

My eyes widened. My initial shock grew to anger. “What are you doing with Jessica!?”

“As she was involved with you, a god, she must be brought into D.E.U.S.'s for questioning and watch for the time being like anyone else who gets themselves involved with gods.”

“Eva!” Kevin yelled from the phone.

“Hurry up!” I yelled into the phone and hung up. I then jumped out of my seat and bolted for the door.

“Hey! Wait!” Doug called out to me.

I burst through the door and started running toward the street. When I looked behind me, I saw Mark dash through the door and started chasing me. He was quickly closing the gap between us. Without bothering to look first, I ran into the street. I lucked out and ran to the grassy median that stretched across the middle of the street without getting hit by a car.

Mark jumped into the street, but a red truck rammed him, causing him to fly over the hood and fall onto the road.

“Jump on!” It was Kevin.

I hopped into the bed of the truck. Kevin slammed on the gas and drove me out of there. When I looked back, I saw Mark stand up. I opened the back window to the cabin of the truck and crawled in.

“Did they do anything to you?” Kevin asked.

“No, but they said they got Jessica.”

“Damn it all.”

I sat down on the front passenger's seat and buckled my seat belt. “What are we going to do?”

“That's easy. Rescue Elizabeth and Jessica,” Kevin said. “But first, let's see if we can find a place to hide out for a bit.”

As Kevin continued to drive, I started to hear a low rumbling noise like a helicopter. At first I didn't really pay attention, but as it grew louder I started to feel nervous.

“You hear that?” I asked.

“Sounds like a helicopter. Pretty close too.”

It kept getting louder, so I decided to look behind us.

What I saw was an incredibly large helicopter unlike anything I've ever seen. It had a pair of wings with two sets of propellers that could adjust it's angle front and back to help with steering. The entire body was painted black except for giant white letters painted on the side that read D.E.U.S. There were two large guns on the front along with a torchlight.

“Testing, testing. One two three. How's it hangin', Eva?”

Doug's voice blasted from some unknown speaker system on the helicopter.

“The hell is that?” Kevin asked.

“Oh God,” I said. “It's the two guys who I was talking to earlier.”

The speaker system came back on, with Doug's voice blasting from it. “Hey, so uh, we gave you the chance to just come along peacefully, but obviously that didn't work. And it's kind of our job to make sure you're captured, so yeah. I'm gonna be shooting you guys in a couple seconds.”

“He's gonna what!?” Kevin yelled.

Once Kevin finished talking a line of bullets rained down from the sky, piercing the road in front of us.

Kevin cursed as he swerved the truck to try and get away from the bits of rock that shot up from

the ground.

Any car that might have been near us slammed their brakes, making it incredibly difficult for Kevin to maneuver around. As the road Kevin drove on was one long straight line without any way to turn off the street, it made it tough to get out of the way of the bullets.

“I need to get off this street!” Kevin cursed.

“Are they trying to kill us!?” I screamed.

“Hope not!”

The bullets stopped for a brief moment before another round was fired at us. Kevin turned a corner into a residential area, hoping that there wouldn't be any more cars getting in the way. Like something out of science fiction, the helicopter managed to turn with ease and resume chase, barely losing any speed.

“That's a hell of a helicopter,” Kevin said. “Think you could maybe shoot at them or something?”

I hesitated. I didn't want to hurt them, or anyone else for that matter. But then I thought about Jessica, and that's all it took.

“All right,” I said.

Kevin's truck continued to swerve left and right as he tried to move away from the line of fire, and hope that maybe being a spastic driver will make it harder to aim at us. I climbed to the back seats and opened the rear window. The helicopter flew behind us, but they were close enough that I felt I had a shot at hitting them.

With a deep breath I held out my hand and pointed my finger like a gun. It looked like Doug knew what was about to happen as the helicopter pulled backward and soared into the air. I concentrated and fired a large laser that pierced the sky. It roared as it shot out from the tip of my finger. Its radiant light was almost blinding, but I didn't squint my eyes.

Once the laser vanished, I saw that I had missed. As I grew more angry, I fired another laser.

And then another, and another. All just as large as the one before it. They shot out in small bursts, lasting for a second with half a second pauses.

“Holy crap,” Kevin said as he continued to drive. “You aren't tired from that?”

“I'm fine!” I answered.

The helicopter continued to dodge my lasers with ease. As if waiting for me to finish, the helicopter rained another wave of bullets, piercing the bed of the truck. A stray bullet hit the cabin from the ceiling and pierced the front passenger's seat. If I had still been sitting there I would have most likely been killed.

I focused my mind and began firing lasers again. After a few shots, I managed to clip the wing of the helicopter.

“I got it!” I cheered.

“Way to go!” Kevin yelled.

Our celebration was cut short when the helicopter shot another round, hitting the front of the truck and destroying the engine. Flames started to grow under the hood, visible by the numerous bullet holes. Kevin hit the breaks. The truck screeched to a halt as smoke blinded the windshield.

Once it stopped, Kevin and I got out of the truck as fast as we could. Once out, the helicopter shined a spotlight onto us and came closer to the ground.

A large door opened on the side of the helicopter, revealing Mark. He dropped a rope and slid out of the helicopter before dropping onto the ground. When he touched the ground, Kevin and I started to run away. Mark, obviously in much better shape than Kevin and I, managed to catch up. Before Mark was able to catch me, Kevin jumped onto Mark and forced him to the ground.

“I'll hold him down! Run!” Kevin yelled.

Mark struggled to get Kevin off him, but somehow Kevin found the strength to hold on.

“Go!” he yelled.

The helicopter began to descend and park in the middle of the street. I knew that Doug was

gonna be coming out to help, so I quickly made my chance to escape.

I ran as fast as I could through the neighborhoods, taking any turn I could find to hopefully lose them. My lungs began to hurt as my legs grew sore. As much as I wanted to stop running and rest, I forced myself to resist the temptation and keep going.

After running for what felt like forever, I found a small drainage ditch covered by trees sitting behind the fences of people's backyards, so I jumped down into it, walked away from the entrance, then collapsed onto a hunk of cement that rose out of the water. I closed my eyes and placed my arms over my head as my back rested on the cold cement. The smell of mildew managed to waft into my nose, even though I was breathing through my mouth.

As I laid there, the sound of a helicopter passed overhead. I held my breath, though it wasn't like that would have helped at all. I waited until it was gone before breathing again.

