

Introduction

I always stared at the sky above and thought, do I exist as an intelligent individualistic human being or am I just born in this life time to accomplish one important task and that's it?

I don't remember my childhood. I don't think it has ever existed in my mind. I kept wondering how it was by some photos in a small metal box that portrayed me as a child. Where did these photo papers come from? Where did this box come from that I kept hiding underneath my bed cushion? I only took them out on days like today to remember something. Anything. I don't remember my parents or if I had any one to call mom and dad. I don't have brothers or sisters nor any living relative.

I don't remember I was ever taught to write on a piece of paper. We learned to tap on a screen and letters and numbers appeared. We learned to recognize these letters, words, sentences, paragraphs and stories. Everything was just a screen that did all the work for us. We only learned how to decipher what was written and speak in a language that is recognizable by machines.

We live in a small world where machines are our only tool of survival. Our species, or what is left of it, was trained by our leaders to protect those machines. Also, we are trained mentally and physically to prepare for an upcoming inevitable war. Yet, who is out there that we need this high level of constant security? What are we waiting for? Aliens? Decades ago, it was proven that aliens don't exist and we are in this universe all alone. Alone in our being and thoughts.

A few years ago, after taking an intelligence exam to test my aptitude and future position in this world, I was told by my superiors that I had unusual scores. I was never told what they were nor did I ask, but they automatically placed me in the special compound called “Intelligence” where General John Myr was in charge of it, and I monitored all machine activities, data collection and analysis, and defence of a project that was named Merge.

My daily life was predictable. I left everything in my room so I can't be reached or called for. My only time I can be someone else. I only kept a hold of a small gun on a belt surrounding my waist. I physically trained in the morning by running two miles along the old bridge that crossed what is left of the old city. I jumped over bulgy rocks in a semi crooked line that I have placed on a half paved road for ten yards. When I felt happy and wanted an ounce of what is thought of as fun, I tried to grab hold of non-working street lights and swing from them. I felt that the world at that moment was meant to spin me. It felt different, carefree, and childlike perhaps. It was my escape, but an escape from what?

I ventured back to reality when I heard someone call my name from a far. “Lina!”

Chapter 1

Where is she?

Boris was running fast towards me and screaming my name at the top of his lungs. How did he find me this far away from the compounds near the old city? I kept a hard grip on the street light as he approached me. I wasn't very fond of Boris. He had brown, extremely tall, 6 feet 5 inches, dark blue eyes that looked black at times, and he wore a silver long necklace with a bird at the end that he claims was his mother's. He is a Red. He is from that compound that is responsible with overall defence and material improvements of our world. What I couldn't stand was his self-proclaimed physical superiority over everyone. Moreover, sometimes late night, he used his physical power to break random objects and deserted old front door entrances in the Triangle compound. It was for fun, as his clouded mind kept justifying. It was very childish in my opinion.

He came closer, stopped to breathe and glistening sweat tickled down from his forehead. I waited for him to catch his breath. Being a foot shorter than him, I had to look up and stare at his eyes for a few seconds. He then looked at the floor and back at me and said, "Professor Ellen Lynn disappeared. General John Myr is looking for you everywhere."

Ellen, a delicate small brown-haired woman with large brown eyes, 48, with no children, was also the commander in chief of Project Merge. Something I had to watch over and protect with my life as long as I was told to do so. Project Merge started twelve years ago as a secret defence tool that can't be seen by just anyone, or anything that is not directly involved with it. I said with

a puzzled look on my face, “How? That’s impossible. What do you mean?”

Boris, still breathing heavily said, “That’s what General John told me. And he is friggen mad that his tamed hair seemed wild on the screen. The defence force was called for. I think they arrived by now and ...”

I interrupted him and asked, “How did he know that?”

Although John was the general of Intelligence and he seemed to know everything in our small world and watched the hidden cameras in his waking hours, he could not see past the Project Merge corridor and interior room that housed it. It was not permitted by those not directly involved with it. Ellen’s disappearance, or proclaiming she is, is a little mystifying and only an assumption by John.

Boris eyed me with a sharp look of disgust and said, “You are wasting time by asking me what I will never know. Just go now to the Intelligence compound and shut up!”

He had a controlling demeanour about him and a stern commanding voice that scared me at times. I assumed that’s why no girl in our small 1989 citizen count world can stand him or want to be his future wife.

I let go of the street light and started running back. Boris, with his strength and superior physique, tried to catch up with me, yet, I am faster than him.

As I approached the compound, Boris caught up now and stood next to me. He said, “Damn your fast. Why did you stop? Just key in the code and let’s go in.”

The door to the compound is platinum steel that is twelve feet high and eight feet wide. There is a panel on the side where I can tap the code and a finger print image is used to identify me as accessible to the Intelligence compound. After step one is completed, I placed my hand in the bottom of the panel in a little hole, and a beam of light shined and flickered three times to identify a living me by my blood structure, its flow, and level of authority.

The screen on the panel changed and my face appeared.

Lina Ard, 30

BD: 12-31-2280 AD

Intelligence Colonel

Merge Defence V

Level of Authority V

Boris with a small grin of his face said, "It seems secure, but our compound, Red, is more secure than that." The door started opening and I eyed him disgustedly and said, "Who wants to go to your filthy compound?" He wasn't amused and grabbed my shoulder and said with a deep serious voice, "You may seem intelligent, but a smart mouth that needs constant authority and discipline."

I grabbed his arm and shoved it off of me. "You are absurd," I said quietly and ran to the main doors where I tapped in another key code to enter. I ran through the hallways, Boris behind me, and I climbed a flight of stairs. I ran again, turned left, and then I heard a low scream.

As I approached the door to the machine authorized only room, I took out my gun, and a woman kneeling on the floor with her head down kept looking at her hands and screaming loudly, "No!"

I came closer, and I saw blood on her hands. At that instinct, I pointed the gun at her and I said, "Where did this blood come from?" Boris held his gun pointing at her and started walking slowly to my right. I knelt down near the woman and told her to raise her head. She was Dana.

I saw tears gushing down her face, and she kept saying with a loud aching voice, "No! No!"

I didn't know why Dana was in the control room, since she hardly ever comes up here and visits this place for any reason. She is always in the lab downstairs, finding an ingenious solution to some problem by analyzing numerous old books on her screen or gathering random information, and trying to apply her assumptions by experimenting on a small controlled group of people. I asked her, "Stop Dana. Where did this blood come from?"

She had bright green eyes with a brown thick line surrounding them. Her eyes seemed deep and had a magical aura to them that I could not explain, and I saw my own reflection in them. She looked stunned and pointed on her right side. She wore a lab coat that was two sizes bigger than her, and I saw a spot of blood and pulled her coat to the side. She kept saying, "No! No!" Then she sighed, looking at the floor and slowly said, "Help her."

I said frantically, "Who?" Boris stepped closer to Dana and examined her wound. "It's a knife wound," he said in disbelief. "Who still uses a knife? So primitive." I looked at him and said, "It's not the time to discuss old weaponry and their usage. They kill people, that's their intention!" Dana gasped and looked at Boris and pleaded to him with broken tone of words, "Help ... her.... Please." Boris pursed his lips and grabbed Dana, lifted her and started walking towards the door. "Where can we bandage

her so she won't bleed to death?" he said with a steady tone to his voice.

Red compound may seem rough and unorthodox compared to us, with a group of citizens who only know what's it's like to fight and defend, but they also know how to heal the wounded. They are the doctors, the fighters, the healers of our world. They are self-sufficient on their own and can solve any immediate problem they face without any question.

I sprinted to a door down the hall and told Boris to follow me. We walked a few steps to another door, I opened it, and a group of scientists sat on their stools mesmerized in their experiments. Robots, I label them as intelligent life-less machines, were conducting an experiment too on the left side of the room. I didn't have time to have Boris perform any lifesaving procedure, and I needed him to help me find Ellen. I said with an authoritative voice, "We need help now!" A scientist on my right lifted his head and his eyes widened. I wasn't sure if he was taken aback by our arrival, or just by Boris's tall stature and physique. The doctor said, "What? What's going on?" Boris looked at him and said, "We need antiseptic, gauzes and bandages. She is wounded."

More scientists stood up, and frantically hurried and opened drawers and glass containers. The scientist said, "Put her on the chair. We will help her." Boris walked to the chair, kneeled down and slowly placed Dana on the chair. I kept my gun held up and said to Boris, "Who is she talking about? Who do we help? We need to find John."

Boris eyed me and his eyes were raging mad, then he calmed down, nodded and started walking towards the door. I looked at Dana and her eyes were closing. I touched her shoulders and asked, "Who do we help?" She closed her eyes and one of the

scientists said, “We have to take her to the ward on the other side of the building.” Boris then said, “Lina, we have to go find General John.” I nodded and wiped a little tear from my eye. Although I was trained to be physically and mentally ready for any situation, my heart felt like it was breaking into pieces and I wanted to go in a corner and cry. I couldn’t handle seeing an innocent civilian suffer like that.

Boris stared at me and I said, “What?” He looked at me with concern and he hesitated for a few seconds and said, “Let’s go.”

Chapter 2

Timed

The Intelligence building was the second largest of the three compounds. I started sprinting from one corridor to another with long hallways and large gardens to the side used for experiments. I looked back and I saw that Boris was in awe, but he stayed steady and kept sprinting. Boris doesn't come to the Intelligence compound much. Maybe once a year. Unlike me who is all over the place. I go from building to building and compound to compound. I know many people, their lives, their stories and projects. My job requires me to know many things, record them and analyze them.

Somehow, I remembered Boris. I knew him since we were young. He is my age, and he seemed to always be the tall studious one that sat by himself in the cafeteria. He didn't talk to many people, and when he did, he had a command on his voice. It seemed that he was ready to attack at any moment, and I never knew why. He lived in the boy's sector of the Alliance building in the Triangle compound. It's created for kids who were 17 and under that don't have a family. Obviously, I was in the girl's sector there too.

He sat next to me in class one year when we were 15. He didn't talk or say hello at all to anyone. He had a small tablet screen on his desk and tissue paper. I never knew why he needed the tissue paper, but it's there if he needed to sneeze. He was highly intelligent, and he received high achievement marks on all his work. I never had his aptitude because I was never focused or cared much. I just sat there, admiring the outside world from the window.

One day, as I was looking outside beyond the window and not on my screen, the professor approached my desk hastily and stared at me. He had a look of disgust and said in a low menacing voice, “What will you learn from looking outside? Nothing. What will you learn from looking at your screen? Everything.” I felt my heart skip a beat. I tilted my head down and stared at my screen. The professor said, “Good,” and walked to the front of the room. Sitting on my right was Boris. I lifted my head a little and looked at him with the corner of my eyes. He was staring at me. I moved my head to the right and looked back at him. He stared at me for a few seconds, shifted his eyes to the window above me, then back at me and smiled. Then he stared back down on his screen. It was the only time his small gesture was any type of approval by him of my existence.

Why were my memories of him so detailed? Anyways, as we sprinted to the north east corridor of the Intelligence building, we saw John, Joseph, and Zack coming out of the glass room. Soldiers from the Red compound stood on either side of the corridor carrying long pistols and wearing weapon resilient vests. Joseph and Zack are John’s right hand men. Joseph was tall, muscular, middle aged, with salt and pepper hair and brown eyes. He had tanned skin and stood with high authority. On the contrary, Zack was my height, light brown hair, fair skin, wore thick glasses, was much younger than John and Joseph, and he slouched when he walked.

Then there was General John Myr. He was much older, very tall but shorter than Boris though, had gray hair thinning hair, noticeable wrinkles on his face, and an undeniable aura of authority and charisma surrounded him. He looked at me and angrily said, “Lina! Where were you at this critical time of the day?” I didn’t know how to respond. He expected me to be alert

and available at 07:00 am? I couldn't lie, and I stared blankly and said, "I was training outside the compound, like I do every day at that hour." He hit the wall next to him with his fist and I jumped back. He yelled and said, "That was over an hour ago. Where were you?"

Boris stared at me and his mouth started opening to say something, but Joseph interrupted and said, "We don't have time to interrogate her General. She needs to go in."

I had a confused look, and I was gestured by Joseph to walk forward down the hall with them. Boris stayed in his spot and I looked back at him. He stared at me with utter concern. Something was uncharacteristic of him at that moment that I couldn't understand. I looked forward again and I kept walking.

We were approaching the corridor of the Project Merge sector. I didn't know why we were there, and what John's intentions were. I stopped walking. Joseph and Zack turned around to look at me, and then John looked back and stared. I said, "Why are we here? I don't understand. We are not authorized beyond this point."

John stared at me for a few seconds, wiped his forehead and said quietly, "Ellen walked in this corridor last night at 09:52 pm and into the Project Merge sector. She didn't come out. I was in the glass room this morning at 06:30 am to check feeds from last night of authoritative areas of the compound, and an emergency light was flickering faintly in S3, this sector. I checked the feeds, and I saw her going in. I was not worried since she spends hours there, but the emergency light indicated something was wrong."

I was confused, and something about his tone was different, it seemed too unreal of a story but I played along. I said, "How long was the emergency light on?"

He looked at the floor and said, "Since 10:01 pm last night."

Chapter 3

Beyond this Point

I said angrily, "Why was no one notified of the emergency calling light? Where was the nighttime security? And ..." John interrupted me and said, "Glass room is limited to high leveled personnel that possesses a certain level of authority in this compound. Not even machines can access it." I quickly said, "Well, I can go into to the glass room." He said quietly, "Yes you can. And you are authorized to go into the Project Merge sector too." I gasped and said, "Since when? Why me?"

John looked at me for a few seconds, and opened his mouth to say something but Zack furiously said with a loud voice, "We don't have time for this. She has to go in! Now!" My eyes widened and I stared at them. Joseph said with a demanding tone, "You first."

I remembered growing up in the Triangle compound and was taught that everyone here has earned their social place based on intelligence and skills. I always wondered why Zack and Joseph were in their position as only right hand men to John. They couldn't replace John until he died it seemed. Yet, John possessed something that Zack and Joseph will never have; a commanding power, high intelligence, and compassion.

I started walking slowly down the corridor and then turned to the left. I saw a long empty faint hallway. I looked up and there were no surveillance cameras hidden anywhere. The ceiling was clear. John looked at me and gestured that I should keep walking. We walked down the hallway and I saw a metal door with a strange symbol in the middle of it. It was an upside triangle with V and M on top of each other but almost connected. I didn't know what it

meant, but John sighed as he was looking at it and said, “There is the security panel on the right side to open the door. It requires you to insert your arm in the hole below, and your head in the upper small indentation area to identify you.”

“How did John know that?” I thought to myself.

I walked to the right and I saw the lower hole. I lifted my arm slowly and inserted my right hand. I glided my hand inside the hole, then my elbow and the rest of my arm. I felt two metal objects squeezing my arm in place, then the screen above the hole turned on and one word appeared in green, “Go.”

I placed my head near the indentation. I didn’t know how far in it I should shift my head into, but I kept moving my head forward. I then heard a click and a faint blue light glowed. I heard John say, “It worked.”

I moved my head back, and I tried to remove my arm from the hole. I glimpsed at the screen right above the arm hole and it blinked continuously with two words in purple, “Sara Authorized.” I was confused and stared at the screen. I kept my arm in the hole, John sighed heavily, and dumbfounded by my reaction to what the screen read. He said, “Lina... It’s not the time to explain.”

I stared at John and unconsciously moved my arm out. The door was sliding slowly to the left, and another short hallway appeared. It had a black door at the end of it. John hesitated and looked worried. He stared at me and said, “There is an invisible shield in this hallway that only allows authorized individuals pass it. Anyone else will die by the laser beams that strike from every corner.”

I looked at him shocked and I said, “Really? There are laser beams?” He was wide eyed and said, “You need to take your gun out and stay alert. Find Ellen. We are counting on you.”

Chapter 4

Why Me?

My hand shivered as I placed it on the gun at my waist. I held it and pointed it upwards. I was trained to do this. I kept assuring myself that I was trained and expected to do this. I have to defend Merge if it cost me my life. Then, deep inside me, another voice in my head came to life and said, "Why?"

I hesitated for a few seconds and shook my head, but then I walked slowly in the hallway with my gun pointed upwards. There was only silence and the sound of heavy breathing from John, Joseph and Zack behind me. I walked and nothing zapped me. Thank God. I continued walking in the hallway and reached the black door. It didn't have a knob or handle or any security panels on either side to open it. I looked back at John and said loudly, "What should I do now?"

With a loud rattling noise, the black door started opening.

I looked at the door way and back at John. I nodded and walked slowly towards the opened door. I went in, and quickly, the door slammed shut again. I jumped and turned back. I touched the door, looked around for any security panels on either side of the door, and blurted, "No!"

I didn't know what to do, but I convinced myself that I had a mission to fulfil. I turned back around and I saw a long hallway. I walked slowly in it. The walls on either side were black and empty. I continued walking till the end of it, and then I approached a large wide door with glass panels. I opened the door, and my eyes widened. I was looking at a large empty room. No sign of life. Not even machines or screens or anything.

I walked in. I held my gun near my chest, and I felt that the vast room was getting smaller. I reached almost the middle of the room, and then, a 3D hologram image appeared of a girl. She was life like and blurry. I closed my eyes and opened them again. “Stay alert. Stay alert,” I kept chanting. The blurry hologram was slowly coming to focus. I dropped the gun on the floor. She was me.

She was wearing a knee length dark blue dress. She was not athletic, but had a few extra pounds that showed on her round face. Unlike me who appeared life less and my facial bone structure was apparent. She had almond shaped eyes with a smoky black eye shadow and black eye liner. Her brown eyes seemed they were sparkling. She had long thick dark brown hair. She was an inch taller than me, because she was wearing beautiful black high-heeled dress shoes.

I couldn't speak, and she kept staring at me.

She finally said, “Why so long?”

I stared at her and couldn't speak.

She repeated herself and asked with a more stern voice, “Why so long Sara?”

I didn't know what I should reply with. She called me Sara. I'm not Sara. I'm Lina. I always have been.

She continued and said with a smile, “Why did you not come here for such a long time?”

I had a confused look and said, “My name is Lina.”

She eyed me with a small grin and a raised upper lip that I knew too well, and she said, “That's what they told you?”

I was stunned. Who are they she is referring to? Suddenly, letters, words and numbers started falling from above to an area on her left side.

She said, "I am you."

The letters became recognizable words and she pointed at them.

Sara Ard, 30

Last Physically Seen: 2011 AD

BD: 12-31-1980 AD

Death: Unknown

I looked puzzled. She is me from almost 200 years ago? I don't understand. She looked at me with a sad expression and said, "They told me to go with them. I was lost and alone. I wanted a different life. They told me they needed me because I had something in my head that did this."