Once I caught my breath, I sat up and held my knees. I didn't bother moving or doing anything. I thought about how Kevin must have been captured. Elizabeth was gone. Jessica was gone. I felt like I couldn't turn to Rose anymore.

I was alone.

There was no longer a reason for me to carry it. I didn't have anyone to go to anymore, and the last thing I needed was for more people to get caught up with this mess. With me. With D.E.U.S. It was over.

Then my phone rang.

At first I ignored it; its sound muffled by my pocket. Once it ceased, I closed my eyes and hoped to just suddenly cease to exist.

Then my phone rang again. It continued to ring over and over again until it forced my to take it out of my pocket and look at it. The phone number was unknown. I thought about turning it off, but since whoever it was constantly kept calling me, I answered and kept silence.

“Do you want to see Jessica again?”

I jumped up. “Who is this!? Is this Doug or Mark!?”

“Come to the destroyed middle school.”

With that, the conversation was over.

“Hello? Hello!? Dammit!” I cursed.

Was it D.E.U.S. again? Was it Doug and Mark or was it someone else from D.E.U.S.? It could be a trap. Well, obviously it was a trap, but that seemed to be the only way I was going to get Jessica back. I got up and started walking. I was gonna bring Jessica back from D.E.U.S., even if it was the last thing I did.

Winter winds blew in from the north, bringing a nasty chill. Leaves on the trees clung for dear life as the street lamps shown above them, creating dancing shadows on the ground. I kept my hands in my pockets to keep them warm. A small fog would escape from my mouth every time I breathed. My feet slid against the pavement, making a scraping noise as I walked briskly.

Unlike the rest of the area, the school was shrouded in darkness. It was still taped off by the police. The giant hole that once graced the wall had been covered up by a blue tarp. The bits of wreckage that once sat on the yard had long since been cleaned up. There were no lights shining on this corpse of a school building.

I looked up at the roof, wondering if someone would show up now or if he wanted me to enter the building. Minutes passed with not a soul appearing. I decided to go inside.

I walked around the building, checking for unlocked doors so I could walk in, but was left disappointed. Without an entrance I decided to make my own. I walked to the far side wall of the gym, held up my hand, and fired a ball of energy the size of a basketball at the wall. It exploded inward,

creating a large entrance for me to walk in. As I walked across the basketball court my feet squeaked. The squeaks echoed in the large, hollow room.

I exited the gym and followed the hallway that I had followed the night where everything had started. Once I was at the double doors to the court yard I pushed them open, walked to the center of the courtyard, and stood there.

“I’m here!” I shouted. “Where’s Jessica!?”

There was no answer.

“Hey! Person who called me on the phone! Get out here!”

Silence.

My hands shook with anger. I felt like I was played for a fool coming out here, thinking that maybe I could rescue Jessica, only to have nobody here.

“God dammit!” I screamed.

A pillar of light shot upward into the sky from where I stood. It rose higher and higher until it exploded like a firework, illuminating the area. In the shadows I noticed people in black armor with guns fixated on me. None of them flinched from my display of power.

“You can calm down now,” said a voice.

“Which one of you are talking?” I asked the crowd of soldiers.

An old man stepped out from a hallway where the door had broke off. He appeared in his seventies, wearing black slacks and a gray coat. The way he walked upright without trouble made it looked like age didn't matter to him. His face was gentle, wrinkled with age and wisdom, with a white goatee and numerous black freckles covering his face.

“It looks like my boys were unable to get you like I asked,” he said with a soothing voice that could put you to sleep. “Looks like I’m gonna have to discipline them later.”

“Where’s Jessica?” I demanded.

“Now now, let’s try to remain calm. There’s no reason for you to get upset right now.”

“Where is she!?”

The man sighed like an adult to a child who won't listen. “She's being treated by our top medical staff. Everything is going to be fine, trust us. We just need her under our care and watch for the time being.”

“Bring her here!” I demanded, having lost my ability to reason and think straight.

“We can't do that. She's in crit-”

I shot off an orb at the man, who fell in order to get out of the way. “I don't care!” I cried.

The soldiers who were hiding in the shadows jumped out into plain view. Many more appeared from inside the building all around me, as well as numerous helicopters similar to the one Doug piloted hovered above us.

“Eva Guile! Put your hands on the back of your head and get down!” yelled a speaker from a helicopter.

“No, wait!” the older man shouted.

All their rifles were pointed at me. It seemed that I was at the end of the line. There was nothing left for me. And then my mind snapped. My thoughts were nothing but destruction. All I could think about was to destroy and kill everything around me.

Numerous orbs appeared around me, rotating like electrons to a atom. In a flash, the orbs shot out, blasting through those that were unlucky to be in their path.

“Fire!” someone shouted on the speaker.

Everyone began firing their rifles at me. Blue light surrounded me like a protective shell. I watched as everyone's bullets dissolved the moment they hit the blue shell. Once the firing ceased, the shield vanished.

I ran towards a group of soldiers with my hand up, blue light glowing from it. I punched a man in the chest and sprayed energy out like placing a thumb over the hole of a hose. His body was ripped to shreds as the energy continued into the building, piercing thousands of holes into it.

Someone had gotten behind me and shot my back, causing me to fall forward. I don't know why, but I couldn't feel pain. My anger and adrenaline seemed to overpower it. I stood up, blood leaking from my back, and blasted him with a laser that disintegrated his entire body.

A helicopter began firing at me, but I created a giant orb of energy twelve feet in diameter and absorbed the bullets. I then fired it at the helicopter, dissolving half of it. The other half crashed into the building and exploded. Shards of metal and glass shot out from the explosions, cutting my face.

Another few soldiers burst out from the building, but I easily managed to wipe them out. When another soldier tried to attack me, I killed him. One after another someone attempted to attack me, but I managed to obliterate them. I wasn't thinking any longer. My mind was blank. I acted out without feeling. A force had taken over me, and I kept on killing.

Someone managed to shoot my hand, creating a hole in the center, but even that didn't stop me. The bullet wounds in my legs were nothing but scratches. The blood that leaked out of me was just a trifle. I wasn't human. I was a force that couldn't be taken lightly.

I was unstoppable. Nobody could defeat me. These humans were nothing but garbage. Their weapons couldn't compare to my power. I was a god.

“Chris! Don't go out there!” the old man shouted.

I turned around, ready to kill whoever it was that dared to stand before me. I held out my hand, ready to blast the person, but my hand dropped. My heart sunk. Humanity seemed to return to me. I stood there, looking at the man, as tears poured from my eyes.