I asked, "Did what?"

She looked at her left side, and then at me with a menacing look and said, "Control time."

Chapter 5

Confusion

I didn't know how to reply or if it was a hoax by someone. Maybe it was Ellen that devised this plan to scare me or anyone that tried to come to this place. She is using old technology and holograms to taunt me. I kneeled down and grabbed my gun. I pointed at the hologram and demanded, "Where is Ellen?"

The hologram started walking and getting closer to me. I started walking backwards, and another hologram appeared. This time of an old man in a wheel chair. He looked at me and said loudly, "She is alive! Sara is alive!"

I turned around and ran back in the direction I came from, but the door disappeared. Where did it go? I looked back and the two holograms were looking at me. Sara's hologram said loudly, "Ellen is gone. She wanted to go through. I didn't let her."

My heart was pounding uncontrollably now. I couldn't put words together to speak and I felt dizzy. Sara's hologram approached me and she said, "Your life in this world isn't real."

Her words were like knives tearing up my heart. I breathed heavily and blurted, "No!"

The old man then faced Sara and said, "She wants to start again. I know it. Let her start again."

Sara's face turned dark and with an angry voice she said, "I can't keep doing this. You HAVE to go back. You HAVE to stop time control."

I felt my hands shaking and the gun started slipping from my hand. My eyes were blurry, and then it hit me. John told me that I should always be alert. I have to be alert that this isn't real.

I closed my eyes tightly and started running as fast as I could to the other side of this room. I then opened my eyes and a door appeared. It was not the same door that I came through, but it was a door. To my surprise, I opened it quickly and ran in a narrower hallway. The sides were white and empty. I kept running until I reached a large white door. "How am I supposed to open this?" I said frantically. Then I heard a noise and turned back. There was no one there. I turned around and something long and hard struck my head, and I fell unconscious on the floor.

Chapter 6

Awake

I was in a room laying on a bed, and machines were checking my vitals on a screen behind me. I felt dizzy and my head felt heavy. I couldn't move my body. The machine said, "You have a severe head concussion. There is a wide bandage wrapping your head. It is not recommended that you move in any form. Please relax since your heart beats keep rising. The medicine that is pumped in your blood stream should lower it and keep it steady." I tried to move my mouth, and the only thing I was able to say was, "Water."

I didn't know how I arrived to this room, but what I saw earlier, the holograms, what Sara said, if it was even real. I couldn't think and wanted to sleep. After a few minutes, I heard people talking at the door entry way, but I couldn't lift my head to see who. The conversation became clearer and a man that sounded familiar to me, with an authoritative voice said, "Intelligence sector is not allowed to be involved in this matter."

Another man frantically said, "She can't know the truth. It will ruin everything."

The man with authority said, "I have no idea what you mean by truth. The Intelligence sector is no longer involved and allowed to help her."

The man entered the room and told the machine to leave. The machine obliged. He closed the door behind it. He came closer to my bed and looked at the ceiling. He shifted his eyes at every corner, took out his gun and fired it at the surveillance cameras. There were four, one in every corner.

I opened my eyes widely and lifted my heavy head. Dumbfounded, I said, "Boris?"

He looked at me with a frown. He didn't say anything.

I asked him, "What happened? Where am I?"

Boris looked at me and had a difficult time putting words together. He then said, "You were right. Ellen never disappeared."

My heart started beating fast, and Boris looked at the screen behind me, held my hands and said, "Calm down. You are no longer in the Intelligence compound. You are in the Red compound with high security to protect you."

Chapter 7

A New Place

With a shocked face, I said, “How am I in the Red compound? And why did you fire at the surveillance cameras. Are you going to kill me?”

Boris laughed and smiled, “I would never kill you. Even if I was ordered to do so.”

I didn’t know if I felt relieved or scared for what will happen next. Surely Boris knows what happened and why am I here, and his sudden compassion towards me is so foreign. I had many questions burning inside me and I asked, “What happened to me? What happened to my head? Why am I here? Where is John? Ellen?” Boris shrugged, looked away and stared at the wall. He kept holding my hands tightly and for an instance, I felt he was scared.

Someone knocked on the door. Boris let go of my hands; he stood up and walked to the left of the door towards a panel. It was a camera pointing on the other side of the door that showed who was knocking. Boris shifted to the door knob and opened the door. A man with a thick mustache, white hair, came in.

The man said, “Boris. Are you watching her carefully? Boris stood straight and said, “Yes sir.”

Boris is the commanding chief of all the infantry and the General of the Red compound. I never heard him say sir to anyone, but who is this man? I know everyone that is in authoritative power or I think I do. The man said, “Good. Keep an eye on her and never leave her sight. We will get to the bottom of this.”

Boris lifted his arm and pounded his chest near his heart with his fist. He said, "Yes sir!"

The man walked out of the room and closed the door. I felt that my eyes were heavy, and my head quickly landed on the pillow. Boris approached me, tapped on the screen behind me, and I dozed off.

Chapter 8

Rescued

I opened my eyes and I shifted my head to the left where Boris was sitting on the chair. His head was lowered towards the ground. I lifted myself up, but he didn't hear my shuffling noises. I glided my body to the left slightly to reach his shoulder. I tapped his shoulder slowly. He lifted his head up and stared at me. I positioned myself back to the middle of the bed. He smiled and said, "Good morning."

He was not the Boris I knew. I thought him very well and I felt he was a different person. I said, "I would say good morning, but ..." He interrupted me and said, "Do you feel better or your head still pounding? Should I get you breakfast?" I hesitated and said, "I don't want to eat." I looked at the side table where the cup of water is, and I moved my hand towards it. He grabbed it quickly and came closer to me. He held the cup near me and said, "Here you go."

I grabbed the cup from him and sipped some water. I felt that my throat needed something smooth to coat it. I lowered the glass and said, "Why am I here?"

He looked at me and said, "They wanted to kill you. You're safe now with us."

I stared blankly at him.

He looked at me and took a heavy breath. He said, "Do you want me to tell you what happened or ..." I blurted out, "Yes tell me. Please. Now!"

He looked down at the ground, and then back up. He had a grim look and said, "I will tell you. But just keep an open mind and understand you were not their only target."

I stared, waiting for him to continue. He just stared back at me. I lost my patience and asked, "Well, who else?"

He looked at me and said, "Dana."

I said frantically, "What? She was in her lab all day conducting research. What can she have possibly done?"

He looked blankly at me and said, "She is dead."

I froze. So many thoughts were permeating my head. I didn't know what to say or feel. I felt like crying, and inevitably, my eyes started watering and tears ran down my cheeks. I tried to help her when she was stabbed by the knife, but I couldn't. Why her? Of all people!

He stood up and sat on the edge of my bed. He stared at me with his deep eyes, and took the cup away and laid it on the side table. He breathed loudly and said, "Why did they use you?" I didn't know how to respond. The tears wouldn't stop, and he wiped my cheeks with his hands. They may seem rough, after all these years of brutal training, but he did it gently. He said, "I will ask you one more time. Why did they use you?"

I didn't know how to respond. Should I tell him what I saw? He would think I was crazy and just dreamed it. My tears stopped flowing and I stared at the covers between my hands.

He came closer to me and his face was near mine. He said, "I followed you, John, Joseph and Zack. You went into the Project Merge sector."

I raised my head and looked at him with wide eyes.

He continued, "After you went inside by yourself, the main security doors shut. John and his lackeys were frazzled and didn't know what to do. They ran back and I hid in an empty hallway to the right of the corridor. They ran to another hallway and I followed them without noticing me at all. Their minds were somewhere else. So much for high security." He had a disgusted look when he said it.

My head was spinning and my heart beating faster. Boris looked at the screen behind me and said, "Calm down. I will never hurt you. I am telling you what I saw."

My heart kept beating fast, and my eyes stayed fixed on him. Was it his way to be gentle and trustworthy to interrogate me? Was compassion his way of getting the answers he needed? I didn't want to answer him. I didn't want to be fooled by him any longer.

He kept staring at me and said, "They went to a small hallway north of where they were. They approached a medium sized door, but they didn't know how to open it."

I kept staring at him and he said, "I tried to get closer to hear what they were saying, and John said, 'She has to come out alive. She is our only chance.' I knew they were talking about you and not Ellen."

Something in me wanted to stay quiet, but my curiosity clouded me and I said, "Why did you follow them?"

He laughed so hard. I didn't know that my question was funny at all. He said still laughing, "And you think this show stopping act of theirs was convincing from the beginning?" I had a puzzled look and stared at him. He said, "That's why they used you all these

years as their doll. To run around and do their dirty work for them while they monitored you.” I was confused and I didn’t know how to respond.

He continued his story and said, “The door after a few minutes opened, and you were on the floor with blood near your head. I thought you were dead. I wanted to get you, but then I saw Ellen too. She stared at John with a long metal rod in her hand. John said loudly, ‘No, no, no, no!’ Ellen didn’t say anything for a few seconds. Then she said, ‘She knows it’s not real now and is slowly stopping it. I had to end her.’”

The story seemed awkward, and it didn’t make sense. Where did she come from? I was next to the door and the hallway was not wide. I only turned back for a second before I was struck. No human being was there. Was I only imagining what happened? Boris kept staring at me, wondering what I was thinking. I said, “How long did this scenario take?”

He stared at me and said, “About five minutes from beginning to end.”

I was in there for more than five minutes. I walked slowly down the black sided hallway and it took me more than five minutes, and the conversation with Sara, more than ten minutes. Was I only imaging things? Was it all in my head?

Boris continued, “John kneeled on the floor beside you. He said, ‘She is dead. Lina is dead. Of all people.’ Ellen didn’t appear amused and threw the rod on the floor beside you and John got up and said to Ellen, ‘She has been at service for all these years. She did what was ordered of her and ...’ Ellen interrupted him and said, ‘Yes. She did her job but did not complete what she was told to the very end. Something went wrong and she failed.’”

I didn't understand anything and Boris kept staring at me. He continued, "Joseph spoke and said, 'What do we do with her now?' John looked confused and did not say anything. Ellen spoke and said, 'Leave her inside and shut this door. We need to leave this place and find Dana.' They closed the door and started walking towards me. I quickly hid in the corner and I took my gun out. "

"I waited, but I heard a door to the right that was hidden open. I turned and Zack looked at me. He took his gun out and started shooting at me. I shot back and all of them went in and the door shut. I was too late. I stared at the hidden door then back at the medium sized door. I approached it and I saw it was not completely shut. The rod propped it open."

Boris seemed breathless, irritated, but he continued.

"I opened the door, and I kneeled beside you. I checked your pulse and it was faint. You were not dead, but reaching that point. I lifted you up and saw that the left side of your head was bleeding, and the floor had a large puddle of blood. You were bleeding to death."

He turned, stared at the wall and then back at me, "I carried you out of the Project Merge sector and near the glass room. My troops looked at me and you, and led me to the ward. I used a security transponder that was on my wrist to speak to my authority and told them what happened. They told me to find Dana immediately. I didn't know where to search for her, but the scientists said that they will take her to the ward. I looked from room to room and then asked a doctor that was standing near a door where Dana might be. He said she is passed this door, and I tried to pass him to go in and he stopped me. He said, 'She didn't

make it. Her wound was too deep and she bled internally to death.”

I didn't know how to respond. He seemed distant and for a second, his dark blue eyes seemed like an ocean that was slowly building a large wave of water.

Chapter 9

Dana

Boris was a man with a few words. I couldn't comprehend the way he told a long story like that with so much detail. He looked at my hands that tucked furiously the edge of the bed cover and said, "Dana said to me to help someone, her. Remember?" I nodded and said, "Who was she talking about?" He said, "You." I hesitated and asked him, "How did you know she was talking about me?" He said, "She pointed her finger from her good side at you. I saw it and lifted up her right away."

I stared at him and I didn't know what to say.

He said, "They must have been looking for her; Ellen and the others. But she was in the ward and dead. Someone else killed her, obviously."

My heart kept beating fast, and I lowered my head. Boris lifted my chin up and said, "I would have saved you no matter what."

A knock on the door startled me. Boris looked at the door, shifted and stood up. He looked at the panel on the side. He opened the door and a machine stood there with a tray of food. The machine said, "This is the breakfast. All four food groups are on the tray. She must eat them all in order to regain her health and the blood she has lost." Boris said, "Yes, and she needs to also be left alone and not be disturbed by anyone or anything." He grabbed the tray and shut the door hard. He didn't seem fond of machines.

He approached me holding the tray and sat down with it. He lifted back his long sleeve and a wide black band with a small panel appeared. He placed it over the food and moved his arm from left

to right. He then said, “The food is fine. It’s organic and safe from any chemical and ready for consumption.”

I looked at him and then the food tray. Organic? Of course it was organic. The Triangle compound had small and round farm areas that grew our crops and provided for our small world. What did he think? Someone may have injected the food with chemicals to kill me? I said to him, “Am I that valuable that food in a tray is suspicious to you?”

Boris handed me the tray and said, “I need to keep you safe.”

I think Boris was consumed in this notion that I need to be protected at all times because I can’t defend myself. I said angrily, “I can protect myself. I am level five authority of defence in the Intelligence compound. I ...” He interrupted me and said, “Yes. That’s why you can’t protect yourself. You were trained to protect others but obviously not you. ” I stared at him and he said, “You are a powerful little thing, but you have an instinct to protect others. You forget that you are human and need protection too. Look at what happened to you.”

With anger I said, “I was brutally attacked. I wasn’t expecting it and there was no room near the door for Ellen to strike me with the metal rod.” Boris eyed me suspiciously and said, “Go on.” I covered my mouth with my hands. I said too much, but it didn’t make sense. He kept staring at me and said, “Who hit you then?”

Chapter 10

Confession

The room felt like it was spinning. It was the same feeling when I spun around grabbing the street lights. Boris removed the breakfast tray from my lap and placed it on the table next to me. He looked at the screen above me, and then stared at me. He said, "You have to tell me. I am the only one on your side." I tried to focus on him, but everything kept spinning. I removed my hands off my mouth and I tried to talk. He eyed me and said, "Why can't you tell me? Don't you trust me?" I was shocked, and suddenly, the room stopped spinning and I was able to focus on him.

With an angry tone I blurted out, "Trust you? I barely know you!"

He lifted his head higher and moved his body backwards leaning on the chair. He frowned, but kept looking at me. I said, "Our population is at 1988 now, and I know that number will keep going down. It has for the past five years and we don't know how to stop it." I continued, "What I think happened or what I say is unimportant. Our world needs scientists and researchers to help repopulate this earth that we have damaged for decades. Dana, and every innocent scientist is more important than me."

I felt a sharp pain in my head, and I tried to continue talking. Boris stared at me and said, "You need to rest. You are in deep pain as your face is showing it. Relax now." He shifted me back and lowered the top part of the bed. He tapped on the screen above me, and I closed my eyes and fell into a deep sleep.

Chapter 11

Warning

My eyes were slowly opening, and I could feel a light breeze brushing my face. I opened my eyes and I was shocked by my surroundings. I was in the middle of an endless green field. I stood up, and I spun around to look at all directions. I was alone. I tried walking forward, but something tugged me back. I looked back and no one was there. I stood still. I didn't want to move any more, then suddenly, large birds appeared and approached me. They were flying right above my head in a circle. I didn't know what I should do now. Should I run?

Then the birds vanished, and the blue skies instantly turned dark gray. A figure from a far was walking towards me. I couldn't move. My body was stuck. I waited, and the figure came closer but was blurry. Then suddenly, he came into focus. It was Sam. But he died a long time ago. How did he come back? Why a man that I barely knew, I was married to for two weeks, come back from the dead?

Sam looked at me with a concerned face. He finally said, "Sara. Don't leave me."

I stared back at him and I couldn't reply. Why was he calling me Sara?

He then lifted his arm and came closer to my face. He touched my face and applied gentle strokes with his fingers and kissed my lips. He stopped suddenly, moved back, walked away and disappeared.

The dark gray skies turned black, and it felt like everything around me was black too, even the grass below my feet. I heard a noise coming from behind me, and I tried turning around. When I did, a

large wooden paddle hit the right side of my face and I screamed. I touched my face and looked at my hand, it was covered with blood. I kept saying, “No. No.” I kneeled down and touched the ground. I kept saying, “No. Why me. Leave me alone.”

I couldn't feel pain. I couldn't feel anything. Then a large door appeared in front of me. It didn't have any knobs or handles. It was plain, solid, and dark gray in colour. I heard a voice and someone said, “Sara. Leave.”

I didn't know what to do, but the voice I heard sounded like an order, and I had to get up. When I tried to walk towards the door, someone kept tugging me back. I turned around, and a little girl, barely four years of age, was there. I recognized her from the photo papers in my room. She was the younger version of me.

She wore a white and pink dress. She had white tights, white shoes, her hair was long, and her arms were at her back. She had a happy expression and said, “Why are you leaving? Stay.”

I didn't know what to do anymore, but I tried to open my mouth to say something, and a metal rod struck my head hard. I woke up and screamed.

Chapter 12

The Past

I opened my eyes and I was in the room again laying on the bed. I tried to catch my breath like I was running for miles non-stop. When I did, Boris, looking at the panel above my head said, "You have unusual heart beats."

He then looked at me and kept staring. It seems that he had something to say, but I only wanted water. He grabbed the cup of water and approached me. He held the cup near my lips and tilted it slowly. I sipped slowly and stopped after a few seconds. He lowered the cup and placed it back on the table. He then said, "It was just a dream. No one will hurt you."

I panicked, and I looked at him with a scared expression on my face. He then said, "Why did you scream like that?" I said, "I screamed to wake up." He said, "You were screaming non-stop for over ten minutes. It was a low scream and your face looked like it was in pain. I tried to wake you up, but you kept saying, 'I am not her. I am not Sara.'"

I felt my heart stopping and my throat was slowly collapsing. I was talking in my sleep? He knows now. He knows about her. He said, "You also screamed Sam's name." My eyes felt heavy and watery. I started crying and streaks of tears covered my face. He said, "For a level five authority position defending the most intelligent people in our world, you are quite sensitive like a child." A child I thought. Did I say anything else while I was dreaming and I saw myself as a child? He then said, "It was just a dream. Sam will never come back."

His tone was different, and I didn't understand why he was concerned with Sam. Why did it seem to bother him?