The man wore a black suit and tie with a white buttoned down shirt underneath. There were noticeable bags under his eyes, as his job and raising his kid had slowly taken its toll. In one hand held a suitcase while the other held a bag of fast food.

“I'm back,” he said.

It was my dad. He came back from his trip. I looked around me, seeing the numerous bodies that laid dead or dying because of me. A mountain of burning rubble towered behind me. I looked at

my hands. They trembled in front of me. The tears grew more intense as I collapsed to the ground, crying into my hands.

I had just killed so many people. I never wanted this to happen. I just wanted to see Jessica. All I wanted was her, but not for this to happen. It was like my self was locked away as a raging beast took over. So much death and destruction, and for what?

The old man and my dad walked up to me as I continued to cry. The soldiers that weren't killed continued to point their guns at me, but as my dad was there nobody pulled a trigger. My dad put the food and his suitcase down and placed a hand on my shoulder. I looked up to him, partly blinded by my tears.

“It's gonna be okay,” he said.

I went back to crying into my hands as I heard the sound of a click. A cold piece of metal was placed on the back of my head.

“Go to sleep, and everything will be better once you're awake, okay, Eva?” my dad said.

I didn't react, but continued to cry.

In a flash, a bullet went through the back of my head.

Chapter 10

I jumped out of bed, clenching my forehead. A layer of cold sweat covered my body. I breathed in a quick, heavy pattern that sounded like I was gasping for air after having nearly drowned. The nightmare that I had just experienced was still fresh on my mind.

After I managed to calm myself down a bit I discovered that I was no longer at my old ruined school. At some point while I was asleep, I was transported to a room that must have been a prison cell of some sort. The walls, floor, and ceiling were made of cold cement with the same D.E.U.S. logo that I saw on the helicopter painted on the ceiling. It must have been painted a long time ago as significant portions of the logo was worn away.

There were no windows, and the door was made of metal without a handle for me to open and walk out. Only an old, metal framed bed was all there was in the room with me. Any time I would move just the slightest, the bed would squeal. The only source of light was a small, blue, dimly lit light bulb on the wall across from the bed, giving everything a blue tint.

At some point someone must have changed my clothes. My t-shirt and jeans were replaced by white scrubs with the D.E.U.S. logo on the front. On my wrist was a black bracelet with a blinking red LED light on it. I tried fiddling with it, but it was stuck tight to my wrist.

I sat on the edge of the bed and stared at the floor. It felt like my life was over. When I thought about all those people who died, I didn't know what I could do to make up for it. Worse was that I didn't feel bad when I was killing. It was like I was a completely different person. It was horrifying that I could just lose myself like and become a killing machine.

I crawled back into bed and held onto my legs in a fetal position. I wanted to say sorry to someone, but who could I say it to? Sorry for killing you. No hard feelings? I'm sorry I killed a member of your family? I'm truly sorry for killing your loved one? Nobody would believe it if it came from me.

All in all, how many lives did I ruin? How many families are going through such agonizing

despair because of my actions? How many will no longer be able to find happiness all because of me?

Why didn't I stop when I had the chance? Why did I decide to keep using my powers? Why did I decide to fight one more time for Jessica, even though I originally decided to stop? Why did I disobey Rose? Why did it have to be me? Why me?

The longer I sat in that room the more I felt claustrophobic. I wanted to get out of here and run away to the deepest parts of the Earth away from anyone. No, I wanted to run to the ends of the universe and shed myself from this world.

I walked up to the door and started pounding it.

“Hello? Can anyone hear me?” I said.

There was no answer.

“Hey!”

No answer.

I gave up and dragged my feet back to bed and fell onto it. With much effort I made myself comfortable and stared at the ceiling. The D.E.U.S. rested on the side of my view of vision. As I looked at the ceiling, tears began to flow from my eyes, but I wasn't crying. Or to put it better, my soul was crying, but I was too worn out to show it.

As I sat in the room alone in silence, it felt like time flew. Without a clock I couldn't tell how long I was in there watching the ceiling and sometimes the wall. If someone were to ask me I would say hours, but honestly I didn't know.

After getting tired of laying on the bed, I got up and started pacing around the room. Once I paced a few rounds I decided to start counting.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.

Twenty-one. Twenty-two. Twenty-three.

Hundred-and-one. Hundred-and-two.

The numbers started to blur together and I would lose count, so I started over. Numerous times I

started over, the highest number being somewhere in the five hundreds before losing count. Once I realized that I must have looked like I was losing my mind, I stopped and sat back down on the bed.

Again I stared at the ceiling. There was nothing to do. It was an empty room with just a bed and my thoughts. At some point I felt physically exhausted thinking about what I had done, and my mind became blank. A darkness would start to cloud my vision until I twitched my eyes, wiping the darkness away.

After what felt like an eternity, the door clanked open, filling the room with a blinding light. I held up my hand to shield my eyes. Standing in the light was the silhouette of a man. After my eyes adjusted, I saw that it was my dad.

“Eva,” he said as he sternly looked at me with his bagged eyes.

I sat up and looked up at him, only to turn my head away. He walked over and sat down next to me. For a few moments he sat next to me in total silence, staring at the floor with me, gripping his hands together on his lap.

“I don't really need to explain why you're here right now, do I?” he finally said.

“I'm sorry.”

He placed his large hand on my shoulder. “Everyone makes mistakes, Eva. However, you have to take responsibility for them.”

I nodded. “Why are you here?”

“I work for D.E.U.S.”

“Since when?”

“When you were born.”

“Why?”

He sat there in silence for a moment before finally speaking.

“When you were first born, you had an 'incident.’”

“Those guys I met told me that, but said they couldn't go into detail about it. What exactly

happened?”

“Your powers went off the moment you were born. That destructive energy you possess appeared around you and destroyed the hospital room. Everything in the room was vaporized, leaving a giant hole where the room was. There wasn't even any trace of your mom or the hospital staff. When that happened D.E.U.S. appeared, wanting to get rid of you, worried that your powers would be too much for the world to handle. They wanted to bring you to judgment before the gods and erase you from existence.

“When I heard they planned to do that I fought back. I told them that you were just a newborn and hadn't experience life yet, and to place judgment on an infant was inhumane. When I was standing before the board making my plea, it honestly felt like a lost cause. I could tell none of them wanted to deal with you. However, the head of the board at the time saw it from my perspective and shot down the idea. What ended up happening was that I was to keep a constant eye on you while working as a agent for D.E.U.S., and the head of the board stepped retired from his position and took it upon himself to be my commander. Remember the older man at the middle school?”