After a minute of thinking, I finally said, "In my dream, Sam thought I was someone else." He unexpectedly said, "You always were to him." I shifted my head and looked at him. Tears slowly stopped and I said, "What?" He looked at the panel above me, and looked back staring at me. He had a low voice that was almost like a whisper and said, "You were never meant to be with him. Your aptitude scores were none-confirmative and they thought that John's nephew is best suited for you and your level of authority in the Intelligence compound. They said it was for the greater good of this world."

I didn't know how to respond. Why was Boris telling me this? How did he know? About me of all people?

In our world, at 20 years of age, we are required to take an aptitude test that examined our social behaviour, intellect, and reaction to various scenarios of danger. It was a grueling exams that spanned the duration of three days, with barely any hours of proper sleep. We were in a closed room sitting on a chair with wires on our bodies, and we wore thick goggles that had a screen in them where we reacted to what we saw. It was required by all of us since we reached a milestone in the level of maturity in our years of classroom and field training.

After the test was finished, the next day in the morning, at 08:00 am, each of us waited in a long wide room. We were called in alphabetically by first name, and we had to stay in that room until everyone was finished. There were twelve of us. There were five females and seven males. After Lee, a heavy built average sized man, a lady holding a screen tablet called out my name. I stood up and walked towards the door. No one was looking at me because

they kept staring at the ground while I was walking. I approached the lady and she gestured for me to go in. I complied and walked in. The room was small and square shaped, with three men sitting on chairs with a long desk in front of them. They each had a screen and looked at me. The lady sat down in the last seat next to an old gray haired man and said, "Sit."

I sat on the empty chair and kept my gaze on her. The old man next to her started speaking slowly and breathlessly, "Our world is small, but slowly growing because as humans, we need to survive and purify this earth that is damaged by our ancestors. We can't keep fighting each other for power. It will destroy us." He wiped his forehead with his hand and looked down at his screen. He kept looking down and continued speaking, "Our world needs three types of people that excel in the three fields of social behaviour, intellect, and defence. Everyone possesses all three at a certain level but excels highly in one and it shows in their results. Some of their results are close, or highly excel in two or three. We ask them to choose what they want." He stopped for a few seconds.

I kept looking at him and wondered when he will tell me my results. He looked at me and said, "Lina, we require you to hold your new position as defence of the Intelligence compound." I thought to myself, "What about the infantry in the Red compound? They are there to defend us all." I shrugged, and I wanted to speak, but he continued. "From the health test results you were required to take last week, a marriage companion was chosen. Sam Myr, 21, of the Intelligence compound is best suited for you. If you object, and you have someone else in mind, we require that you forget that relation."

I stared at him and I was lost for words.

He kept talking, "It may seem that we are forcing this upon you. We only suggest suitors for everyone based on their results to have a successful marriage. We don't want a corrupt society with mental instability that has spawned behind closed doors. We are also delighted that our young minds choose their companion that they love dearly. Their children will be happier as a result, and they will grow up in a happy and successful household. However, in your case, it is required that you immediately go to the Intelligence compound under General John Myr's orders and not wait for your peers outside. He will be your direct supervisor from now on."

He paused for a moment and looked down at his screen. He then looked up and said, "You may leave now."

My curiosity was evident, and I didn't comprehend what just happened. I looked at him and said, "What were my test results?" He squinted his eyes and stared at me. He didn't seem like he wanted to say anything anymore, but suddenly he said, "They were unusual. You may leave now."

Why did I remember that now? I was so lost and I looked at Boris and he was staring at me. He said, "I can't believe you don't look like you know. Of all people, you should have known."

I wanted to leave or hide, but I couldn't. I wanted to change this conversation, but my eyes looked at him, and then at his necklace. A bird was hanging from it at its end and it kept moving back and forth. He said, "Look at me!" I quickly said, "Why did you not marry anyone till now? Did you not like their recommendation?"

He straightened his posture and stared at me for a long time. I wanted to break this awkward silence and I said, "Well?" He finally said, "I was in love with someone. But it was not meant to be."

Chapter 13

Forgotten

A sharp object felt like it was stabbing my throat and I couldn't breathe. Boris? He was in love with someone? He had the ability to show compassion and gratitude to someone? What did he tell her? Where did they meet? Who was she? Was she our age?

I looked at him and said, "What's her name?"

He brushed off his nose and shifted his head looking at the door and said, "It doesn't matter anymore. She left."

I was confused, and I didn't know if I should ask him about her anymore. I just kept staring at his necklace. I raised my arm and got closer to his chest. I grabbed the end of his necklace and looked at the small bird. He looked at me concerned and said, "It was my mother's. It is the only thing I have from her." I was still holding the necklace and said, "What about your father?" He pursed his lips and then said, "I don't really know him. He died when I was two years old."

He kept staring at the door. He stood up, looked down at me, and walked towards the door. He opened the door and walked out and then closed it. I was all alone. Wasn't Boris supposed to watch me and never leave my sight? What happened?

Chapter 14

Escape

Why did I feel scared? I wanted to hide so no one can find me. I felt vulnerable and I needed someone to always be with me. But what did I do? What did I need help with? After a few minutes of thinking, and noticing that Boris may never come back, I raised my body forward and sat vertically on the bed. I shifted my body to the left and lowered my legs until I touched the floor. I only had socks on. Where are my boots?

I tried to get up, but I felt that my head was heavy. I had one wire in my right wrist with a white bandage around it. I slowly removed the bandage, and then removed the wire that had a needle at its edge of it out of my skin. The panel above me turned black, and then words appeared, "Female, 30, Lina Ard is not connected to the system. Extremely Dangerous."

I was dangerous? Or not properly cared for was dangerous? I didn't know, but I tried to stand up. I felt weak and I had little balance. I tried to stand still, but my hands quickly touched the wall so I won't lose my balance.

I looked at what I was wearing. I wore blue pants and a blue t-shirt that had a white collar. I wondered who changed my clothes. I also wondered how long I have been here. I kept one hand leaning on the wall, and I walked slowly to the door. I looked at the panel, and the top half had a camera showing the other side of the door. At the bottom half, it had the following: Lina Ard. 30. Extremely Dangerous.

It says I was dangerous again. I looked back at the panel, and it had almost the same warning displayed. I didn't care, and I looked

at the camera. No one was outside and it seemed safe. I shifted towards the door handle and swung the door open. I walked slowly and passed the door entry way. The room was at the end. The hallway ended here and there was a wall to my right and in front of me. I walked a few steps, and then I closed the door. There was a panel next to the door. I guess I can come out, but I don't know the key code to go back in. I turned, shifted my body and saw a long hallway. I kept leaning on the wall and walked slowly.

After a few steps, there was an opening perpendicular to the hallway. I tried to get closer to it and I slowly leaned my head forward to look down it. I saw someone sitting on a chair with his eyes covered with his left hand. His right hand had a gun and he kept turning it round and round. It was Boris. I leaned my back on the wall. What should I do? Should I confront him? Why was he sitting there?

I then heard a lady talking and walking closer. She said, "Boris! Did you eat breakfast yet?" We are still in the morning I thought.

He said, "I don't want to eat."

She said, "You have to stop sitting alone and go to the cafeteria and converse with other human beings. It's good for you. Its medicine that not even machines can recommend." She giggled and he said, "I don't think I can. I have to watch someone."

She said, "Who? Lina? She was never your problem or Red's problem. Why did you bring her here?"

I tried to not gasp and keep my breathing at a steady pace. She said, "You need to stop worrying about her. Boris. Are you listening?"

He finally said, "I am the only one capable of watching her." I tried to keep my balance and stay leaning on the wall, then she said, "You know, you could have told Alex and Beth that it was not your place or high status to watch her. She ..." Boris interrupted her and said, "I want to."

She said, "Suit yourself Boris. You know it may cost you your life. They don't have mercy towards you or anyone."

He said, "She is worth it to me." She said, "Right? Worth it? Who is she any ways? She is a traitor to us all and you only brought here to justify to high authority that she needs protection for some unknown reason that I, nor anyone in Red can understand. If it was anyone else, they would have been dead. A little shot between their eyes by *you*."

I wanted to escape, go back to my room or try to cross the opening and keep walking. I didn't know what to do. The woman said, "Boris. Boris?" He said quietly, "I think it is best that you leave Vicky."

Vicky's footsteps were getting fainter as she walked away. I tried to lean back slowly and look at Boris from the edge. He was sitting on the chair staring at Vicky while she was walking away. Why was she so informal with him and just called him Boris? No sir or general? Who were Alex and Beth? I shifted back and I leaned on the wall. My head felt heavy, and then I heard footsteps approach me. I couldn't physically run. Boris, with his tall stature looked at me. He said, "I don't think you want to escape. No matter how fast you run."

Chapter 15

Mercy

I couldn't breathe. Boris looked at me, and I looked down on the gun he was holding. He looked down at his gun and lifted it. He said, "It's only a gun. You always carry one too." I looked at him and he said, "What is wrong? Were you listening to every word we said? Do you want me to repeat the conversation I had with Vicky?"

He sounded serious and I couldn't talk. He said, "Do you want to go back to your room, which I recommend because of your head, or we can go somewhere else?" I gasped and said, "Somewhere else?" He nodded and looked at me. His gun was still lifted, and he said, "Where do you want to go?"

He was losing his patience, and lowered his gun and placed it on his side. He said, "I will help you back. Can you walk?" I kept looking at him, stunned and I felt dizzy. He said, "I will take you back to your room. I don't think you can walk anymore." He lifted me and carried me back to the room. He came closer to the door and lowered his body a bit to tap the key code on the panel. The door opened.

He walked in and closed the door behind him, and walked to the bed. He placed me on the bed and said, "I will hook you back up in a minute." He pulled back his sleeve, and tapped with his index finger on the small panel on his wrist. After a minute he said, "I don't think we should stay here much longer, but I can't risk your health. I have been ordered to have you leave this compound soon."

“Who wants me to leave?” I said with short breaths. He finally lifted his head and looked at me and said, “The Triangle Authority.” I said, “Why do they want me? What have I done?”

He frowned and said, “You have something Intelligence needs, and will kill you, as they tried two days ago to end you, and the Triangle Authority believe you are a threat to everyone.”

I felt small. I was only an object that is used by higher authority to throw around. He said, “Don’t worry. I will not take you to the Triangle compound or Intelligence. You have to trust me where I take you. They will be here soon to take you, but ...” I interrupted him and said, “Where will you take me? Why do they want me? I don’t understand. What did I do?” Boris hesitated for a few seconds and said, “I am only ordered to protect you.”

“I still don’t understand,” I said with a sharp tone of voice. Boris looked at me and said, “It’s not what you did. You were always a good and compliant little girl. It’s what’s in your mind is what they want. It seems you have failed to keep something a secret and wanted to end your services.”

I placed my hands on my knees and squeezed them really hard. Boris noticed my agitation and the panel on his wrist started flashing and beeping loudly. He said, “Come on. Let’s go.”

Chapter 16

A New Place

He lifted me and headed to the door. He opened it and went through the door way. He didn't close the door. He walked in a fast pace, almost sprinting, and I squeezed my hands with my arms around his neck. I said, "I can run. I really can." Boris said, "We don't have time." He kept racing straight in a long hallway and then, when we reached almost the end of it, he opened the door to the left. It was a stair way, and he went up. I was confused. So am I leaving this place or staying? Am I in the basement and heading out upstairs?

After Boris sprinted two flights of stairs, he opened the door and sprinted down another long hallway. Then, a door at the end opened. He went in and stopped. The door closed behind him. The room had five other people in lab coats. Boris walked and placed me down on a medium sized white coach. He said, "There are no cameras here or in the hallways leading here. You are safe here. I will go talk to Triangle Authority now."

I looked at him, and then turned around and stared at the people in the room. I said with a scared voice, "What's going on? Where am I?"

Boris walked and sat next to me and said, "Not everyone who possess a high level of intelligence goes to the Intelligence compound. They want to defend first and help our world too."

A lady with small spectacles, long brown hair with gray streaks spoke, "Hello Lina. My name is Nadia. We can help you with the bandages on your head. They are getting lose and you need new ones." She walked towards me and I panicked. She stopped and

hesitated to come closer. Boris said, "She means to help. That's all. No one can harm you while I am here. Trust me."

I didn't know what was going on. I felt scared, breathed loudly and heavily. Boris shifted closer to me and said, "Calm down. Calm down Lina." I stared at him and my eyes slowly closed and I was unconscious.

Chapter 17

Who do I trust?

My eyes were still closed, but I heard people talking a few feet away from me. A man said, “She can’t stay asleep.” Another woman with a concerned voice said, “But she looks so peaceful. Like a child. She needs to rest.” The man snorted and said, “Boris can’t keep protecting her. She is a danger to him.”

The woman said, “Boris, of all people in this world can only help her.” The man said, “He can’t stop her thoughts. Maybe her actions, but what she is thinking? What she is seeing? He can’t possibly do anything anymore.” The woman said, “We don’t know if it’s true. Boris would have told us and not brought her here.” The man spoke with a loud voice, “Boris is delusional! He has been for ten years. He never recovered from that day and he will always ...”

A door loudly opened and hit the wall. There were loud footsteps and they suddenly stopped. Boris spoke, “If you want to talk loudly, do it somewhere else. She can hear you.”

I tried to open my eyes but I couldn’t. What was happening? What were they all saying? Boris said loudly, “Go back to your work!”

Small footsteps were slowly fading away and the door closed. Other footsteps were getting close to me, and someone sat next to me on the edge of the couch. I tried to open my eyes slowly, and Boris was there staring at the door. He then said in a low tone, “I know you heard them. They don’t know what they are talking about.”

I opened my eyes all the way and then he looked at me. He said, "What you heard was not true. None of it." He then hesitated for a few seconds, grabbed my hands and said, "Is your head still pounding? Can you walk?"

I tried to lift my head, but I had a hard time. Boris put his arm around my shoulder and tried to lift my head up. I was getting closer to him, almost to his chest. He kept moving me closer, and he hugged me, tightly. He said, "I will never let anything happen to you Lina. Please trust me."

Chapter 18

A Cry for Help

Boris slowly let go of me and said, “You have to come with me. You have to walk. I will help you.” He lifted me up slowly, and I felt a heavy weight on my head. He put his arms around my waist and slowly walked. He said, “Lean on me and walk slowly.” He approached a glass paneled door where it seemed he told the man and woman earlier to go through. He opened the door and walked in with me. I saw a large lab room with the five people I saw earlier sitting on stools and looking at screens. The room didn’t have anything on the tables. The tables were empty. A man, brown haired, green eyed with a thick beard said, “I don’t think she is physically ready. Mentally either.”

I tried to stand still, but Boris said, “There is no time. Is it ready?”

The man said, “Yes. Are you gonna go in with her? Can you handle it Boris?”

Boris said, “Yes.”

The man said, “We will get all the equipment ready so we can start.”

I didn’t know what they were discussing. What am I? An experiment? Boris tried walking, but I didn’t bulge. He said, “Are you ok? Do you want me to carry you?”

I pushed him away as hard as I could that I went back and almost fell. I said angrily, “Leave me alone!” I tried to run back towards the door and Boris with a loud voice said, “The door is locked. You can’t ...” I quickly said, “I just want to leave. Leave this place! Leave this nightmare!”

I kept banging on the door until my hands turned red and they started hurting me. Tears fell on my cheeks and I said without realizing what was coming out of my mouth, "I'm not Sara. I'm not Sara."

I kneeled on the floor and kept chanting that I was not Sara. Boris came near me and kneeled down. He said, "You have to trust me. I will not leave you alone."

He looked calm, almost compassionate and had a look of remorse on his face. He said, "I can't force you to do anything, but you have to trust me. I think you will feel better after it's done."

I stared at him. He looked back at the five people sitting on the stools and then, with one swift move, he lifted me up. He walked fast towards the end of the room and turned right to a small entry way with another glass paneled door. He yelled, "Open the door."

The door slid slowly to the left. Boris stood still and he was almost shaking and walked in slowly. The door shut quickly. What I saw next was a large bright white room. It appeared to be illuminating. The room had tiny sparkles shining everywhere, and then, Boris walked slowly. He didn't say a word but kept walking straight at a steady pace. We approached another door at the end of the room and then he slowly said, "Whatever you see is not what it seems. You have to realize you created it and you can stop it."

Chapter 19

Time

The door opened slowly and Boris waited. He almost had his head lowered and sincerely said, "I am here to help you. Even if it means I will die."

He looked at me and smiled.

The door finally opened and he slowly walked in. The door slammed shut, and Boris seemed he was panicking. He hissed, "What!" Then I looked back and realized the room was black and empty. Boris slowly put me down and held my hand tightly. What was he afraid of?

We stood there for what seemed like minutes ticking down, and then there was a loud bang to my right. I turned to the direction of the sound, and birds were fast approaching. I tried to run but they quickly covered me and started pecking me. I screamed so loud. "Stop it! Boris! Boris!" Suddenly, all the birds were gone. I looked around and Boris was gone.

I panicked and my heart felt like it was pounding out of my chest. I tried to slither back, but I couldn't find a wall to lay on. I didn't know what to do. My screams were pointless, and then, a figure from a far started approaching me. The figure had an illuminating light surrounding it. I thought, "Am I dead?"

The figure came closer and it was a man. I didn't know who it was. He was wearing a suit. A pair of black pants, black jacket, white shirt and a red tie. He almost had a bald head. His eyes were brown and wide. His face had noticeable wrinkles. He stopped and looked at me sharply and said, "Who do you choose?"

I looked at him and said, "What?"

The man said, "Why can't you decide?"

I said, "I have no idea what to choose."

The man said, "Boris or you?"

I said, "What?"

The man repeated, "Boris or you?"

I didn't know how I should respond. What will happen if I chose myself? What if I chose Boris? Maybe he will go back and not die because of me. He said he might die, but I am worth it. No, I can't do this to him. I can't be selfish. I frantically said with a scared tone of voice, "Boris. Boris."

The man said, "Are you sure?"

I hesitated. Was he taunting me and wanted me to rethink my choice?

I said, "Yes. Boris."

The man smiled and said, "Very well."

The man walked back and disappeared. I didn't know what to do. Suddenly, I felt a hand on my shoulder, and I turned around. It was Boris. I quickly jumped on him and hugged him tightly. He said, "Wow. What happened to your head bandage?"

I let go of him and touched my head; the bandage was gone. Boris shifted to look at my head on the left side. He said, "The bruise is not there anymore." I started giggling and then laughed hysterically. He said, "Why are we here?"

I looked at him and then turned around. It was an old building, four stories high and the front door was damaged. It seemed that he knew this place. He said, "We must go back." I said, "Go where?" He grabbed my hand, turned us around and started running. Then a wall appeared that was high and endless, and we stopped. I turned, and the wall appeared from every direction. I said, "What now?"

Boris, with a scared voice said, "It's not real. Just say it's not real Lina."

I looked at him and at the wall. He impatiently said, "Do you want to kill me?"

I didn't know how a wall can kill him, but suddenly, ceramic blocks started falling from the sky. It seemed that the wall was collapsing down and leaning towards us. Boris pushed me down, he kneeled down and covered me tightly.

There was loud banging on the floor from the ceramic blocks, and suddenly, the sound stopped. I tried to lift my head up and get out of Boris's tight grip, but I couldn't. I said, "Boris. Let go of me. It stopped." I tried to push myself out and when I did, Boris fell. His eyes were shut and he didn't move. I tried to wake him up. I shook him hard, and then a voice from behind me said, "Why did you choose him?"

I turned around, and it was me. It was her. It was Sara.

She came closer and said, "He is dead."

I said, "No. Why him?"

She stared at me and said nothing.

My heart was beating fast, and I looked down at Boris. He was still. He looked like he was sleeping. I touched his face and it felt warm. I started crying.

She said, "Why are you sad? You wanted him dead."

I lifted my head quickly and said, "No I didn't."

She said, "You chose him."

I said, "What?"

She smirked and said, "Do you want him back?"

I said, "How?"

She said, "Time. Remember. You control time."

I stared at her. All I know that Boris died for me and I had to do something. Anything. Was it only a dream? Was it real?

She said, "Let's go back and undue this mess."

I looked at her, and I didn't want to leave Boris behind. She lifted her right arm upward waiting for me to hold it. I walked closer to her, lifted my arm and was ready to hold her hand. A voice behind me loudly said, "No!"

It was Boris. He was awake.

Sara ran to me and held my hand tightly. She took my other hand and said, "We have to go back and redo everything!" She pressed hard on my hands and a light emerged from them. It was bright and almost blinding.

I fell on the ground, and she disappeared. I looked back, and Boris was kneeling with his head facing the ground. I quickly ran to him and laid on the floor near him. I tried to grab his shoulder and he

quickly tossed them off. He looked at me with a menacing look and said, "You have to die!"

He jumped and grabbed my neck. He squeezed it hard with his fist and I couldn't breathe. He let go of one hand for a second, and lifted a small knife. He said, "This will be quick and painless."

I gave in and closed my eyes tightly. I thought that being killed is an honour to what has been done. Dana was killed. She was stabbed by a knife and I tried to save her. Wait I thought. Boris does not like knives. He thinks they are primitive. I then opened my eyes and it was her. It was Sara. I raised my arm and grabbed her wrist that was holding the knife. I pushed her back with my feet. She fell backwards. She then said, "Why won't you die! If you die, I will die!"

I looked at her not believing what she has said. She pushed herself up but stayed kneeling on the ground. I said, "Where is Boris?"

She shrugged and the knife in her hand disappeared. She said in a low voice, "You chose him over me. Why? Who is more important? What has he done for you?"

I said, "Where is he? Bring him back!"

She looked at me and spoke softly, "I tried to stay good and follow orders. I did everything they wanted me to do. I can't keep doing this. I have to die."

I said, "I don't have time to hear your cryptic banter. Where is Boris?"

She said, "Does it matter?"

I said, "Yes. Tell me now."

She walked closer, I stood up and walked back. She said, “He brought you here because you have something he wants, and you chose him. I don’t know why you have sympathy for him. He only wanted to use you. To know how you did it. He wants to know how you stopped every scenario you saw during the aptitude test and altered the scenes to achieve a perfect mark.”

I stared at her in disbelief. She continued, “Him and other people have been trying for years to build different scenarios and try to cross a world in their mind they can alter. But... they... can’t!”

I finally said, “You are lying. This isn’t true. None of it is true.”

She grinned at me and said, “Why are they afraid of you?”

I said, “What?”

She walked closer and said, “You are stuck here forever. You built this world. You wanted to be someone else. You are in 2011 AD. You are just sleeping. Dreaming.” Then she laughed hysterically.

I shook my head. I didn’t understand why she switched from Boris till 200 years in the past. Is she bipolar?

She continued, “How long you want to keep denying who you are, and where you are.”

I said loudly, “This isn’t real. None of it is real. I want to leave. I want to wake up.”

She finally said, “Time will only tell.”

Chapter 20

Foiled

Sara suddenly disappeared, and the ground started shaking. I couldn't stand still anymore, I fell backwards and hit my head. It continued shaking and then it stopped. I raised my head up, and I was in a green field. It was the same field that I dreamt about earlier. This time, I was wary of my surroundings. Will the birds appear? Will Sam appear? Will I as a child appear? I waited, and nothing appeared at all.

I finally stood up and looked around. I tried walking slowly, and nothing tugged me back. I kept walking and suddenly a door appeared. I stood in my spot and didn't move. I waited, but there was no voice. And then, the door opened. I didn't move and just stared at the opening. It was dark and I couldn't see anything beyond it.

I wanted to leave this place. I walked slowly towards the door, and then I heard a voice say, "Do you want it to stop?" I turned around and Boris was there. His face had long streaks of scars and blood dripping down of it. I tried to walk in his direction and he said, "Stop. You don't want to be with me. You have been killing me for ten years!"

I froze. I didn't know how to respond. Was Sara right? Did my aptitude test cause him such agony? Has he been trying all this time to find an answer to how I changed the scenarios to perfect my test results? What if it was true? What if I could change what I see? I closed my eyes tightly and imagined I was in my apartment. My small apartment that had a single bed, a small couch, a table, a tiny kitchen and a bathroom. I was laying down on my bed hugging

the pillow. I wanted to feel warm and safe. Then suddenly, I felt a tap on my shoulder and I opened my eyes.

It was Boris, but this time, he didn't have any scars and his face was clear. He smiled at me and said, "You did it." He leaned closer to me and kissed my lips. It felt comforting and something was familiar to me, and then he stopped and looked at me. His face changed and he was angry. He pushed me down on my bed and jumped on me. He grabbed my hands and said, "Lina!" I screamed trying to free my hands. I couldn't. I just looked at him and my eyes watered. His face changed and he was no longer angry but sad. He said, "We need to go back. Why can't you go back? How long you want us to stay here? Is this what you want?"

I didn't know what to say. I felt his grip getting looser but he kept my hands in place. He said, "I want to go back. We can't keep doing this. You and I can't keep playing this endless game."

I tried to speak, but there was a loud bang. Boris looked back and said, "You have to get us out of here. I can't do it by myself. I will die."

I finally said, "Boris. Kill me."

He looked back at me and said, "I can't. I can't."

I said, "You have to so we can wake up."

He stared at me and closed his eyes tightly. He let go of my hands and got off of me. He opened his eyes and stood next to the bed, and pulled out a gun from his waist. I said, "Do it! End it now!"

He raised the gun and pointed it at my head. He closed his eyes tightly and then he shot.

Chapter 21

Scenarios

I opened my eyes and breathed heavily, and I heard the five individuals come running in from the door. One man said, "We have to wake him up!" I looked to my side and Boris was laying still on the floor. The bearded man approached me and raised my upper body straight up and said, "Why didn't you wake him up Lina?" I hesitated and I said, "I did. I did. I told him to shoot me to wake up."

The man looked at me and gasped. He was frightened and said, "You did what!"

The others turned around with scared faces and one woman said, "No!"

The man said, "Why did you do that? He would never shoot you. You controlled him. That's not part of the plan."

I looked at him and said, "What WAS the plan? To go back in time. To control time!"

He shook his head and then stared at me with disbelief. He finally said, "Lina. You collected and stored data in your mind. It was a plan to end all machines' power. Remember machines exist to help us. Why destroy the help we need for survival?"

I said, "I don't recall I ever did. Where did you get this information from?"

He said, "The data was implanted in your mind. You analyzed it, shared this information with certain individuals, and stored in your mind its progress."

I said, "I don't understand."

He said sarcastically, "Your mind is a data collection warehouse, like a machine's."

I stared at him.

He continued, "The only way to get that data from you is to go into your mind and go through each scenario. I have no idea how they did it or took control of you. Boris went in with you because he thought he could stop that defence that was built in your mind, understand the plan and know where they are planning to strike." The man looked back at Boris and said, "He knew it was dangerous. Nearly impossible to achieve, but he risked it anyways."

I tried to say something. Anything, but another man near Boris said, "We have to try and wake him up."

I was shaking and I wasn't able to feel my hands. I said, "Why me?"

The bearded man looked back at me and said, "They didn't want machines or any man-made data collection network to know of this plan. That's why they monitor the results of the aptitude test. They are always looking for brilliant minds. You are smarter than any machine Lina, and you were always aware that it was just a test and changed the scenarios for your pleasure and success. That's why it is easier to store data in your mind because it knows how to switch instantly from one scenario to another to ensure success and protection. General James, General Otto and Captain Evelyn found out quickly and made you go to the Intelligence compound to protect you. To protect that part of your mind that controls the outcome of each scenario."

This was too much for me to comprehend. I stared blankly at him and then I said, “How did you all know that I was withholding this information in my mind?”

He said, “We didn’t. Dana found out and reported that information to Boris right away the night before she was murdered.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing and I said, “How did she know?”

The man said, “Oh... you may seem tough and very uptight, but you volunteered your time graciously to researchers.”

I didn’t understand and I said, “I don’t get it. I never...” He interrupted me and said, “Well, you talk in your sleep, and Dana was researching how REM sleep can induce a certain chemical in the brain to store memory permanently. She wanted to understand how it can be applied on advanced human-like machines. But in your case, you also talk in your sleep.”

I finally remembered the day before Dana was killed, I was in her laboratory volunteering my time to be her test subject. I wanted to help her analyze the parallels of machine’s data storage and memory collection. I was given a serum that accelerated sleep phases until I reached the REM stage. Did I really break my internal defence and tell her everything?

He crawled back to Boris and said to the others, “We need to wake him up.” He checked his pulse and said, “His pulse is slow, but we just might.”

I quickly said, “What if I tried to wake him up?”

The man said, “I think you have caused enough damage. It won’t work.”

All five of them lifted Boris off the ground and slowly walked through the door. I hurriedly got up and followed them. Then they laid him down on a long reclining chair in a room past the lab. A woman quickly strolled down a machine that had over ten long wires coming out of it. The wires all had a rubber flat edge that she stuck on Boris's forehead and upper chest. She said, "It's ready."

She turned on the machine, and there was a low hissing noise. I didn't understand what they were trying to do, but a man said, "I am not sure about this."

Suddenly, Boris screamed and yelled, "Stop it. I can't shoot her!"

Chapter 22

200 Years

Boris opened his eyes and stared blankly at the ceiling for a few seconds. The woman named Nadia touched his forehead and said, "Boris. You are fine now." He looked at her and said, "Why did she choose me?" She said, "Don't worry anymore. You tried but ..." Boris yelled at her and said, "She doesn't have the plan! Sara does!"

I gasped and I said, "Isn't Sara me though?"

Boris lifted himself up from the leaning chair and stared at me. He said, "Yes and no."

I said, "I don't get it."

He said, "They stored the data in a part of your mind that induces hallucinations and creates ridiculous unbelievable scenarios. You ended up creating Sara in your mind as an escape from reality."

I said, "But how did you know that?"

He said, "Since we were young, you imagined that you had a different life and never accepted reality. I remember that they always took you out of class for two or three days to conduct therapy on you. Don't you remember?"

Why was everything he was saying seemed unrealistic and foreign to me?

He added, "It doesn't seem that you remember anything, but it looks like the therapy worked. You stopped day dreaming and saying crazy things, but you kept it hidden well it seems."

He looked at the others in the room and said, "They must have tried many times to find that part in her mind. Yes, it has a high defence and it's perfect. Sara is powerful and no force can get through, but unless, hmm."

The bearded man said, "What are you thinking Boris?"

Boris shook his head and said, "Never mind." He then stood up, removed all the wires stuck on his body and said, "Lina. We will keep you hidden. No one should access your mind anymore. Not even us."

I wasn't sure if I felt safe or more scared. So Sara wasn't real? I made her up as a defence mechanism?

I started crying and finally said, "I want it to end. Please."

Boris came closer and hugged me tightly. Why was he sincere, sad and afraid? Why was he still hugging me?

The bearded man sarcastically said, "I don't think it's the time to live out your desires Boris."

Boris let go of me and looked at him.

The man said, "We need that plan somehow."

Boris stared at him and didn't say anything.

The man continued, "We can't act on our own."

Boris sighed and said, "Humans are dying. They can't figure out how to recover from their mistakes without the help of machines."

The man loudly said, "And then what? Watch this destruction happen before our eyes and not do anything!"

Boris sighed and said, “Maybe things have to be destroyed completely in order for new life to begin again.”

The man said, “What are you saying Boris? Are you agreeing with this plan to destroy the machines?”

Boris said, “No. I don’t agree with it, but I won’t let them use humans as weapons either.”

I was confused and torn between everything. I slowly kneeled on the ground and said, “Maybe they have been implanting this plan inside my head for years and used my delusions as a way to keep it hidden. That’s why I don’t remember who did it and when. Sara tried to tell me that I must kill her in order for it to stop. Maybe if I kill her, the plan will reveal itself.”

Boris quickly kneeled down and laid his hand on my shoulder and said, “They want you to do that to kill you. It’s a final protocol to destroy all data.”

My eyes widened, I tried to talk and finally said, “How do we get rid of her then?”

He said, “I don’t really know. You made her up and you can unmake her.”

I said excitedly, “That’s it!”

Boris smiled and said, “Sometimes, you think of a solution instantly when fed simple data. You may even be smarter than me too.” He winked at me and said, “You can’t do it with your head bandaged like that. You need to rest. You have a small but inevitable war ahead of you.”

Chapter 23

History

I laid on a bed located in a small room with glass panels across from the lab. Boris was on a couch in the corner of the room with a screen tablet. He was drawn in to it and kept swiping. He stared for a few minutes and then he swiped again. I was wondering what he was so intently focused on. I tried to break the silence and said, "How long do you think I will be laying here for?" He looked up and said, "Until you are better and can think straight without letting physical pain cloud your judgements."

He looked back down and kept swiping. I said, "What are you reading?"

He said, "How we ended up like this."

I said, "Like what?"

He said, "Dependent on machines."

I looked at him and wondered, "Well, machines help us in many ways."

He didn't say anything and kept swiping.

I said, "Without them, our world can't help ailing patients, find accurate medical treatments, build new homes, farm the lands ..."
He interrupted me and said, "They are man-made. They are machines made to perform certain tasks. Yes, we don't have the man power to do everything, but humanity didn't grow and survive all these centuries on *robotic machines*. Something happened that made humans stop progressing and stay innovative. They let machines do all the work for them."

From the look on his face, I needed to stop asking. He then said, “Lina. Machines are only made as a tool to help us progress. I feel that people 112 years ago just stopped thinking and let machines think for them and take over their lives. What happened then?”

I said sarcastically, “Well, if I recall correctly, a small data network was infiltrated and it ended up in the hands of a sadistic group who thought it was a superb idea to alter the way machines operated.”

He said, “Was their hatred intended to end humanity?”

I said, “I don’t think they had the intention for that.”

He stared at me not saying anything.

I said, “They wanted to end world governing powers’ areas.”

He said, “They ended up hurting humanity as well.”

Humans discovered many wonderful things. It’s in our history. They used their minds, imagined the impossible and reached for it. The generation before us decided that everyone should be given a controlled peaceful lifestyle that enabled us to keep progressing and thinking of new discoveries. It’s the way our world will grow, but it hasn’t grown and we are losing great minds for the past five years. We are almost an extinct species.

How our world ended? That menacing destructive group wanted to end areas of governing powers and altered the way machines processed data. The machines analyzed that humans can’t survive without clean air to breathe, and when clouds are formed, it rains and helps clean the air afterwards too. Fresh air after a rain storm! What a thought! However, the alteration of that data changed the way it viewed nature’s survival. It processed that clouds needed some help and was in need for external cleaning. They were

injected with intense cleaning chemicals. The machines ordered drones to carry and release chemical vapours above the clouds. When it rained, its particles instantly attached to our air too. It spread far too quickly to unintended places, and the seas, lakes and rivers were poisoned. Water turned into blood and humans in most areas died from polluted air, lack of water and starvation. Life on earth rapidly died, but a small group of us survived somehow. We were lucky it seems.

Boris looked at me wondering what I was thinking. He looked at his screen and continued swiping and said, “Things are getting worse because of the number of people still dying.”

I said, “How are they dying?”

He looked up, pursed his lips and hesitated for a few seconds and finally said, “Earth has the ability to cleanse itself. It has been for nearly seventy years, but the damage was great and it altered many of the remaining humans’ genetics. People are dying without any ailments. They had several mutations in their genes that caused their instant death.”

I said, “That’s why we were given that health test?”

He stared at me, hesitated a bit and said, “Yes ... umm ...” He continued, “They wanted to ensure that new generations don’t have any mutated genes. They labeled the faulty genes, *Merge Mutated*.”

I said, “Merge mutated? Does it have anything to do with the Project Merge?”

He was baffled from my question and stared at me for a few seconds. He then said, “Project Merge analyzes genetic mutations

in people and tries to find a solution. There are other things they also do there, but I'm not sure what they are."

I said, "Oh?"

He said, "Those individual are at a high risk of instant death, and they currently reside in the Triangle compound. They spend most of their time as test subjects."

I said, "So what do they do? They wait to die? Don't we all wait for that anyways?"

He shook his head and said, "If the genes are carried to an offspring, it will mutate even further, maybe two or three times to what it is now. There is a higher risk of death at a young age. An infant will most likely *not* survive."

I said, "So they isolate these individuals and ensure the new born generation is healthy?"

He said, "Yes, they have to. It's a controlled way to ensure our survival. However, making sure machines are safe too is strange."

I said, "Well, don't we use machines' data analysis and storage to help us solve this issue?"

He said, "They help us find the problem, but not solve it. That's why the Intelligence compound is created. It's not only to ensure that the data from these experiments are kept safe, but humans who try to solve these issues are safe."

I said, "I don't understand why they want to end machines' power. What's their real plan?"

He said, "I don't know. You know."

I said, "Oh?"

He looked at me in bewilderment and said, “There are many things you don’t *appear* to know for a high level authoritative defence of the Intelligence compound. Of all people in this small world, you are the one that must know everything. I’m not sure if the concussion caused some memory damage.” He shook his head in disbelief and said, “Maybe your memory will come back soon. You need to rest.”

I said while laughing, “Maybe while they tried to brain wash me, they removed chunks of my memories too!”