I nodded.

“That was him. Honestly, I owe so much to him. If he hadn't stepped in that day, you probably wouldn't have had a chance to live, and honestly, I don't know what I would have done after that.”

“You became an agent to protect me?” I asked.

He nodded. “Except now I'm head of the Southwest district as part of the North American branch of D.E.U.S. And now it's my job to make sure you're brought to judgment. It's sort of funny, joining D.E.U.S. to protect you from judgment, and yet it falls upon my lap to take you in the end.”

“What happens during judgment?”

“The gods examine your recent actions that led you to be judged in the first place, look at your history, then determine whether you are allowed a second chance or erased from existence.”

Erased from existence. I wasn't too sure whether that or being executed was worse, but I guess it

lead to the same result either way. There was still one problem, however . . .

“Where's Jessica?”

“She's at a hospital ran by D.E.U.S. back home, so don't worry about her. She'll be fine.”

I felt a sense of relief come over me, like a weight had been taken off my shoulders. But at the same time I felt a huge regret over my actions. If I hadn't been so selfish and demand Jessica be brought back to me, then nothing would have happened after that. Those people wouldn't have had to die. I'm such a pathetic person.

“I'm sorry it turned out like this, but there's nothing I can do at this point,” my dad said as he stood up.

I shook my head. “It was all my fault anyway. I deserve this after all that happened.”

“Let's go,” he said as he led me out of the cell.

We entered a long hallway with a series of metal doors running parallel along each concrete wall. A soft humming like noise came out from several vents, which I guessed was the air conditioning. Our footsteps echoed against the walls. At the end of the hallway was a large door with large cylinder barricades sealing it. Next to it was a hand sensor, which my dad placed his hand on. There was a quiet beep before the large cylinders moved with great force, unlocking the door.

On the other side of the door was a large room with hundreds of people moving about, like some futuristic secret military base you often see in sci-fi films. A shiver went up my spine from how cold it was. Small cubicle office spaces sat in the middle of the room while numerous walkways embedded into the wall wrapped around it. It was noisy as people went about their business. As my dad and I walked by, a few people would turn their attention to us out of curiosity, but went right back to whatever it was they were doing.

My dad led me to a large circular elevator which sat in a glass tube. Inside, there was a small panel with a metal keypad and red illuminated numbers. Attached to the panel was a card reader, which my dad took his name tag off and slid it into the machine. He then punched some numbers and the

doors closed. The elevator began to make its decent into the floor.

Once we were under the floor, there was nothing but concrete on the other side of the glass windows. For several minutes we descended without any signs of stopping.

“How long are we going to go down?” I asked.

“We're almost there.”

Just as he said, we stopped shortly after. The elevator doors opened to a small concrete room with yellow and black stripes running around the walls. At the other end of the room was a large red door and two D.E.U.S. soldiers standing on each side. They looked at me briefly before turning around to a computer panel for each of them. After they typed some stuff and used a key to turn a device, the red door opened to a red painted hallway with metal plating and bolts. Black warning signs were everywhere, telling all human personal to stay out.

“This is as far as I can go,” my dad said. “Your judgment will take place at the other end of this hallway. Just walk straight ahead until you enter a large room. There should be a chair in the middle. Take a seat and wait.”

I looked down the hallway. It felt like I was looking at a hallway to Hell. I then turned to my dad. He looked down at me with his usual stern face, not showing any signs of emotion.

“Goodbye, then.”

I started walking down the hallway.

“Eva.”

I turned around and looked back at my dad.

“I'm praying for you.”

I smiled, then waved. The large door closed shut as the locking mechanism clamped down over it.

I walked down the hallway into a large, cylinder shaped room. It felt like walking into a missile silo. The walls were covered in strange hieroglyphs which I've never seen before. When I looked

closely, I noticed that there was a very small purple glow to them. The ceiling was so high that I couldn't see it amidst the shadows.

“Hello?” I called out, which echoed back to me a thousand times in the course of a few seconds.

In the center of the room was a large throne looking chair made of marble. It had a unique design with twisting armrests and numerous hands reaching up along the backrest. At the top of the chair was what I guess were rays of light.

Not wanting to further delay the inevitable, I sat down the chair and waited. As I sat there, I started apologizing in my head. To Jessica, to Rose, to Kevin and Elizabeth, to all the people I had injured and killed, and to my dad for having to put him through this. If me being erased from existence could somehow make things just slightly better, then I was ready to die.

The hieroglyphs along the wall began to grow brighter. Row after row glowed as they continued to the distant ceiling. I watched as the room began to glow. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

Bells started to ring. They rang with a melody that could be described as disturbing. The notes were depressing sounding while one bell rang constantly on a very low, gut wrenching note. A sense of fear flooded my entire being. I didn't want to be in there anymore.

Then my body began to feel an intense pain, as if every atom in my body violently exploded and grew back repeatedly. Never had I felt such a pain before. I fell to the ground, screaming in agony. My screams mixed with the ringing bells that felt like they were taunting me. I gripped my head in my hands. I wanted to stop whatever it was that was doing this, but I couldn't. My powers wouldn't work.

It was like my very body was composed of nothing but pain and suffering. The purple glowing hieroglyphs appeared to start moving around as the bells continue their ringing. My body began to spasm as the pain continued. My life started to flash before my eyes. Memories of things I didn't even remember appeared before me like a projection. It was too hard to focus as the pain intensified.

The wall and floor looked like they vanished. I was cringing on the ground next to the marble chair in a vast void composed of nothing but light. The hieroglyphs shot out and flew around like flies

on a dead carcass. The bells grew louder and louder. My eyes were forced open as I watched what transpired around me.

“Stop it!” I cried. “Please!”

As if it was a reply, it felt like trillions of swords sliced my body all over. Then, as if implanted in my mind, I realized that the light was the gods, and that the bells were their voices. They were gathered around, discussing me. My human body couldn't withstand their presence, but as my inner being was that of a fallen god, I was refused to die. Instead I had to withstand the never ending pain. A puddle of tears and spit had grown under my head.

It wouldn't end. As much as I prayed to just kill me, it wouldn't end. My mind felt like it was collapsing. I couldn't think straight. The only thing I could comprehend was the pain. The pain of being in the center of a nuclear explosion that went off with the ring of every bell.