His eyes widened and he stared at me like I said something unbelievably true.

Chapter 24

Memories

The bearded man came rushing in to the room and with shortened breath and said, “Boris, you have to come quick!”

Boris got up and left the room with him to the lab. I couldn’t hear what they were saying, but they seemed to be staring at a screen and arguing. Boris’s expression changed from semi-calm to confused to angry. Then they all ventured to another room past the lab. About five minutes later, they all came back to the lab and Boris kept talking.

I wanted to get up and join them out of curiosity, but I suddenly saw Boris staring through the window at me. I kept looking back at him, but something about his look made my heart beat faster. He said something to the group, then came back to the room and closed the door behind him. He walked near my bed, and sat down on the chair next to the bed. He didn’t say much, but stared at me for a minute.

I tried to break this awkward silence and said, “Was the conversation exciting?”

He said, “Exciting eh?”

I said, “Yeah. Why wasn’t I invited too?”

He didn’t say anything and kept staring at me.

I said, “Did your tongue fall off suddenly?”

He finally said, “I think you need to rest and get back your strength. I will make sure that you’re safe. Don’t worry.”

I said angrily, "Why the hell won't you tell me what is going on!"

He said, "I think you need to rest."

I sat up, swayed to his side and said, "I'm sick of you! I'm sick of this place! You're not trying to protect me. You're holding me hostage like I committed a crime and waiting intently for the final judgement." I pushed the bed cover off me and stood up. Boris looked up at me and said, "Where are you going?"

I was so frustrated and said, "To my doom! Why does it matter anymore?"

I walked to the door and tried to open it. It was locked and I said, "Open the door Boris!"

He got up, walked towards me and stood staring. He said, "I can't let you go out there alone."

I said, "I-don't-care! I want out!"

He looked at the ground and said, "While you and I were in the mind simulation room earlier, the team analyzed the data they retrieved carefully and found out that since you chose me, you were in my mind. You used Sara as a defence tool in my mind too."

Why was he saying it as it was a shameful situation? I said, "So?"

He sighed and said, "You don't seem to care."

I said, "Ok? And tell me something new why don't ya? Can I get out of here while you people analyze useless data and try to figure out something you are not meant to ever know?"

He said, "We are not meant to know eh?"

I said, "No! You nor anyone else can know at all. "

He said, "Not even me?"

I said, "Especially not you!"

He stared at me, moved his arm to the left and got his gun out. He raised it up and aimed it at my forehead.

I stepped back and said, "What do you think you are doing?" Then the door banged loudly and the others in the lab yelled, "No Boris!"

He said, "I have to kill you."

I said, "What?"

He stared.

I said, "If you kill me what would you gain?"

He didn't say anything but kept aiming at me. I said, "Then fine. Kill me. There is nothing worth it anyways. I can't remember anything anymore. I don't know who my parents are or what happened to them. I don't know how Sam died. I don't know who is behind this plan and how they accessed my head. All I know that my life is pointless and I am just a machine to everyone! So kill me and end my misery!"

He kept staring at me and the banging on the door became louder. He lowered the gun and said, "Why did you chose me?"

I looked at him in bewilderment and said, "I didn't want you to die because of me."

His eyes widened then stared down on the ground. He said, "I was living as a child in that building. Why did you let me see it again?"

I hesitated and said, "I didn't mean to. I didn't know. How can I even control what was there? It's your head, not mine!"

He raised the gun and pointed it at my forehead again. He kept pushing it in and said, "I would kill you. I should. I have to!"

The banging was so loud, and suddenly, the door opened and the others jumped on Boris. They tried to grab the gun and moved it away from my head. Nadia said, "You may not care Boris! You don't care what will happen to our world! But we do! She is our only hope!"

My heart beat faster, but not from the relief. On the contrary, I was scared and sad for Boris. He wanted to forget that building and I brought that memory back. I resurfaced it to make him scared, frightened, and his only way to deal with it is to kill me, the catalyst that started it.

I walked closer and the others kept him still by grabbing him tightly. They all looked at me wondering what I was about to do, then I put my arms around Boris and hugged him tightly. I said, "I didn't want you to remember. Sara's defence used your memories knowing you would end her, and me."

Chapter 25

Breaking the Silence

I laid in the bed confused and alone. I was told to go back and rest. That episode of me trying to leave was pointless. No one was sitting in the room with me and the door was closed. I didn't know how long this will continue. Why no one bothered to look for me? Was I not important enough? Was I hidden well from the eyes of the world?

A man came in, he was clean shaven and olive tone skinned. He had hazel eyes, brown hair and wore a long lab coat. He was carrying a tray of food and said, "Food is here and it's delicious!"

He seemed a little pompous, laid the tray on my lap and said, "Just fine dining. Tastes superb and made by our magnificent cooks."

I said, "Hmm... thanks. But why are you so happy?"

He said in a low voice, "Not every day we have a guest."

I said, "Well that's a relief that you consider me a guest and not something else."

He said, "My name is Nizar."

I smiled and said, "Hi. Nice to meet you too."

He said, "Oh don't worry about Boris. He makes such a big deal of little things."

I said, "Oh? He likes to use his gun too?"

He laughed and said, "You have to excuse him. He needs a little control."

I said, "Just a little?"

He said, "He won't bother you anymore. He is busy researching."

I'm not sure if I felt relieved or more alone. I said, "So how long will I stay here? What will happen when I get better?"

He said, "Maybe your thoughts and memories will come back, and you will tell us."

I said, "What if I never get them back? What if I am useless?"

He said, "I don't think you are. But if that is the case, we have to use another method to retrieve the data."

I said, "You would do that? Invade my mind again? Who will you bring with me this time?"

He said, "I don't think it will be necessary to take over your mind in that manner. There is another way. It has a little higher success rate, but it's all we got."

I said, "If that didn't work either, then what?"

He frowned and said, "I'm not sure I want to be alive to see that."

He walked away through the door and closed it behind him. They are depending on me and grabbing to that little hope. So what? Machines will cease to work. We can survive without them. We will use old methods to help us continue on. I think.

I looked down on my food tray, grabbed it, and placed it on the table beside the bed. I didn't feel like eating.

I stared at the ceiling for a long time. I kept trying to remember something. I just couldn't. How do I get rid of Sara from my mind? Why was she there? What was this plan?

Too many questions, but the ceiling seemed more concrete than arbitrarily believing that my mind is a vault of data. I welcomed the silence and embraced it. Everything that has happened to me in the past two days was unbelievable. I shouldn't have survived, but I did. I am mind controlled it seems and no one can access my head because of a high defence named Sara. Why her anyways? Why was her name Sara? Why she was me, but had subtle differences in physicality? She may not be what I think she should be. Am I giving her more credit than she deserves as the defender of my thoughts and memories?

I bowed my head down and looked past the glass panels. The others were chatting together and eating. Boris was sitting away from them and looking down at his screen. I wondered what he will learn from thousands of years of human history.

The bearded man stood up, looked at me, walked to the door and opened it. He said, "Don't you like the dinner we brought for you?"

I said, "I'm not hungry."

He walked closer and said, "The food is amazing. Try it." He then smiled and continued, "I can be your company." He sat on the chair and said, "My name is Bob."

I said, "Nice to meet you."

He said, "If you don't eat, you won't regain your strength. How will you get better?"

I said, "How did I get to the Red compound? Do you know?"

He said, "Boris didn't tell you?"

I said, "Boris only asks me but barely answers when I ask him."

He said, "Oh don't mind him. He is never used to being asked. He only does the interrogation."

I said, "Well good to know. So?"

He stared at me, hesitated and said, "He carried you over here."

I said, "Excuse me? No one saw him?"

He said, "Oh many saw him, but he said you were dead and they had to do an autopsy on you using Red compound's methods."

I said, "Just like that? Sounds ridiculous and the Intelligence compound would never buy it."

He said, "Who can question him? The Intelligence compound is using Red compound's infantry to defend it. And there is you of course. Who knows what your real position is."

I said, "Hmm, ok?"

He said, "And you know that Boris is the commanding chief and controls all the infantry. He tries to control you too, but that's not working out very well."

I said, "This is the most ridiculous story I ever heard."

He said, "Well, not many people can say no to Boris."

I said, "Yeah right! I don't care how much power he has. I don't have to answer him."

He frowned and said, "You may not want to be on his bad side."

I crossed my arms and said, "I don't care!"

He said, "I know you were never required to associate with him, but I think it's better if you complied for a little bit. He doesn't mean any harm."

I said, "What about the gun earlier?"

He said, "Something was triggered in his head and he saw things he didn't want to see again."

I said, "So he wears this invisible mask that hides his past, and kills off anyone that tries to unmask it?"

He said, "That sounds about right."

I said, "When will this nightmare end! And all of you, especially Boris, when will you people stop your experiments on me?"

He chuckled and said, "They are not experiments. We just want to know the plan and let you be."

I said, "Just let me be? Just like that? Why am I marked dangerous then? Why are people afraid of me?"

He said, "Oh Boris just put you in the system as that, so no one knows what he is really doing."

I said, "Am I supposed to be thankful then?"

He said, "Why not? Always better than being dead, and you get personal protection from Boris."

I said, "I give up. Let me eat." I grabbed the tray, placed it on my lap and started eating. Bob smiled and said, "I have no idea how you survived. Maybe someone is watching over you."

I said with my mouth half full, "Maybe."

He said, "Why you never came to visit us before? We are barely in this lab. We are always downstairs on the main floor in security."

I said, "I never went to the security area."

He said, "What's left to visit then in this compound?"

I said, "Training."

He said, "Ah! You are an avid trainer and wanted to always learn new methods to improve yourself."

I said, "Yep. It didn't work for my advantage though. Look at my head."

He said, "It will take time to heal. Just eat and rest."

I said smiling, "I love company. I'm usually alone and I don't converse much with others. Stay with me, or I can go to the other side and we can chat. Maybe we can all discover that it's a bad dream!"

He chuckled and said, "Rest first. You can come join us anytime."

Chapter 26

Protection

I guess I fell asleep and woke up in the middle of the night with my heart beating fast. I didn't remember what I was dreaming at all. When my eyes gained their focus, I raised half my body up and looked through the glass panels. No one was there.

I tried to stand up, but for some reason my balance was off. I reclined on the wall and walked slowly to the door. I opened the door and went through. I saw Boris with his head down. He seemed asleep. I walked over and sat in the empty stool next to him. I didn't say anything. His screen tablet laid visible at his side. I swiped it open. To my surprise, there was no pass code. Maybe it was a tablet storing public information. *The Story of Mankind*. Is that what he was reading? It was childish and full of illustration as I was swiping through. I laid the screen back down on the table and slowly tapped Boris's shoulder. He didn't move.

I got closer to him and tapped a little harder, but he didn't wake up. I tapped him harder and said, "Boris. Your dreams will come true!"

He raised his head and turned it towards my direction. His eyes barely open and said, "Why can't I sleep in peace? Lina, is something wrong?"

I said, "No. Not at all. Where is everyone?"

He rose up from the table, stretched his arms out and said, "They went home for the night. They have a life too. Wives, husbands and kids."

I said, "Lucky them."

He said, "Because they can leave?"

I said, "No. Not that. They have a life. They have a family."

He stared at me and didn't say anything. I said, "You shouldn't sleep like that. You will hurt your neck."

He said, "I dozed off."

I said, "You should sleep properly. Is there a bed somewhere for you?"

He said, "No. You're occupying the only one here."

I said, "Well, since I am awake, then go on it and sleep. Or better yet, why don't you go home and sleep. I can't seem to leave this place anyways."

He said, "I can't leave you alone."

I said, "What do you want to do? Interrogate me some more, or just kill me?"

He stared at me and looked down on the table and said, "I can't control my actions sometimes."

I said, "That's your only excuse?"

He looked at me and said, "I didn't mean it. Why won't you believe me?"

I giggled and said, "You answered my questions and had a normal human like conversation with me. I win!"

He looked at me with a confused look and said, "Why are you level five authority again?"

I said, "I may appear like a bubbly little girl, but I'm powerful and can kick your ass."

He said, "Oh? Can you?"

I said, "Yep!"

I got off the stool and stood up. I said, "I don't need guns or any weapon to beat you."

He said, "You're insane. You don't know what you're up against."

I kicked the stool and it fell with Boris on the floor. He was angry and said, "You want to break my head?"

I said, "Umm. Didn't seem to work. Should I try again?"

He got up and pushed the stool away. He said, "I'm not going to fight you."

I said, "Oh yeah?"

He stood up, brushed off his pants and made sure his shirt was properly tucked in. Then with one swift move he grabbed my hands, and lifted them above my head. He then grabbed my waist and pulled me closer to him and we were touching. He said, "Do you want to take turns?"

I said, "Let go of me."

He said, "No. I am enjoying this for being sleepy."

He yawned at my face and I gave him a disgusting look. I said, "If you want to sleep, then go sleep in the other room."

He said, "I think it is a good idea."

He let go of my hands and carried me. He went to the room and laid me on the bed. He then laid next to me, faced the other side and said, "Good night Lina. Don't talk in your sleep."

I said, "Are you for real?"

He said, "Last time I checked I was sort of real."

I said, "You will sleep like that with a gun on your waist?"

He took out his gun and laid it on the table. He said, "There. Are you happy now?"

I said, "What if I take it and kill you?"

He yawned and said half intelligibly, "What a way to die."

He was asleep and I wondered if I should stay laying there, but I didn't move.

Chapter 27

Humanity

I was on my side, and I tried to move, but something strong was holding me down. It was Boris's arm around my waist. I tried to look back but he was sleeping still. I said, "Boris! Time to get off of me!"

He tried to open his eyes and said, "Why?"

I grabbed his hand and moved it away from my waist. I sat up, turned around and looked at him. I said, "Are you for real?" He looked at me with his eyes wide open and said, "Oh no!"

I said, "I am fine!" I tried to stay still, but my head felt heavy and I suddenly fell on the bed with barely my hands saving my fall. I wanted to speak, but I couldn't. Boris quickly got up, pulled in my legs, laid me down properly and said, "I will get help."

He sprinted to the door. I didn't see what he was doing since the pain in my head was so intense. He came back after a few minutes and wheeled with him a big cart with a large computer. It had wires hanging and a large screen in the middle. I couldn't talk obviously, but I wanted to know what was wrong with me. He took a wire and inserted a needle at its tip. He wiped my hand with an antiseptic cloth and slowly inserted it in me. The screen came alive and it read, "Lina Ard, 30, blood count dangerously low."

He looked at the screen and gasped. He said, "I already called the others to come here quickly. I will go to the other room and get some new bandages for your head." He sprinted out and then came back with his hands full. He came close to my head with a

pair of scissors and said, "I just need to cut this off your head. The bandage is stained with blood."

He untied the bandages gently off my head and gasped. He said, "A clear liquid is leaking with the blood from your head too." He removed the entire bandage, tapped on the screen and entered a few instructions and sighed really loud. He said, "I will have to wrap your head again. You will feel dizzy and sleep for the next few hours." I looked at him with my eyes half open and tried to speak, "Am I ... worth all this?"

He looked back at me and said, "Forget everything and what data is stored in your head. It's not important anymore. You being alive is more important. We can't lose another human being like this."

I kept staring at him, but my eyes closed and I was unconscious.

It seemed like hours passed as I opened my eyes. Am I dead I thought? I only saw white. I tried to focus and I realized it was the ceiling. I tried to look forward, and I saw two guys sitting next to me. It was Boris and Bob. Bob was looking intently at the machine's screen, and Boris's head was tilted up at the ceiling with his eyes closed. I tried to speak and I only said, "Hi."

Bob looked at me and said, "Hi. Everything will be fine."

I said, "Boris needs to find better places to sleep."

Bob chuckled and said, "Oh don't worry about him. He can sleep standing up if he has to."

I couldn't move and I felt sharp pain in my head. Bob said, "I don't think you should move and just sleep. It's only been two days."

I said, "Two days I was sleeping?"

He said, "Yes. It's 02:00 am now. Just sleep. We take turns to watch you."

I said, "Maybe a doctor needs to see me."

He chuckled and said, "Oh we are doctors too you know."

I tried to look towards him and said, "I was just making sure. Boris is a doctor too?"

He said, "He tries to be. He can't be good at everything. He can't be around ailing people for too long. That's his Achilles heel."

I said, "So he just kills them and gets it over with?"

He said, "We are just trained for defence and not kill. Also, we wait for this inevitable war that we are brain washed with."

I looked at him and then stared at Boris. Bob said, "What are you thinking Lina. Your eyes are watery."

I said, "Nothing." I closed my eyes and I felt tears running down my cheeks. Bob said, "Everything will get better."

I said, "I don't want this life anymore." I opened my eyes and said, "Why me? I want to go back to my home. I am scared of being here."

Bob looked down and stared at the ground. Then he got up and walked away to the other room. Boris was still asleep, but I tried to raise my hand and tap his knees. He opened his eyes and moved his head down. He looked at the other side, but the chair was empty. He looked past the glass panels then looked back at me. He said, "Your awake, but why are you sad?"

I cried harder and I tried to say, "I ... want-to-leave."

He grabbed my hands, sighed loudly and said, “I won’t leave you alone. Not in your condition.”

I said, “I just want to leave.”

He said, “I will see what I can do.” He let go of my hands and stood up. He walked to the other room and it seems he was talking to Bob. I felt awkward then angry and my breathing was heavy. I said loudly, “Why won’t Sara leave me! She is killing me!”

Boris looked back and walked through the door, Bob was behind him. Boris said, “What did you say?”

I tried to raise my head and sit up. I said, “I want Sara out of my head. She is killing me!”

Boris and Bob came closer. Boris sat on the edge of the bed, and Bob stood next to the machine and tapped furiously on the screen. I said, “Why won’t you people listen. I said get her out!”

Bob looked at me and said, “With your condition, we can’t do much.”

I moved away the blanket, and I swayed myself to the machine’s side. I said, “Get this wire out of me. Get Sara out of me now!”

Bob said, “The medicine is going through your blood and we shouldn’t stop it now. You need to rest.”

I said, “Fine!” With one swift motion, I removed the wire from my hand. Bob gasped, and I said, “Get her out now!”

Boris said, “Do what she wants Bob.”

Bob and I looked at Boris and Bob said, “She will die!”

Boris said, “No she won’t.”

Bob said, "But she doesn't have the strength to handle her."

Boris said, "She doesn't need physical strength. It's mental."

Bob said, "That's the problem. Look at her head! She can't possibly ..." Boris interrupted him and said, "I will go with her, but Lina you have to promise that you will not chose me. Let's go into your head. We will use another method with serums to induce your hallucinations. I will stay aware and help you through it."