I managed to get onto my feet, but I ended up just running forward and smacking into an invisible wall. I started pounding it, hoping it was the door into the chamber, praying that someone could hear it and let me out. I pounded so hard that my hands started to bleed. Warm blood dripped down my arms as it splattered against the invisible wall. At some point I must have bit my tongue between screams, as my mouth began to fill with blood. I slammed my head into the wall, hoping to die from it. All it managed to do was create a large gash across my forehead.

I fell back down, writhing in the pain. Then my wrist began to burn like someone poured hot lava on it. I reacted to the burning pain and gripped it with my other hand. But then my hand was pulled up by an invisible force. I was dangling in the air, held by nothing but my wrist. I grabbed onto my arm with my other hand and tried to pull myself up.

The black bracelet began to glow, then shattered like glass. I dropped to the floor of the cylinder chamber, where the floor and wall had returned with the hieroglyphs. I continued to writhe in pain as I screamed at the top of my lungs, crying. As I did, the door at the end of the hallway opened up. Two doctors with a stretcher ran into the room and picked me up. They struggled to put me on the stretcher

as my body continued to spasm.

I was taken to the elevator where my dad stood. As I cried on the stretcher, he leaned down and held onto me.

“You did it.”

I jumped up from the bed with a sweat. My hands shook as I held my head, breathing heavily. Judgment filled my mind. The pain felt like it was still there, wrapped around my entire being. I held myself, shaking like a scared mouse who had been laid in a snake pit for hours before being pulled back out. I started taking deep breaths. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale . . .

When I managed to get myself back together, I laid back down and stared at the florescent light fixture that was currently turned off with my hand on my forehead. The room I was in appeared more like a generic hospital room. Everything was white. The walls, the sheets, the curtains, the light shining through the white blinds, and the cup of water that sat on the white table next to the white framed bed. Even my skin seemed to have lost some of its color and became more fair, though it could have been my eyes playing a trick on me.

As I sat on the bed, the door opened. “How's it going?” my dad asked as he entered the room with a young nurse following behind him, pushing a cart in front of her with usual doctor stuff.

I held up my hand as I watched it shake slightly. “Okay I guess.”

“I need to do a quick examination if you think you're up for it,” the nurse said.

I nodded. The nurse pulled a chair in front of me and got started.

“I'm surprised you look so well for what you just went through,” the nurse said as took my blood pressure.

“The judgment?” I asked.

“Usually it takes months or sometimes even years for people to get somewhat normal after going through judgment, but here you are and it only took you a week of sleep.”

I thought about asking her about me being asleep for a week, but then thought that was sort of dumb to ask, considering the only answer would be “Yeah, you were.”

“You must get that from your father,” the nurse said.

I looked over at my dad, who was looking through a packet of paper. It didn't seem like he was paying any attention to us, though it could have been just a ruse.

“Get what,” I asked the nurse.

The nurse smiled. “The ability to just shrug off even the worse of times and manage to remain calm.”

I thought about the times I broke down recently and shook my head. “I'm not like that.”

“Well, I'm glad you're doing okay,” the nurse said with a smile.

I tried to smile back, but I couldn't tell if it looked too forced or not. It felt forced to me.

After a few more tests, the nurse grabbed her cart and left the room, telling me “Have a great day,” as she walked through the door.

The second the door closed, my dad placed the packet on the table. “Since you passed judgment, you are hereby an agent of D.E.U.S.”

My eyes widened. “Wait, what? When did that happen? Why?”

“The moment you were brought in here. Due to you passing judgment, it was decided that it would be best if D.E.U.S. kept a closer look at you at all times.”

“Weren't you already doing that?” I asked.

“To a degree, but after what happened, D.E.U.S. felt that you should be given proper training on how to use your powers so that you'll be able to use them without problem. Originally we planned to wait until you were an adult, but considering all that happened, the higher ups decided to push your

training early.”

“And in doing so I'm becoming an agent for you guys?”

“Yes,” he said with a stern look on his face.

“I don't want to.” I said.

“You have no choice in the matter.”

“Why not?”

“Because you have the power to destroy the world, Eva,” he said, looking down at me. “You're too dangerous to live. At any moment you could go off like when you killed all those people who were trying to help keep your powers under control.”

“But I didn't ask for these powers! Why can't you guys just lock them away like you did before!? I don't want to deal with this anymore!”

“We can block your powers to some degree, Eva, but we won't be able to get rid of them entirely. The best we can do is train you so that you won't have to worry about losing control in the future because one day we won't be able to suppress them. Your body will overpower it.”

“Why now?”

My dad picked up the packet and flipped it open a few pages. “It's partly because you're slowly maturing into adulthood. However, it didn't just wear off naturally on its own. What should have happened was that whenever your power went off your body would shut down, causing you to pass out. However, and this was partly our fault for not doing enough research, all that guarana you were ingesting had a chemical reaction to our suppressors, which wore its effectiveness quickly. That's why over time you were slowly able to use more and more of your power without crashing.”

“Those energy drinks,” I face palmed. Once again it was my fault. If I hadn't drunk all those energy drinks . . . wait a second.

“What happened to Kevin and Elizabeth? Last I heard Elizabeth was captured by D.E.U.S. agents and Kevin was fighting Mark.” I asked.

My dad started digging through his papers. "You're friends," he said as he continued to look. Finally, after a minute of silence, he stopped to page. "They've been taken in for questioning and will be given sentences based on their contributions to what happened."

"Prison?" I asked.

"Not prison," he said. "They'll be forced to work for D.E.U.S. to pay off their share of the damages. Same as you. It'll be some time before it's decided what exactly they'll be doing. Any more questions?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"Okay then. Next, we're going to put a tracker on you so that you'll be permanently registered as an agent of D.E.U.S., and so we know where you are and what you're doing at all times."

"Is it another bracelet?" I asked.

"That was just a temporary tracker for when you were held as prisoner."

He rolled up the sleeve on his right arm and showed me his shoulder. There was a black tattoo of a weird looking emblem made up of numerous, perfectly curved lines. The numerous lines spun together to make what I thought was a letter of some sort, but I wasn't sure of the language. Under it was a series of numbers that looked like a serial number.

"This," he said as he pointed at it, "is the tracker."

My dad led me to a room that from the outside looked nondescript. When he opened the door, a sweet, almost candy like aroma poured out of the room as smoke. The walls of the room were covered in hundreds of band posters, some of which I actually recognized due to being drilled by Rose's taste in music. In the center of the room was a plain looking wooden chair that was leaning on its side for whatever reason. Loud rock music punctured my ears.