I said, "Will it work?"

He said, "You have to make it work if you want to end her power over you."

I said, "Ok." I tried to get up and Boris said, "Wow Lina. Just stay laying down. We will bring the equipment here."

Bob and Boris walked out of the room. I saw them arguing for two or three minutes on the other side. I guess Boris won that argument. Boris walked back and sat on the chair. He said, "Bob can't do it by himself. If anything happens, there has to be other people to help."

I said, "Like last time?"

He said, "Something like that."

Bob came in and wheeled a long rod with a screen in the middle of it. The rod was clear with liquid inside of it. He said, "This rod has the serum in it. It slowly goes in your blood stream and lowers your heart beat. The wire we attach it to your forehead and Boris's too. The serum is injected in you through your mouth. It just drips slowly down your throat. It takes a minute or two for it to start working. I called the others and they will be here soon."

He motioned for me to move a little and said, “Boris will lay down next to you. You both have to be relaxed and laying down.”

Boris laid next to me, turned to look at me and said, “I can get used to this.”

I said, “Maybe your deepest desires are slowly showing.”

I looked at him, stared at his eyes and he just looked back. Bob said, “You two act like twelve years old.”

I then said, “How will Boris see what I am seeing if he is not injected with anything?”

He said, “Oh he will. It won’t be the same serum though.” He took out a needle and filled it with a purple liquid. He said laughing, “Boris! Do you hate needles?”

Boris looked at him and said, “Yeah whatever.”

He said, “Well then. Everything is ready.”

Nadia walked in through the door and came closer to Bob. She didn’t wear a lab coat, but a pair of black pants and a white shirt. She said, “Hi. Will it be safe Bob? We are not sadistic people. We don’t want her to suffer.”

Bob said, “Not my choice. It was an order.”

She looked towards Boris and he chuckled. She said, “You two look like children laying there.”

Boris didn’t say anything but just smiled.

She said, “Lina. Is Boris making you do this?”

I said, “No. Since when do I listen to him?”

Boris looked at me and squinted his eyes. Nadia said, “Fine then.”

Bob said, "The screen here is a little more sophisticated. It will show us what you are seeing and saying Lina. If we feel you are in danger and Boris can't help you, we will stop the injection and wake you up."

I said, "Ok."

He said, "Let's get started then!"

Chapter 28

Hallucinations

Bob attached the wires to Boris's and my foreheads. He inserted a curved tube in my mouth and it stayed in place. Suddenly, I felt a warm liquid drip down my throat, and Bob said, "Just stay breathing normally Lina. The liquid is slowly dropping down."

I looked over at Bob and turned a little to look at Boris. Bob came closer to Boris's neck, and inserted the needle in him. Boris's eyes slowly closed, and I kept looking at him.

Suddenly, I was in a dark room. It was wide and empty. I looked around, but no one was there. I walked forward for a bit, and suddenly, I saw Boris laying on the ground. I ran to him, kneeled down and said, "Boris! Wake up!" His eyes opened and said, "I am here with you." He raised his body and stood up. He put his hand out and said, "Come on."

I grabbed his hand and he said, "Stay close to me and never let go of my hand."

I nodded and just looked at him. He said, "So your head is filled with dark empty places?"

I said, "Umm, I'm not sure."

He said, "Should we go anywhere?"

I said, "How do I look?"

He stared at me and said, "Well, your head bandage is gone. Your hair is a little messy and long. You look a little pretty."

I said, "Little?"

He laughed and said, "That's all."

I frowned and looked away, and he said, "Don't be sad. I am just teasing you."

I said, "Fine."

He said, "Well. How long do we wait?"

Then suddenly, a light from the distance beamed and shined. As it approached I said, "I wonder if it's Sara."

The light was only a few feet from us, and slowly, someone appeared. It was not Sara, but Sam.

Sam looked at us, but he stared at Boris. Boris looked at him with a little disgust and didn't say anything. Sam finally said, "Did you replace me?"

I said, "No."

He said, "It appears so. Why are you lying to me?"

I said, "I'm not lying." I tried to let go of Boris's grip, but he kept grabbing my hand and pulled it back. Sam looked at Boris and walked closer.

Boris said, "You need to stay away from us."

Sam said, "She is mine. You can't have her."

Boris said, "Lina. Make him go away."

I said, "Poof! Go away. I don't think that will work."

Sam stared at us and said, "Sara, come with me."

I said, "You must be mistaken. I'm not Sara."

Sam walked closer and Boris stepped back, then suddenly, Sam struck Boris with a knife. Boris screamed and held his side. I said, "No!"

Sam said, "Sara, let's go."

Boris kneeled and kept holding his side in pain. I kneeled down next to him and he whispered, "This isn't real Lina. You have to convince your mind that I am fine and Sam is not here."

I was sobbing and said, "You are bleeding. I can't. I can't."

Sam said, "Why do you chose him?"

I looked at Boris and he shook his head. I looked up at Sam and said, "I don't chose him. I will come with you."

I stood up, walked over to Sam and he said, "Let's go."

He walked back and I followed him. I looked back, and Boris was gone. I stopped and said, "Is he gone?"

Sam looked back at me and said, "Don't you want to see our garden?"

I said, "Garden?"

Then suddenly, we were in a small garden. It had different kinds of colourful flowers and vines hanging on the walls. There was a small fountain in the middle. I walked over to the fountain, and Boris was sitting next to it with his head down. Sam said, "Why is he always here?"

Sam took out a small gun from his waist and said, "Time to go." I looked at Sam and yelled, "No! You aren't real!" Sam looked at me and pointed the gun at me. He said, "Why Sara? Don't you love me anymore?"

I hesitated, looked at Boris and back at Sam and said, “You are not real! Just go away!”

Boris quickly tackled Sam, and Sam fired the gun. It missed me and I jumped back. Boris yelled, “Run Lina!”

I ran back, out of the garden and into an empty field. I stopped to catch my breath and I looked around. No one was there. I kneeled on the floor and wondered, “Do I like gardens? There are many in the Intelligence compound used for experiments, but I didn’t care much for them.”

I looked up and Boris was standing in front of me. He said, “Gardens? Knives and guns? What’s next? Fruits and vegetables falling from the sky?” I smiled at him and stood up. He grabbed my hand and said, “So is Sam good or bad in your mind?”

I said, “I’m not sure. But he seemed protective.”

He said, “Defensive too?”

I said, “I guess. Is he gone now?”

He said, “It’s your mind. You decide that.”

I said, “Umm. I can decide anything?”

He said, “Just don’t do anything bad to me.”

I said, “I won’t.”

He looked around and said, “Well, what do you want to do here?”

I said, “I was in this field before. There was a door though, but I never went through it.”

He said, “This door is not here.”

Suddenly, there was a loud sound, then fire started burning the grass. It spread around us in a circle. Boris said, "Things are heating up." He carried me and ran as fast as he can and jumped over the fire to the other side. Then the fire appeared in front of us.

He said, "Oh boy. It's everywhere."

I looked up and said, "The sky is clear."

He said, "Then turn it gray and let it rain."

I closed my eyes and imagined it was a hot summer day, and small rain clouds were over us. Suddenly, I felt drops on my head. I opened my eyes and it was dark and rainy. Boris said, "Great job!" He let go of me and I stood up.

He said, "There is something over there, but tiny." I looked back at the direction he was pointing at, and the rain stopped. It was still gray, and the small object came closer. As the object came closer, it came into focus. It was a little girl. It was me.

I said, "She is me when I was four."

He said, "Why four? What happened to you then?"

I said, "I don't know, but I have pictures of me at that age."

He said, "On paper?"

She spoke and said, "Don't go."

I said, "I won't go. I am here."

She raised her head up and said to Boris, "Are you going to take her away mister?"

He said, "I'm not."

She said, “Yes you are. You said so when she was sleeping. Remember?”

I looked at Boris and he shrugged. He said, “What should I say?”

I said, “Umm. Listen. He won’t take me, but you have to tell me where Sara is.”

She said, “Who is Sara?”

I said, “Umm. I guess you don’t know her.”

She said, “Will she hurt you?”

I said, “She is trying.”

She said, “Then you should run away.” She came closer and held my hand. She said, “Let’s go.”

I walked with her, and Boris grabbed tightly my other hand. We kept walking for a while, and suddenly she stopped. She let go of my hand and said, “Here we are.”

I looked around and the scenery didn’t change at all. I said, “Here or back there, what is the difference?”

She giggled and said, “I saved you.”

I said, “How?”

She pointed behind us and said, “There’s the door.”

I looked back, and a black door was there. I looked at Boris and said, “It’s locked.”

She said, “Let’s open it!”

I said, “How?”

She walked towards the door and enthusiastically said, “Boom!” The door slowly swung, she giggled and said, “Let’s go!”

Boris said, “Now I know where your joyful attitude comes from. You were always like that.” I said, “So?” Then she said, “Double so!” She stuck her tongue out and I laughed. Boris didn’t seem impressed at all.

We came closer to the door and I said, “We should all go through eh?”

She said, “Yay!” Boris shook his head and said, “Do you really want to Lina?”

I said, “Where else do we go? It’s the only way.” Boris nodded and said, “Lead the way.”

I walked slowly through the door. It was dark and I couldn’t see anything, and I felt Boris’s grip on my right hand, and little me on my left. As we kept walking, the darkness turned into white. No one spoke, but then, there was a loud bang. Boris tucked me closer. He said, “Come closer.”

I said, “What’s that noise?” Little me let go of my hand and walked in front of us. She turned around and said, “I got to go. I can’t stay little forever.” Suddenly, she disappeared.

Boris said, “Great. She brought us here and left.”

I thought for a minute that I don’t know anything about my parents, not even how they look like and I said, “She brought us because I needed to know the truth.”

He said, “What truth?”

I said, “Where my parents are.”

He said, "They died. They had mutated genes. It's in your medical records."

I said, "Why didn't I die then?"

He said, "I don't know."

I said, "Something doesn't make sense then."

He said, "You're right. They didn't discover the mutated genes till years later. Maybe we were fourteen."

We heard another loud bang and the ground shook. We lost our balance and fell on the floor.

Boris said, "Wow. Earthquake!"

I said, "Look above."

Boris looked up and shiny sparkles filled the sky. I said, "I love sparkles!" He said, "So maybe you're hallucinating now things you love?"

The ground stopped shaking and I quickly stood up. I raised my arms high and tried to catch a sparkle. When I did, I made a fist and looked at Boris and said, "I got one!" He smiled at me and said, "Why do you act like a child?"

I frowned and said, "Is it wrong that small shiny things make me happy?"

He said, "So little you brought you to a much simpler part in your mind. The time when you were a child?"

I kneeled down, grabbed Boris's hand and said, "Let's go!"

He said, "Where to?"

I said, "Find everyone!"

He looked at me not sure what to answer. He stood up and he held my hand tightly. I said, "Let's go that way! We will find them!"

I skipped and Boris kept looking at my direction with his eye brow raised. I said, "Finally! We are here!"

Suddenly, the room was filled with people. They were walking and had strollers too. I said, "Well Boris! Let's find them!"

He was puzzled and said, "Who?"

I squinted my eyes and said, "My parents you silly Boris!"

I walked around and looked at each group of people. I stopped and asked each group, "Do you know Lina?" They would shake their heads and say, "No."

I kept asking every couple that was there. Boris said, "Can we stop? I don't think they are here."

I said, "But why!"

Suddenly, a couple appeared with a baby in a stroller. I walked over and asked them, "You have a lovely baby!" They looked at me and smiled. I said, "What's her name?" They continued smiling, then the baby, about one and a half years old said, "Lina!"

I looked at Boris and said, "See! We found her!"

I looked at the couple and said, "Why did you leave Lina?"

They looked at me and the father said, "We had to."

I said, "You did! What a shame, but she will be so lonely!"

The father said, "We have to go." He looked over to his wife and said, "Dear, we have to go now."

They turned around, but left the baby in the stroller. I said, “Umm. What about the baby?”

Suddenly, everyone left, but the stroller stayed in its place. I looked at the baby, grabbed her slowly and took her out of the stroller and said, “I was so cute! Look Boris! I’m so happy!”

Boris stared at me not knowing what to say, then raised his arms out for me to give him the baby. I said, “Here you go!” He held her and said, “I don’t think you should hold her.” I said, “Why not! She is so cute!”

He pursed his lip, looked behind me and said, “That’s why.”

I turned around and she was there. It was Sara.

I said, “Look! It’s me!”

I ran towards her and Boris yelled, “No!” As I got closer, I froze and light beams burst from the ground and shocked me. I screamed loudly and cried from the pain. I fell on the ground and I barely held my head up and said, “You don’t want me to know the truth Sara?”

She looked at me, and then back at Boris. He no longer had the baby in his arms. He ran and kneeled down next to me. He said, “She is not real. You have to stop her.” He brought me close to him and wrapped his arms around me.

Sara stared at us, but she seemed bored then said, “Can we go back now?”

I said, “Back where?”

She said, “In time. You don’t belong here. We control time and we have to go back.”

I said, "What if I don't want to."

Boris squeezed me tightly and whispered, "You have to stop her."

I said, "You know, I like your dress Sara. Why do you keep wearing it?"

She seemed uninterested and said, "It was my mother's."

I gasped, looked at Boris and he whispered, "No it's not. She wants you to believe it."

I said, "Umm. So, what can you tell me about my mother?"

She stared at me and didn't reply.

I said, "Ok? Umm, what about my father?"

She tilted her head to the side and stared.

I said, "So you want me to go back in time, and there is nothing to go back for?"

She finally said, "Who said that if we go back then we will see them?"

I said, "What's there to see then?"

She said, "The human destruction!"

I said, "Great. You want me to relive that?"

She said, "What did machines do? They destroyed us."

Boris whispered and said, "I think she will tell us something now."

I said, "Well, machines have a positive, and they do help us."

She sprinted closer and yelled, "NO!"

I looked over to Boris and he stared at me with a scared look. I said, "What about Ellen?"

She said, "Ellen lied! They all lied!"

I said, "Who are all? What did they lie about?"

She frowned and said, "They said I will go. Leave this place and go back."

I said, "Go back to reality?"

She said, "No."

I said, "Then where?"

She hesitated and didn't reply.

Boris whispered, "Ask her about the plan."

I said, "What about the plan to end all machines? Can you tell me about it?"

She said, "I don't know."

I said, "You don't? Of all people, you should!"

She sighed and said, "I have to die."

I whispered to Boris and said, "This isn't going well." He stared at me and said, "I think you need to go with her alone so she will talk."

I said, "Why? No I can't. What about you?"

He said, "I brought you here safely, and that's all I can do."

I looked at him and he smiled. He touched my cheeks gently with his fingers and kissed my forehead. He said, "You need to go with her. If anything happens, we will wake you up."

He stood up and walked back, then he disappeared. Sara kept staring at me and finally said, "We have to go back."

I said, "Ok. I will go."

She smiled and said, "Ok."

She raised both her arms and light came down blinding me, and the ground shook.

Chapter 29

What I did

I opened my eyes and I was in a dark room again. This time, I was alone. Where did Sara go? I stood up and walked for a while. I was scared and inevitably started crying. I thought that I was stuck here. Suddenly, I heard a loud bang and the scenery changed. I was in a lab. I looked around, and no one was there. The tables were filled with beakers, test tubes and old thick computer screens. I was afraid to touch anything and then Sara walked in through the door and said, "This is where it started."

I said, "What started?"

She said, "Thinking of ways to destroy the world."

I looked at her then stared at a table with numerous beakers and a computer screen, and said, "How did it start here?"

She said, "Humans didn't want to do it alone. So they spent time creating sophisticated machines to do it for them. It was their rightful exercise of intuitive thinking and application."

I said, "Then what happened?"

She said, "Humans went too far. They developed a plan for machines to think for themselves. They only fed the machines data to perform certain tasks, and allow these machines to learn and evolve on their own."

I said, "So humans created a smart machine?"

She said, "Yes. A machine that interprets data and builds upon it."

I said, "So if the data is altered, the machines will learn new ways to accomplish a task and act upon it."

She smiled and nodded in agreement.

I said, "So is that a flaw?"

She said, "Yes, an inevitable flaw. You can't create something and expect it to be flawless. Look at us humans. God created us, but we can't act right all the time. We are filled with flaws."

I said, "So machines are like humans."

She stared at me for a few seconds and said, "You have to stop it."

I said, "Stop what?"

She said, "The machines growing power again, but this time, they want the machines to be superior with an advanced error detection system."

I said, "So that's a bad thing? It seems that those machines are more human than ever."

She said, "Yes, but remember, humans can detect an alternative method to succeed, but they still have to consider the risks and ways to avoid it. The success rate is never 100% but close."

I said, "So, it's an inevitable circle that can never be perfect. Humans want the machines to be exactly like them, but that's impossible."

She said, "Yes, but that's what Project Merge has been doing all this time. They are trying to create perfection, but they know that you will be against it and will stop them. You are more powerful mentally and physically than anyone in this world and a danger to them. So, they tried to control you from thinking for yourself and

feeding your mind absurd ideas. Also, they kept removing large chunks of your thoughts and storing different ones. You have been trying for a while to break the defensive barrier in your mind.”

I was horrified and said, “What?”

She said, “They said that you will one day find out the truth and have to be killed.”

I was confused and said, “I don’t understand?”

She said, “You have to go to Project Merge and destroy the machines.”

I said, “What? Why there? I went there and there was nothing but me seeing you.”

She said, “They wanted to try one final time to alter your thoughts and stay under their control. They didn’t want the Red compound to know what they have been doing to you. In the meantime, I acted for you because they told me to.”

I said, “I don’t understand.”

She said, “You know how to stop the machines and you were authorized to do so because you evolved in your position to have that power. You’re the one that everyone’s afraid of. When Dana found out and warned the Red compound, I acted for you and tried to kill her. I was ordered by them, but they didn’t know if it was a success since you tried to save her after.”

I said, “What? I didn’t kill Dana. How could I? I wasn’t even in the building when she was stabbed.”

She said, “You were before you went out, but you were under extreme mind control. Dana found out about me and what has been done to you and your plan to end all machine’s power. You

told her everything while you were sleeping and I couldn't stop you. It was your way to bypass the defence and get help."

I felt like knives were stabbing me and I couldn't breathe.

She said, "Now it's time for me to leave you forever. I can't be here anymore. You don't want me to."

She smiled and came close to me. She hugged me tightly, looked at me and said, "You decide what needs to be done from now on."

She walked back and disappeared. The room instantly turned black, and a door appeared. I opened the door and went through it.

Chapter 30

Awake

I felt my body shaking and there was an intense pain jolting in my shoulders. I heard banter and opened my eyes slowly. It was Boris. He looked at me and hugged me tightly. Bob said, “Oh my God! Did she wake up?”

Boris let go, looked back and said, “Yes. She is awake now.” Nadia came close to me and said, “You scared us. Your heart stopped for a minute. The screen went black and we couldn’t see or hear anything. We removed the tube from your mouth and stopped the hallucinations. Then your heart started beating slowly, but the screen stayed black. That was twenty minutes ago. We tried every way to wake you up.”

Boris had his head down and didn’t say anything. I said slowly, “Did you see me in the lab and heard what Sara said?”

They all looked at each other with a puzzled look and said, “No. When Boris wanted to leave, we woke him up and your heart stopped.”

I tried to raise myself up, and Boris helped me and stayed holding me tightly by my waist. I said, “We need to go to the Intelligence compound. To Project Merge.”

Bob said, “You can’t. None of us can.”

Boris looked the other way and shifted his head down. I said, “Why can’t we?”

Bob said, “Yesterday, there was an order released to everyone by the Triangle and Intelligence compounds to have and control their

own defense. They released an ulterior mechanism for defense, robotic machines.”

I looked at them horrified and whispered, “It’s beginning.”

Boris kept his head down and didn’t say anything. Nadia said, “They have over two hundred machines now in the Intelligence compound, and a two hundred more at the Triangle compound. We had no idea they were building such an army. But why?”

I looked at her and said, “Because they think humans are full of flaws and machines are not. They are programmed to perform certain tasks and their margin of error is low.”

They all looked at me shocked and Nadia said, “None of us understand why they need such a number. Who are they defending against? Our world is so small and humans are slowly becoming extinct.”

I looked at the bed covers and said, “Are we the only ones left?”

She said, “Yes. No one else survived the destruction.”

I said, “How does anyone know that? Earth is so big, and we don’t have air planes or direct access to satellite’s data because our technology and man power is limited now. What about a group of people that disappeared almost three decades ago who tried to explore other places for survivors? Why have they never come back? Did they all die?”

She said, “Lina, I don’t think there is anyone left. We would have known by now.”

I said, “I’m not sure. It seems impossible to even think like that.”

She said, “Boris. What do you think?”

Boris looked at her and said, "I'm not sure anymore. I can't believe this was all happening without us ever noticing. As for other survivors? I don't know. Seems possible if Lina thinks so. We can't be the only ones left." Boris was talking slowly and in a low voice. I said, "Are you ok?"

Boris looked at me and said, "I don't feel well."

I said, "Then maybe you should rest. I think we all need to rest." Boris nodded his head in agreement. I tried laying down and Boris laid down too. He smiled and kept looking at me.

Nizar hesitated for a bit and asked, "Umm, Lina?"

I said, "Yes Nizar."

He said, "Did you find out the plan?"

I smiled and said, "It's too late now. But Sara is gone."

He frowned and said, "Oh."

I said, "Project Merge has been creating and testing these machines for years, but they have been controlling my mind to stay silent and be their puppet of defence."

He said, "Why you? Why not Boris?"

I looked at Boris and then to Nizar and said, "I'm not sure?"

He said, "His results for the aptitude test were exactly like yours. They kept him here and took you to them."

I raised my body up but Boris stayed laying down. I said, "I don't understand. Why me?"

He said, "We have no idea why they chose you over Boris."

Boris said, "I think they wanted a puppet too in charge of the Red compound."

I looked at Boris and said, "What?"

He said, "Unlike you, I was aware, but I was limited by what I can do because I had other controlling powers working against me. I tried to find out what they were trying to do, but I couldn't. All I noticed was you collecting data from each compound and digging for random information. It's like you were collecting information on how people trained, defended, attacked and responded to danger. That's why you were in the training sector most of the time."

I stared at him and he looked at me. I couldn't believe what I have been doing. I did this. I collected the data for those machines to be human like. I did it all. I was never aware of what I was doing.

I said, "How long was I doing this for?"

Boris said, "I noticed this three years ago, but in the past year you were here daily training and collecting data."

I said, "Why didn't you stop me, or even question me?"

He said, "I was not in a position to do so. I was pressured by a direct order to leave you alone and never question what you were doing."

I said, "Where did this direct order come from?"

He said, "Our leaders."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "That guy that came earlier to your room and I had to respect his presence, he was one of them. He was mostly

surprised you were alive and wanted you locked up in the Triangle compound on a direct order by me though. I have the power in this compound, but I don't know if I do anymore because of what's going on. They believed the Intelligence compound had traitors from within. That traitor was Dana via you. I wasn't going to allow it anymore. You are under the Red compound's protection and they have to get rid of me to reach you."

I looked at Boris dumbfounded by what he said. He stared waiting for me to say anything and then I said, "You protected me even if I did all this?"

He said, "You were just their puppet. I noticed it from the day you married that idiot."

I said, "How did Sam die?"

He said, "His heart stopped. He had a heart attack."

I said, "Heart attack?"

He said, "Not everyone handles pain the same."

I said, "Pain? What pain?"

He said, "Sam was in love and wanted to marry someone else, her name was Sara."

I said, "What?"

He said, "Yes, she was a year older than us. She died though from mutated genes. They couldn't help her, and it devastated Sam. They chose you because you resembled her a lot, but it was too much for him."

I said, "How didn't I know?"

He said, "They might have been controlling you before you went to the Intelligence compound. General John tried to sooth his nephew's pain, and Ellen and the others used you for their motives."

I stared at Boris and he looked to the other side and I said, "Why didn't you stop it?"

He said, "Stop what? Any of this? What happened ten years ago? I couldn't."

I said, "Why didn't you try?"

He said, "I just couldn't, but I knew from someone that this would happen."

I said, "Who?"

He sighed and looked away.

I grabbed his shirt tightly and said, "Tell me now or else!"

He said, "Or else what?"

I said, "Kill you!"

He laughed and said, "I do have direct orders to kill you. Many people want you dead, but ..." I interrupted him and said, "Tell me now Boris!"

He hesitated and finally said, "You."

I said, "What? You're not making any sense."

He said, "The day before they told you about your results and departure, you came to my room. We were close friends for the past two years in training, and somehow you knew where everyone is going to end up at. I don't know how. You told me that

someone has to know what has been going on. At the time I didn't understand what you meant. You told me to promise that I will always help you no matter what. It was never your fault and you are too weak."

I looked at him and I had no idea what he was saying. He said, "You said one more thing."

I let go of my grip on his shirt and said, "What did I say?"

He said, "I was the only one you trusted in this world."

I stared at his eyes and somehow I knew he was not lying. Everything he said was true, and he did all this because I told him years ago to help me. He knew this will happen, but he couldn't do anything.

I stared down at my hands and started crying. Boris hugged me tightly and said, "I didn't want you to go, but they used you because they found what made you weak and used it against you. Also, they wanted us separated because we are too smart and physically capable of killing them and stopping all this from happening."

I looked at Boris and said, "We can? We don't kill."

He said, "How did you kill Dana then?"

I gasped and said, "How did you know?"

He said, "For the first time in ten years, you contacted me after Dana told me the story. You were scared and said Sara was controlling you and I have to help you stop her. I told you to calm down and not do anything stupid. After about a minute, your voice changed and said that you must kill Dana and then kill Sara. Dana

can't know what the plan is and you have to be stopped by getting rid of Sara. You were very contradictory."

I said, "But Sara is gone now. Why can't I remember any of this?"

He said, "Like you said, they planted Sara in you to remove chunks of your memories permanently and feed you new ones that aligned with their plan."

I didn't say anything. Boris looked at me and then the others. He finally said, "Many things happened in your life and Sara was getting rid of anything that was a threat to Project Merge's plan. None of us knew what was going on. I just thought you were adapting to the change, and your personality changed as a result and forgot everything. Forgot us."

I said, "Did I forget my parents too?"

He said, "I don't know. But you were in the girl's sector of the Alliance building before me. So I don't know and you never told me."

I looked down and I couldn't speak anymore. I laid on the pillow and cried slowly. Boris got off the bed and walked out of the room. The others stared at me, and then Nadia approached my side, sat next to me and said, "I think it is time for you to rest. Nothing can be resolved now with your condition."

Chapter 31

A New Beginning

I opened my eyes, looked around and there was no one in the room. I got off the bed slowly and walked to the door. Bob was sitting on the stool and said, "Good evening Lina. How's your head?"

I said, "The pounding is gone, but I'm a little dizzy. Where is everyone? Where is Boris?"

He said, "Come sit next me. Everyone left for the night."

I walked towards the empty stool and sat on it. I said, "I think I need a shower, new clothes and a pair of shoes."

He said, "I can get those for you, but unless Boris approves, I can't be of service."

I frowned and said, "Where is Boris anyways?"

He said, "He had to go do some investigative work. He will be back soon." He pointed at his waste and a gun was bulging out from it.

I said, "What will happen now?"

He said, "We can't do much."

I said, "Ok."

I looked at the door and said, "Did you all know what was wrong with me?"

He said, "No. It seems Boris only knew but kept it to himself all these years. No one questioned him anyways."

I said, "Ok."

He said, "You wanted to kill him and he wanted to kill you. You two talk about killing a lot. I know you were controlled but he wasn't. He was very close to killing you and you didn't stop him, but felt bad. Why?"

I said, "I don't know. I didn't mean to create such tension. It's not my fault I made him see something he didn't want to remember."

He said, "I think you did."

I said, "What? Even if I did, it wasn't me. It was Sara."

He said, "How did Sara know?"

I stared at him and I said, "I don't know."

He said, "There were parts of your mind that were aware and remembered some things. Maybe you don't remember your relationship with Boris, but you knew many things about him. It seems you two trusted each other."

I said, "Was there a relationship?"

He said, "Ask Boris. He never clarified to us what he meant."

The outer door opened and then the door to this room. Boris walked in with a screen tablet and a bag. He stared at me and said, "You're not in a condition to be moping around and talking Lina. You need to rest."

I didn't say anything but stared. Bob looked at me and said, "Will you leave again Boris? Can I leave for the night?"

Boris said, "Yes you can leave."

Bob got off his stool, took his screen tablet and said, "Good night."

Boris looked at me and said, "Well?"

I said, "I may have changed, but I will never take orders from you."

He stared at me and said, "It's not an order. I'm only concerned about your health."

I said, "I'm not leaving."

He said, "Fine. Here you go." He placed the bag on the table and said, "These are clothes, shoes and other stuff for you. The bathroom with a shower is down the hallway and to the left. When you're done, I can help you with a new bandage for your head."

I stared at him for a few seconds, grabbed the bag and got off the stool. He eyed me and said, "Are you ok?" I said, "I'm fine."

I walked down the hallway and saw a room leading to a bathroom. I tried slowly to remove the bandage on my head, but I felt dizzy and almost fell on the floor. I didn't think I could do this, but I had to. I need to get better. I noticed that the clothes were Red compound's military clothes. I was like great, now I am one of them.

After I was done, I walked back down the hallway and into the lab. Boris sat on a stool and looked down at his screen. I said, "Well?" Boris looked at me and said, "Now you are officially one of us. You know what that means?"

I said, "Umm, what?"

He said, "Since I am the general of this compound, you have to do what I say."

I said, "What if I overthrew you and removed your power?"

He smiled and said, "At least you're capable of doing the job right. I don't mind. I trust you."

I smirked and said, "I need a hair comb and an elastic for my hair." He nodded and went to another room. He came back with his hands full and put the items on the table. I will get the head bandage ready. I took the comb and brushed my hair. Boris kept looking at me and said, "You never liked long hair. You always had it short. Do you like it that way now?"

I said, "I guess. I got used to it."

He said, "It makes you look more girly."

I said, "Excuse me?"

He laughed and said, "It's a good thing. Don't get mad."

I pulled my hair back in a bun. He took the bandage and wrapped it around my head and secured it. He said, "Done!"

I looked at him and said, "So, can I go now?"

He said, "Where to?"

I said, "Back to my apartment."

He said, "I don't think you can go back to the Intelligence compound. Since you are alive still, they classified as a traitor and highly dangerous."

I laughed and said, "Do I look dangerous to you." I stood up, pointed at my head and stuck my tongue out.

He stared at me and said, "I don't think anyone's gonna buy that. Not even me."

I frowned, sat back down on the stool and said, "What do I do now. Where do I go?"

He looked at me and said, "You can stay here, or stay at my place."

I said, "Your place? Then what?"

He raised one eye brow and said, "What? It's not like you never did before."

My eyes widened and said, "What? Wait. Bob said that we had a relationship. What does that mean?"

He stared at me and said, "You had nightmares, and came over to my room afraid. I know you don't remember, but you didn't know how to stop them. You thought that sleeping in my room will make the nightmares stop. It didn't work."

I said, "But you didn't explain this relationship we had. Were we more than just *friends*?"

He didn't say anything but stared at me with an empty expression.

I said, "Is that a yes?"

He said, "I don't know. You never expressed how you felt and I never asked you."

I looked at him wondering what I should ask next. He looked at me wondering what I was thinking. I finally said, "What about you?"

He said, "What about me?"

I said, "Umm, how did you feel about me?"

He said, "How I felt or still feel?"

I said, "Hmm, both?"

He stared at me and said, "Will it make a difference?"

I eyed him and said, "I don't know."

He said, "What I felt then and now is the same. Nothing has changed. I still think the world of you."

I smiled and said, "You do?"

He said, "I don't want to talk about this anymore." He got off the stool, grabbed the stuff, and walked to the other room. He walked back and sat on the stool. He looked down on the screen and started swiping. I looked at him and said, "I will go to the other room and lay down." He didn't say a word and I walked back.

I sat on the bed. Why he never married? He was not bad looking. He was handsome, tall, smart, quiet and very eloquent. Maybe he was very reserved, strict and controlling. Was he devastated because I left him? He knew it was out of my control, but that shouldn't be the reason he couldn't move on.

I sat up and looked through the glass panel. I was in his head. He kissed me? Was I going to the deepest parts in his mind where no one dares to cross? Did I awaken something in him that he tried so hard to hide? Did he want me to realize it too?

I walked out of the room towards him. He looked up at me and didn't say anything. I came closer to him and I kissed him. He pushed me closer and grabbed my waist. I stopped and moved back. I said, "I never left."

Chapter 32

Two Minds

Boris smiled at me and said, "I don't think you did." I smiled and said, "Great! What now?"

He looked down at his screen and said, "I was trying earlier to see what is going on in the Intelligence and Triangle compounds. Machines just stood at the gates and at every building entrance. No human was in sight."

I said, "All day?"

He said, "Yes. I have my staff in security on surveillance 24/7 and watching everything."

I said, "Maybe they missed something."

He looked at me and said, "Why do you think that?"

I said, "Well, it seems weird that there are no humans visible at all. What happened to them? Are they all hostage? Dead?"

He said, "No. I don't think so. It's normal. Outside the building is what concerns me."

I said, "What can we do then?"

He said, "We just have to wait and see."

I looked down at his screen and asked, "What are you looking at? It seems blotchy and out of focus?"

He said, "We have night vision outside of each compound. A red light means it's organic and faded blue are the machines. The faded blue is most of the screen."

I looked closer at the screen and I noticed a very faint pink spec moving. I said, "Boris? Are you seeing that?" I pointed to the spec and said, "That? What is that?"

He looked at it and it was moving slowly. His eyes widened and said, "Can you walk fine? Do you still feel dizzy?"

I said, "I can walk."

He grabbed the screen tablet and grabbed my hand. He said, "Come with me."

We walked out of the lab and into a hallway. He said, "Don't worry about any surveillance camera. The other compounds don't have access to them anymore. We cut them off this morning."

I nodded and walked silently with him. We walked down a flight of stairs and then through a door. The door led us down another hallway and there were a couple of doors on each side. Boris opened the door on the left. I walked in, and I saw around twenty people behind large screens. They all looked up and stared at me. Boris said, "I brought Lina with me and she will help us from now on."

A man stood up and said, "General Boris, but she is classified as highly dangerous."

Boris with a sharp tone said, "Yes, dangerous to the Intelligence and Triangle compounds, but not us."

The man nodded and sat down. Boris looked up at the large screen to the right and said, "Can you change the output to night vision 304."

The screen immediately switched and it was ten times bigger than Boris's small screen. It was clearer and more detailed too. He

stared closely at the pink spec. It still seemed small and moving slowly. A man sitting near the screen said, "Sir. It seems that something is crawling and bleeding heavily. Red is appearing pink and it will soon fade."

Boris looked at him and said, "I know. I just want to make sure it's human. Can you zoom in?"

The screen was zooming to the area of the spec and was significantly larger. Boris immediately said, "Stop!" He stared and I gasped. He looked at me and said, "These are outlines of a human body on the ground." I said, "What do we do now?"

Boris walked backwards and said, "Lina, come with me."

I walked out with Boris down another hallway. He opened another door with a key code. The room was empty and had a desk with multiple screens on the wall and a large one on the desk. Boris sat on the chair and started typing furiously. Out of curiosity I said, "Whose office is this?" He didn't raise his head and said, "It's mine." I said, "Oh."

He said, "We can't go check out what's going on because that person is still in the Intelligence compound."

I said, "Why don't we go from the hidden entrance covered by bushes and trees?"

He raised his head and said, "What hidden entrance?"

I smiled and said, "The one I know about!"

He looked at me confused and said, "What else do you know?"

I said, "I don't have to answer you, but if things come up, then I might be of assistance."

He said, "One day you will have to follow my orders no matter what."

I stuck my tongue out at him and said, "I don't think that day will ever come Boris."

Chapter 33

The Old City

Boris opened a drawer and grabbed a gun and ammunition. He raised it and said, "Here you go Lina." I grabbed it, loaded it and placed it at my waist. He said, "Let's go."

We walked out of his office and down another hallway. He opened a door and walked through and I gasped when I saw Vicky. Vicky had light golden hair, blue eyes, wore a navy blue dress jacket and a long tight skirt. Her hair was pulled back in a bun and had two screens on her desk. Vicky looked up and stared at me. She struck me as an elegant and beautiful lady. She said, "Well Boris? Can you explain?"

He said, "Nothing to explain. I need some things from the closet."

She said, "What do you need Boris? Memory alternation serums or poison?"

I gasped, Boris looked at me and said, "Uff Vicky. Stop scaring her. She had enough. I need bandages, antiseptics, syringes, needles and antibiotic."

She got up and opened a closet behind her. It was filled with bottles, glass containers and bandages. She also grabbed a small bag and filled it up. She said, "Here you go Boris. Don't forget us."