In the corner of the room under some ceiling hanging cabinets was a man who looked roughly

the same age as my dad, smoking a pipe while sketching on a tiny desk. He had numerous tattoos covering his arms and several piercings on his ears and lip. His black hair was wild, sort of like Kevin's. He looked over at us and turned down the music using his phone, which was connected to two speakers.

"You're a bit early," he said. "I haven't finished a final version yet."

On the ground was numerous pieces of papers that were crumbled up, all of them containing the same emblem that is forever burned onto my dad's shoulder.

"How many have you gone through?" my dad asked as he knelt down and picked up one of the discarded pages, looking at what the man has already drawn. "This looks all right."

"It's not," he stated outright. "See the line on the top?"

I leaned over to look at the page that my dad was looking at. He ended up handing it to me. The drawing was of a half finished version of the tattoo, which looked perfectly fine to me. As there were numerous lines on the top, I couldn't tell which line he was directing at.

"I screwed it up. It was off by a quarter of a centimeter."

I didn't see it.

"I see," my dad responded with. "How much longer do you think it's gonna take?"

"Mmmmm. I'm kind of on a roll right now with this one. Give me a few minutes and I should be done."

"Cool," my dad responded with, which felt slightly unnatural coming from him. "Just wait a few minutes here, Eva, and he'll put the tracker on you. I'll be back when you're done."

He patted me on the shoulder and left the room. I stood there, watching the man draw on the paper.

"You don't have to stand there, you know. Sit down."

I picked up the chair and sat down as commanded. The man turned the music up a bit louder, but not as deafening as he had it before.

“You like music?” I asked, looking at all the posters.

“Yep,” he responded with.

As I looked over the posters, I spotted one for Rose's band.

“That poster, over there,” I said, pointing at it.

“Hm?”

“That's my aunt's band.”

The man looked over at the poster. “Ah. Yeah. It was Chris, I mean, your dad who introduced me to them. Handed me their CD awhile back. They're not that bad.”

He picked up his phone and scrolled through the music, changing it to a song that's one of Rose's. The music was loud and a bit dirty sounding, but Rose's vocals were beautiful sounding, contrasting with the music.

“She's a really nice singer, but the rest of the band doesn't quite match up with her. She'd be better off by being in a better band.”

I wasn't too sure if I should be pleased by him praising Rose, or slightly offended that he trashed the rest of the band.

“So, what sort of mischief did you do to get caught by D.E.U.S.?” he asked.

I kept silent for a minute, then explained everything that had happened the past week. As I went on, I could feel my voice sounding more depressed, as my stomach grew heavier the more I said. I talked about all the people I killed due to my actions, and the all out war I had with the soldiers from D.E.U.S. that shouldn't have happened if I wasn't so caught up in my own selfishness. My eyes started to swell up a bit by this point. Finally, I struggled to talk about Jessica, but I couldn't finish it.

“You can stop if you want,” he said, noticing the difficulty I had talking about it. “Is she gonna be all right?” he asked.

“I think so,” I said.

He stopped his drawing and took a long drag of his pipe, letting out a stream of the sweet aroma

from his nose.

“Well, you can't go back and change what you did, but be thankful that you were given a second chance in life, and that your friend is going to turn out all right too.”

“How did you end up here?” I asked.

The man put down his pipe. “In case you haven't noticed, I'm a fallen god as well.”

I was kind of awed. “He's like me,” I thought.

“I'm a god of language. To make it easy to understand, I can change people with the power of words, such as make someone stronger, faster, more intelligent, et cetera.”

“That sounds cool,” I told him.

“I had a best friend back when I was younger. One day I discovered my abilities by doodling what I thought was just some cool symbols, but were actually powerful letters created by the gods, or the old version of me I suppose, hundreds of thousands of years ago. I accidentally got it on my friend and discovered what a single letter could do to change someone. He became stronger, which we used to get into some fights and make some money. However, I didn't fully understand how much power was contained in a single letter. I just started adding more and more to my friend until his body couldn't take so much power and he died.”

I looked down at the ground. Guess I wasn't the only one to have ever hurt their best friend.

“After that I became depressed and then started abusing my powers, causing a whole bunch of trouble for people, including some deaths. Then I was captured by D.E.U.S., somehow survived judgment, and here I am. Been here for twelve years now.”

“Locked away making trackers for D.E.U.S.?”

“Locked away? Nah. I have a life outside of D.E.U.S. I own a tattoo parlor and even sell 'special' tattoos that can slightly boost attributes to a person. But don't worry, I only allow one per person's lifetime, and even then it isn't significant enough to cheat their way into being a pro athlete or genius or whatever. That and it costs a lot,” he said with a wink.

“Wouldn't D.E.U.S. be alarmed that you're putting those letters on people again?”

“Nah. As long as I don't go overboard with it, hence the one per person, it's fine. I take a bunch of precautions so someone doesn't get more than one if they're human.”

“And if they're not human?” I ask, thinking that he was referring to other fallen gods.

“If they're not human, then all they get is a tracker. We're already playing with an unfair advantage. No reason to make it even more lopsided than it already is.”

“I see.”

“So yeah, I know you're going through a rough patch right now, and you feel like garbage, killing all those people. But regardless of what happened, the gods told you to keep living, and you should take this opportunity to try and make right. Even if it takes the rest of your human life and then some, you have to keep going. You aren't living for just you anymore, but for those that died by your hands, so stop moping around and get it together.”

I thought to myself that he might have had a point. I looked down at my hands. These were hands that killed innocent people and people who were just trying to help me, but should I end everything and leave it at that? Could I one day use these same hands to save people? To make a positive change to the world? To help the ones I love instead of hurting them?

I wasn't going to wait for someone to tell me the answer, but make the answer myself.

“I am,” I whispered to myself to push me out of the pits of despair and into new light. As of that moment, the old trouble making, self-centered, immature Eva Guile was erased from existence, replaced with a new Eva who now had a meaning for life, and who wasn't going to let any harm come to anyone if she can help it.

He held up the drawing and inspected it. “All done. So, where do you want this bad boy?” he asked, holding the sketch. “Oh, and don't worry about the size of the drawing. It'll shrink down a bit.”

Without a second thought, I held up my right hand. I wanted a permanent reminder of my new resolution.

"I want it on the back of my hand," I told him.

"The back of your hand? You don't want to try and hide it somewhere?"

I shook my head.

He shrugged. "If that's what you want."

"Is it gonna hurt?" I asked. "I heard getting tattoos are pretty painful."

He chuckled. "Well, regular tattoos, sure, but not this. You ever get a temporary tattoo before?"

"Once or twice when I was little," I replied.

"It's sort of like that. Watch this."

He placed the paper with the drawing against my skin. He then slapped the paper and pulled it off. The complex emblem was now on the back of my hand.

"Just so you know, this is permanent and will never come off. Even if you were to say, I don't know, cut the skin off where the tattoo is or blow your hand off with a grenade, the tattoo will appear again after your body heals itself."

I held up my hand and stared at it. At that moment, I had permanently become a member of D.E.U.S.

"All done, Eva," he said.

I stood up. "Thank you, mister . . ."

He held out a hand. "Jesse."

I shook his hand. "Thank you, Jesse. For everything."

"Don't mention it. Ah, right on time."

I turned around to see my dad standing at the doorway.

"All done?" he asked.

I showed him the back of my hand. He looked at it with an emotionless face and let out a small grunt.

"Let's go," he said.

I walked out of the room and turned around to wave Jesse goodbye, but he had already turned the music back up and was busy working on something, so I left.

We walked down the empty looking hallway and onto an elevator that took us down to the first floor. As we headed to the exit, we passed by a small help desk with two people sitting there, patiently waiting for something to do. When we walked by, they waved to us. I waved back while my dad simply ignored them.

It was the first time I was outside in what felt like months to me. The sun was shining brilliantly on a cloudless day, making it rather warm for what should be fall.

We walked out into a large courtyard surrounded by numerous buildings with paved sidewalks leading to each one. Gardens and trees prettied up the courtyard. People were coming and going, most wearing what appeared to be a D.E.U.S. uniform that composed of a black vest with the logo on the back, a white cotton shirt, and black slacks, while a few wore business suits, which gave me the impression that they must have been higher up in the chain of command like my dad. A few people wearing what looked like military garb ran by us in a rush somewhere. My dad watched them run by, checked his phone, then put it away as if satisfied with what was going on.

He led me to a concrete table and sat down on one of its concrete benches. I sat down on the other side of him.

“I hope you don't mind that we sit out here for a bit,” he said.

I shook my head. “It's nice out.”

“Yeah,” he said as he fumbled through some papers. “So, now we need to figure out your living situation and training regiment.”

“Living situation?” I asked. “Are we not going back home?”

“No,” he answered without a second thought. “During the meeting in Canada, it was decided that I was going to be transferred here at the main offices of the US branch in Arizona. And since you're going to need training to become a field agent and learn to control your powers, you're going to be

living here as well.”

I wasn't going to go back home? I'm gonna be stuck here?

“H-how long am I gonna be here?” I asked.

“Most likely for a few years until your training is done, and then you'll probably be sent all over the place for missions where your powers would prove more useful.”

“I'm gonna be here for years,” I thought to myself. As obvious as it was that I needed to learn to control my powers, I didn't want to be away from Jessica. I wanted to go home and see her, and make up for what I did to her. I wanted to protect her from any more danger. It would be too much to ask her to come here and throw her life away just so she can be with me, so the only choice I have is to go back. To whoever this prayer goes to, let me be selfish one more time.

“I don't want to,” I mumbled.

“Hm?”

“I said I don't want to!” That time I yelled. I bet a few people probably looked over to see what the commotion was about.

“You don't have a choice, Eva,” my dad said.

“But I don't want to! I want to stay together with Jessica! Why can't I just live with Rose?”

“Because you're too dangerous, Eva!” my dad argued back. “You already sent Jessica to the hospital once. Do you want to send Rose to the hospital too, or worse? If you can't learn to control your powers now, you're just going to end up hurting everyone later. You need the proper training that can only really be done here.”

“And why can't I do it back home!? I know for a fact that there's capable people in D.E.U.S. stationed there already! I'll stay with them and learn to control my powers! I'll become the greatest member of D.E.U.S. and prove that I won't hurt anyone again!”

My dad stared down at me. It was obvious he was annoyed by my objection, especially having followed the rest of his orders up till now. However, something unexpected happened. He smiled.

“Fine.”

I was slightly confused. “Fine?”

“I’ll send you back home.”

It would be a lie if I wasn’t shocked. I mean, I assumed it was going to be more difficult to try and change his mind, so this was weird.

“Why did you change your mind so easily?” I asked.

“I’m not dumb, Eva. The last thing I want to do is separate you from the people you care about and stress you out even more than you already are. In fact, I already talked it over with my old commander and he said he’ll gladly watch over you and train you so you can go back home. I don’t think we’re ever gonna be able to repay our debt to him.”

I didn’t know what to say. A wave of warmth and joy swept my body. I jumped up and hugged him.

“Thanks, dad,” I told him.

He patted me on the back. “I might seem like a cold hearted person, but I still love you, Eva, and I want what’s best for you.”

He motioned for me to get off and straightened his tie. “We leave first thing tomorrow, so why don’t you rest for another night.”

I could feel tears forming in the corners of my eyes, but they weren’t tears of sadness. “Yeah,” I said with a smile.

Epilogue

I couldn't stop thinking about going home all night. Because of that, I didn't get much sleep, but that didn't bother me in the morning. I was happy that I was gonna finally see Jessica. This had been the longest stretch of time that I can remember where I wasn't with her. I must have been spoiled with being able to see her every day like that. However, I knew that any excitement would be drained the moment I step foot in that hospital and see her, so I tried to enjoy myself while I could.

When I got up I was given a change of clothes by my dad. "Your old clothes were ripped to shreds, and it'd be kind of rude to show up wearing scrubs, so I bought you something nice to wear," he said. It was a blue dress with a matching sweater. The thought of me wearing a dress made me gag mentally, but I imagined my dad stressing out on what to get me and having to ask his coworkers for help. Not wanting to disappoint the dad from the made up scenario, I put it on. He had also brought a brush and a black headband.

"He definitely must have had someone help him out," I said to myself. "Too bad it's all wrong."

I quickly brushed my hair and slapped on the headband. Thinking that I looked good enough, I went back to my dad, who led me to a jet plane that had the same futuristic look as the helicopter Doug piloted the other night.

"Rose is gonna meet us at the airport, and then you'll be taken to the Dallas/Fort Worth base and get acquainted with your superior officer and fellow agents," my dad said.

"Cool," I said.

I'm not sure if it was because the plane was so fast or that I was lost in my thoughts, but the plane ride was insanely quick. We arrived at a small airfield with the plane landing without a hitch. When I stepped onto the stairs to get off the plane, I noticed Rose standing at the bottom with her arms crossed and looking incredibly pissed.

I climbed down the stairs and looked up at her.

“What did I tell you the other day?” she asked in a angered tone.

“I’m sorry,” I told her.

Her angered face quickly melted away when a tear sprout in the corner of her eye. She grabbed me by the arm and then hugged me as tight as she could, crushing my lungs.

“Thank God you’re okay!” she said. “And you look like a girl for once! This really is the end of the world!”

I laughed. “It was definitely the end of something,” I replied.

“Tell me about it.”

She let go of me and looked at my dad. “And why the hell did you never tell me any of this!? Sure, I can understand not wanting to talk about Deus or whatever it is, but you should have told me that you had Eva at least! All you would have had to do was say ‘Hey Rose! I have Eva, so don’t go around acting all worried for days and almost die of a heart attack!’”

“There was really bad phone reception,” he replied with a stern face.

“You’re telling me that the people you work for, who apparently have the money and technology to have a God forsaken super helicopter, but are incapable of getting phone reception?”

“We tried, but the telephone company sued us, claiming we would be ‘disrupting competition’ in the area.”

Rose laughed. She then turned back to me and hugged me again. “Well, whatever. You’re staying at my place tonight!”

“Okay, okay,” I said, escaping her grasp. “When can I go see Jessica?” I asked my dad.

He looked at his watch. “We’re a bit early, so why don’t we go see her now?” he said.

My dad called someone on his phone real quick, and within minutes, a familiar black SUV pulled up. The driver’s door opened up, revealing Doug.

“Hey,” he said with a wave. “You look a million times better, Eva.”

I felt embarrassed to see him, especially after how I acted that night.

“I’ll take her back to your place in a little while,” my dad told Rose.

“You better,” she replied with a smile.

We entered the SUV and drove out of the airport. We sat in silence in the SUV as Doug drove like a maniac onto a highway, speeding past car after car that seemed to get in his way.

After a few minutes we exited the highway toward a large hospital that seemed to stand majestically along the edge of the highway. Doug pulled around to the back and into a parking garage. My dad and I exited the car while Doug stayed behind.

“I’ll be waiting here,” he said.

My dad and I entered the hospital. It had the same eerily clean smell like the other hospital, but it didn’t make me feel sick. We walked down some white corridors until we came to a locked door with a card reader next to the handle. My dad took out a card and swiped it, unlocking the door.

The other side of the door revealed a similar looking corridor. At the end was an elevator that led us to the tenth story. The D.E.U.S. logo was proudly displayed here on the walls and doors. We passed a few doors and stopped in front of one that had “Jessica Wood” on the name plate. My heart felt like it dropped into my stomach the moment I read that. I stood at the door without moving. A sudden fear had grabbed hold of me. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to go in there or not, remembering the images of the wounded Jessica.

My dad must have noticed as he opened the door and gently pushed me inside. The room was a similarly white room like the room I was in earlier that day. Sleeping gently in the bed was Jessica, appearing angelic like. The dirt that I last saw her in had long been cleaned off. A few bandages covered her head and face, but other than that she looked like a sleeping princess.

I walked up to her and watched her sleep. Her chest slowly moved up and down with her breathing. My dad moved a chair over to me so I could sit. Her gentle hand was laid out on top of her cover, so I held it.

“She’s been in a coma ever since we moved her,” my dad said. “Her body seems to be healing

fine, but we can't tell how long it's going to take for her to wake up.”

Jessica looked peaceful in her sleep. It didn't look like there was a care in the world to her.

“Can I come here every day and see her?” I asked.

“You can,” my dad said. “Though only during visiting hours, and when you're not busy with training.”

I nodded. I sat there for a little while longer, watching Jessica sleep. There was a new sense of purpose in my life, that no matter what happens, I wasn't gonna let anything hurt Jessica ever again. I leaned over her and hugged her as best as I could and promised her I would always protect her.

“It's time to go,” my dad said as he placed his hand on my shoulder.

I let go and looked back as I exited the room. Once the door closed, I turned around and left.

Doug drove us to where I was going to train and work from then on. At first I thought it was a mistake, but my dad assured me it wasn't. The building we were dropped off at was a large high school that was built in the 1950's with what appeared to be a newer addition to the school in the past few years. It was two stories tall with red bricks and green paned windows. There was a front entrance with fat white pillars and a large white panel with “Arlington High School” written in green letters.

Walking out to greet us was my dad's old commander, except instead of the suit from the other night he was dressed as a janitor.

“Welcome back, Eva Guile,” he said in a gentle voice.

He walked up to me and extended his hand. I looked at him for a moment before I shook it. It felt incredibly rough.

“Da- I mean, my dad told me that you were the one who saved my life,” I said.

He waved his hand. “I only did what I thought was right. However, it was because of you yourself that you ultimately survived judgment, to which I say congratulations.”

“Thank you,” I replied.

He then approached my dad and shook his hand.

“Glad to see you again,” he said.

“Likewise,” my dad said with a smile. He then turned to me, fixed his tie, and wiped away the smile and returned to looking like his usual serious self.

“This is Emil Johnson. He's in charge of operations for this district and will be your commander as of today.”

“Are you a janitor too?” I asked.

Emil laughed. “Part time to appease appearances.”

A moment later Mark walked out of the school, also dressed as a janitor.

“And you've already been acquainted with Mark Goodrich,” Emil said. “Including Doug Sears here and a Miss Patricia Barton who couldn't be here with us today, we are the members of D.E.U.S.A.H.S.”

I wanted to say something about the length of the anagram, but decided not to. “Do you all work as janitors part time?” I asked instead.

“Us three are,” Doug said. “We clean the school of messes caused by students while cleaning up messes caused by fallen deities. Though the latter is more interesting than the former, to be honest.” He let out a big goofy smile.

“Am I gonna be a janitor too?” I asked.

“Nope,” Emil said. “Once we get you caught up with your middle school education, you'll be attending A.H.S. as a student, though that's still a year and a half away. Until then, you'll be coming by here whenever school lets out.”

I looked up at the school, which turned out to also be a secret base for a somewhat secret organization that deals with fallen gods, where the agents are janitors. I wasn't sure what it was, but I started to laugh at how bizarre this all was. After everything that had happened, I couldn't help but feel

like my life was some weird comedy that was at my expense.

Doug smacked me in the back. “Welcome aboard, Eva.”