He stared and furiously grabbed the bag from her.

He turned around and walked out of the room. I followed him quickly. He walked down another hallway and I said, "Umm, why are you mean to Vicky?"

He said, "I don't like her."

I said, "Ok?"

He said, "She is the daughter of the previous general of the Red compound. But he died a few years ago from liver failure."

I said, "Ok, so?"

He stopped and said, "So what? She is only in that position because of him. I wanted to get rid of her, but I didn't want to cause any problems."

I said, "What does she do?"

He said, "She is the manager of security of all three compounds."

I said, "Ah! That's why."

He said, "Why what?"

I said, "She talks to you like that."

He stared at me and said, "We should keep moving."

We kept walking down another hallway and then down a small flight of stairs. I saw the main entrance of the Red compound. Instead of going through it, Boris walked left to a small door. He tapped on the panel on its side and the door slowly opened. We went in, and the room had a row of lockers. He opened the first one and took out a vest from it. He opened the one next to it and took out another. He said, "These are bullet proof vests." He handed one to me and I put it on. I said, "Can you help me secure it?"

He moved closer to me and fastened it securely on me. He said, "We should go now, but before we go..." I looked at him and he came closer and kissed my cheeks. He said, "Come on."

We walked out of the room and through the main entrance doors. There were soldiers on each side of the door and nodded at us. I walked next to Boris towards the main gates of the compound. He keyed in the panel and said, "There is a security code to go out too."

We walked out, and followed a semi paved road. He stopped after a minute and said, "We can't walk to the Intelligence compound. Not with street lights on and security cameras everywhere. Where is this hidden pathway?"

I said, "We need to across the bridge through the old city buildings and around the Intelligence compound from the east. Don't worry, they are not haunted by ghosts." He looked at me and said, "Why do you say that?"

I said, "Not many people go into the old city because they are afraid."

He said, "Afraid of what?"

I said, "Each building has thousands of skeletons. No one survived."

He said, "How did we? The buildings are not very far it seems. About a forty-five minute walk."

I said, "I don't know. We just did. Have you ever been there?"

He said, "I never did to that side. It never interested me."

I looked at him mystified and said, "Well, let's go."

We walked slowly and turned right down a rough road. The bridge was near and I said, "We should cross it, but be careful. I'll go first."

The bridge was rusty and very unstable. It was not very wide and had a deep river below it. I walked on it slowly and it kept creaking. I finally got to the edge and jumped to the road. I looked back and yelled to Boris, "Just walk slowly!"

He walked slowly, and the bridge was creaking louder than before. I said, "I don't think it can handle your weight Boris." Suddenly, I heard a large crack, and the bridge started collapsing. I yelled, "Run!"

He ran towards me and the bridge collapsed completely. It fell with him and I hurried to the edge. He was barely holding the edge with one hand. I grabbed his hand and tried pulling him. I said, "Come on Boris. Raise your other hand." He did and grabbed the edge. I grabbed his shirt and pulled his upper body. He pulled the rest of his body up and laid on the road. I breathed heavily and said, "We can't go back now."

He got up and said, "Why is the bridge so bad?"

I said, "That's what happens when you don't maintain it for over a century. Come on."

We walked on a small dirt path surrounded by trees. He said, "Do you come here often?"

I said, "Just when I want to escape everything."

He looked at me and didn't say anything. We kept walking to the end of the path. The moonlight was slowly fading, and clouds were covering it. I said, "Great. We have no light." Boris grabbed a stick from under his vest and shook it. He said, "Now it's lit up. It will last about thirty minutes."

We walked faster towards the buildings. The buildings were twenty to thirty stories high. Green vines surrounded each one

and crept their way up a few stories. I looked back and Boris was mesmerised. He didn't say anything but stared up. I walked closer to him and said, "We can go all the way up another time but we need to keep walking down this road." He nodded and we kept walking. It was pure silence then suddenly, I felt a rain drop on my nose. I wiped it off and rain poured heavily on us. I said, "We got to run."

We ran down the road but I slipped and fell. Boris raised me up and held my hand. I said, "I'm fine." He said, "I don't think you should run." He sprinted and I followed him.

We reached the end of the road and he said, "Left or right?" I tried to catch my breath, for some reason I was breathing heavily and he said, "Are you ok?"

I pointed to the left side, but Boris kept staring at me. He turned around and kneeled on the floor. He said, "Get on my back, I will carry you."

I grabbed his neck and shifted my body on his back. He stood up and held my legs around him tightly. He sprinted and said, "How far?" I couldn't speak and he stopped. He said, "Lina? What's wrong?" I finally said, "Just keep going down this path."

He nodded and said, "I don't think this is a good idea. You needed time to rest. This is my fault."

I buried my face on his shoulder and whispered, "I don't think either of us can win this war alone anymore."

He nodded and continued sprinting. He reached the end of the road, and trees closed in. I whispered, "You need to go through the trees. There is a small path. It's hard to see it in the rain, but you can feel it."

Chapter 34

Rescue

Boris walked slowly through the trees. There were small tree twigs and trunks sticking out. He tried his best to avoid them, but a few struck his face and he kept saying, "Damn it."

I kept my head down. My head felt heavy and I couldn't raise it up. He said, "I don't feel the paved path below me anymore. Did I go to another direction?" I slowly looked up and said, "You're almost there. There are fences behind these bushes."

Boris walked a few steps to the bushes and I said, "I think I need to go down now." He kneeled down and I got off his back. He got up and grabbed my waist and hand. We walked through the bushes and metal fences appeared. He said, "They're so high. How do we go through? We can't climb it."

I pointed to the right side and he said, "I can't see anything." I walked to the right and pushed the metal fence forward. It was shaped as a door way. He said, "No one has ever noticed this? It's cut perfectly."

I said, "I think you have to ask yourself that. What's the Red compound for again?"

He looked at me surprised and said, "Who did this?"

I said, "I did."

He looked at me and said, "That's impossible. These fences are made with platinum steel metal and high security wiring. Any one touching them will set off an alarm in Intelligence and Red."

I said, "You are right, but I disabled them."

He stared at me and said, "You did what?"

I said, "Remember what I have access to and what I can do."

I walked through the opening and Boris tilted down his head and walked through. I pushed back the door wiring and it seemed that the door lines disappeared. He looked at me and said, "If you disabled the security on these wirings that means the entire premise is disabled."

I said, "Except the main compound gate. I left it alone."

Rain was pouring heavily now and Boris said, "Why did you do that?"

I said, "It was my way to escape when I needed to."

He said, "So you compromised the entire compound for your escape? When did you do that?"

I said, "Umm ... If I remember correctly, two weeks ago? I guess, but it was plausible at the time."

He sighed and said, "We have to find this body." He pushed his sleeve back and tapped on his wrist panel. He said, "We are close it seems. A few yards north east of here."

I nodded and walked slowly. The premise was dark and no one was in sight. I said, "Where are the machines?"

He said, "They're on the west side only surrounding the buildings and the main gate."

I said, "Not a very smart idea."

He said, "We humans are cleverer than that."

I said, “No Boris. You and I are different. We think ten steps ahead and are always prepared. The rest of the world thinks slightly differently.”

He looked at me and said, “Is that why ...”

I said, “Yes. They separated us all these years because they were afraid of us. Can you imagine if they made every machine have exactly the same thought process as two of us combined? We’ll be all dead!”

He smiled and said, “I don’t think I would kill you.”

I said, “You almost did.”

He said, “Are we ever going to forget that?”

I stopped and said, “Why are you afraid of that building? I can’t remember why, but it seems you told me before. I’m sorry I brought back that memory, but you have to tell me now.”

He stared at me for a few seconds, sighed and said, “I lived there when I was a child. Numerous men seemed to visit us every night, and my mother locked me in my room. She didn’t want me to see them.”

I looked at him and rain slowly started pouring and he continued, “I was six years old. One day in the early morning, while I was still locked in my room, I got hungry and I wanted to get out. I couldn’t hear anything outside, so I knocked really hard on the door.”

He breathed heavily and said, “I gave up, and I went out of the window, and climbed down to the ground from the second floor.”

I said, “Then?”

He said, "I walked around the building, and a man saw me wondering where I came from. I told him and he said he will take me back upstairs to my mother. We approached the apartment door, and it was slightly open. He swung the door open and quickly covered my eyes. He gasped and pushed me back outside. I told him no, and I pushed back to see."

I said, "Oh my."

He said, "She was naked on the floor with blood under her. A side of her skull was broken and her brain was showing. The man told me to stop looking and he will call security. I walked to my mother and kneeled down. I looked at her neck, and it had a necklace attached to it. I undid it and grabbed it. After a few minutes, the security guards came and took me away."

I said, "Do you know who did it?"

He shook his head and said, "I don't think it matters anymore." I came closer to Boris and hugged him tightly, and he did the same. He said, "Instead of reminiscing about the past, we should find this body."

I wiped a tear from my eye and nodded in agreement. We walked for a couple of minutes, and then we heard a sound. It sounded like death.

We sprinted to the direction of the sound and Boris pointed and said, "Over there."

We approached the body and it was a man, lying face down on his stomach and there were blood stains on his right side. Boris pushed the man to his side so we can see his face and I gasped. It was General John Myr. His eyes opened and he looked at me. He whispered slowly and said, "Lina. I'm sorry."

Boris lifted him up and carried him. Although General John was big and tall, but Boris had unbelievable strength. We walked near a tree, and it covered us from the rain. Boris took out the bag from under his vest. He emptied it in the palm of his hand and he wiped John's wound. He said, "This might sting a little." He then emptied the bottle of antibiotic and injected the needle in John's arm.

He said, "This will help. You need a doctor, but the bandage will sustain your injury. I will carry you back to the Red compound."

I said, "Umm Boris. My thoughtful valiant friend, the bridge collapsed, remember?"

He said, "Isn't there another way?"

I said, "Well, there is, but it's long."

He said, "How long?"

I said, "Well let's see. We can't ... no ... umm ..."

He yelled and said, "Lina!"

I jumped back and said, "Wow! Ok, we go around the old city to the west and around the Triangle compound. Then we reach Red from the south east side. That's about two and a half hours of walking."

He looked at me and said, "You'll pay for this when it's all over with."

I said, "Yeah. Plan B sucks, but do you want to fight the machines?"

He motioned for me to help place John on his back. He lifted himself up off the ground and positioned John on his back so he won't fall. We walked back to where we came from. I pulled the

wired door in and Boris walked through. John seemed unconscious and said, "Is John ok?" Boris looked at me and said, "I can feel him breathing. He will be fine."

We walked through the trees. I was walking ahead of him then said, "Don't walk too fast. Stay near me."

I slowed down and said, "He's heavy eh?"

He said, "No, but I'm worried about you."

I smiled and said, "I will be fine."

Chapter 35

Life

We walked down the path on the muddy road leading back. As we approached the road crossing, we walked straight and didn't turn in the direction of the tall buildings. As we kept walking, Boris didn't say a word. Maybe he was mad. I tried to break the silence and said, "It won't seem long if we conversed a little."

He said, "About?"

I said, "Stuff."

He said, "What stuff?"

I said, "The missing years."

He said, "You mean the past ten years?"

I said, "Yeah. Tell me your story."

He said, "I don't have a story, even if I did, I don't want to discuss it while carrying him. He won't always be unconscious and can listen to us."

I said, "Oh. Classified information?"

He said, "No. I just don't want to discuss anything in his presence Lina. I only trust you, but no one else."

I looked at him and smirked. I said, "The rain is slowing down. It looks like it will stop soon."

He said, "Good to know."

I said, "Well, do you want a history lesson?"

He said, "Enlighten me."

I said, "You see these buildings and old homes? They were never like that. It was a thriving little city. It had a population of around 65,000 people. This is called the city centre. There were many homes and small commercial buildings around the city. But most people lived here though."

He said, "And a small portion lived in the rural area around the city, where we are at now."

I said, "Yes. The rural area had military bases and military families. We are descendants of the military clan." I laughed and he smiled at me.

He said, "I knew all that before."

I said, "I know you know. We learned about it when we were kids."

He said, "So why do you mention it now?"

I said, "The best part about learning history, is seeing it too."

I pointed around and turned myself in a circle. Boris stopped and looked at me. He said, "Is that why you come here often? You want to live the past?"

I stopped and thought that Sara kept telling me to go back, and she claimed she was from the past. Did I have an inner desire to live in the past because it seemed better?

He stared at me and said, "Lina? What are you thinking?"

I smiled at him and said, "Oh nothing!"

He looked at me and kept walking. The rain stopped and the dark clouds were dissipating. I said, "Maybe now we will see better with the moonlight."

He said, "That's great, but the sun will rise soon."

I said, "Oh. It has been that long? What an eventful night."

He said, "That's summer for you. Long sunny days, but short night times."

I said, "Are you tired?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "We should stop and rest for a bit."

He said, "I don't think we can. We need to reach the Triangle compound soon before any one sees us."

I said, "They won't because we will be far from any wakeful eyes. We will go through a hidden path near the river."

He said, "You sure know many hidden ways. What was your position again and doing what in the Intelligence compound all these years?"

I said, "When you're alone, you spend a lot of time exploring places."

He said, "Why? I thought you had a group of friends and knew so many people in all three compounds."

I said, "But no one wanted to associate with me outside of work."

He stopped and said, "Why?"

I said, "They were afraid of me. I collected sensitive data and at times I interrogated people to get that data. I'm not very well liked."

He said, "So?"

I said, "Oh Boris. You wouldn't understand. You do the same thing."

He said, "I do it for safety. People understand that and know what position I am in. They should know yours."

I said, "Can we talk about something else?"

He stared at me and walked slowly. I followed him and didn't say anything. I can see the sun slowly creeping in the horizon and brisk of wind brushed my cheeks every now and then. Suddenly, I heard a noise. Boris stopped to listen. The sound was more apparent this time and nearer. He said, "We need to hide."

He turned left towards some bushes. He tried to kneel down, but he motioned to me to help him get John off and lay him on the ground. He took his gun out and motioned me to do so too. We heard the sound again, and it was very close to us. Out of nowhere, a herd of creatures ran out of a house near the road. I said, "What are they!"

Boris, with wide eyes stared at the creatures and didn't say anything. John said, "They are dogs."

We looked back, and John was up. He looked very pale and in a lot of pain. I kneeled over to John and said, "Are you ok sir?"

John said, "Still alive aren't I?"

Boris put his gun away and said, “How are dogs still here? There were some dogs left few years ago before we were born in the compounds, but they all died.”

I looked at them wondering the same thing. John said, “Not everything died. Look at those trees and bushes that are still here for hundreds of years. There are birds flying, insects, worms and bees. Why didn’t every organic matter die?”

I stared at Boris and he looked back. Boris said, “Do you think there are people other than us that survived the destruction.”

John said, “There must be. Nowhere near here, but far away.”

I said, “How can you be sure of that? Did anyone find them and reach out to them?”

He said, “A few years ago we tried, but we don’t want to go down that path of exploring again. People here don’t want that. They want to be left alone to live. They have enough problems.”

I said, “Is it because of the genetic mutation?”

He said, “Yes. In the past year, they assured that people are not only born with it. The mutation may happen to anyone at any time, and it’s more dangerous than ever before.”

I said, “What does this mean?”

He said, “This genetic mutation causes dangerous behaviours and hallucinations.”

I said, “Like me?”

He looked at me and said, “No Lina. You’re too innocent. You always have been. Like a child.”

I pursed my lip and lowered my head. Boris wrapped his arm around me and said, “General John, why Lina?”

John said, “She was diagnosed at an early age as having Schizophrenia. They took advantage of it and her extreme mental strength. She is an oddity but an ongoing experiment.”

Boris said, “Experiment for what?”

He said, “Behavioural Control. They wanted a quick way to alter completely what she saw and the way she viewed things. It was for the sake of science. They kept injecting her daily with mind alternation serums and feeding her certain information. It erased many past thoughts too, but it’s the serums fault. It was never intended to be erased at all, but they couldn’t stop the injections. They were afraid of what may happen. Anyways, they pretty much changed her behaviour to a controlled one. They treated her as a machine and not a human. They wanted her to collect data to build these new robotic human like machines. They didn’t want anyone to question their motives and what they were building secretly in Project Merge. It was their plan to release the machines to increase defense, and focus only on seemingly healthy individuals and other organic matter.”

Boris said, “But Sara is gone. She is out of this mind control.”

He said, “They don’t know how that happened or why.”

Boris said, “What about this new genetic mutation? How can it be controlled?”

He raised his body and kneeled straight on the ground and said, “Intelligence administration don’t want to bother with it. They view it as a waste of time and they can’t focus on other important matters. This is what happens when your man power is

exponentially decreasing. That's why they released the machines. They needed extra protection in case half the population dies in the next few weeks."

I blurted out, "What!"

He said, "Intelligence can't help us anymore. All we can do is live life like there is no tomorrow. There is nothing to look forward to anymore."

I said, "But ..."

He said, "Lina. There is no hope anymore. It's over."

I said, "That's impossible."

He said, "I tried to voice my opinion, but the bullet on my side is an indication that my power is gone."

Boris said, "Who shot you?"

He said, "Zack did."

Boris said, "He tried to kill me before too."

He said, "Don't be surprised. He and others in Intelligence want their plan of action going smoothly without any interruptions."

John tried to get up and he stood still. He said, "Well, that's the end of it. This old city is marvelous don't you think?"

Boris and I turned around and looked at the sun rays barely touching the high buildings. John said, "It's a shame what has become of us. What we have built and destroyed. And for what?"

He almost lost his standing control and Boris quickly held him up. He said, "Boris! You were always a good lad. I wish they gave you more credit than what you deserve."

Boris sighed and said, "I can't believe they did this to Lina."

I said, "I'm fine."

John said, "No it was never fine. I was against it from day one. And they used my nephew too? They took advantage of a hopeless situation. They kept it hidden from everyone. He was dying and they made you marry him still. I tried numerous times to stop what they were doing to you. He had genetic mutation too and kept calling you Sara, but you were never aware of anything. You never deserved this way of life. But there are more powerful people than me. All I can do is give you as much control and power as I can."

My eyes watered and tears were falling down my cheeks, then I stared at John and Boris and said, "We have to stop them!"

John said, "How?"

I said, "Oh don't worry. They will pay for what they have done to me, and we will find a cure to this new mutation before it's too late."

Boris smiled at me and said, "We should keep going. We have a plan to accomplish."

Chapter 36

Self-Control

We kept walking, but John was a bit slow and we stopped numerous times along the way. Boris kept offering to carry him, but John refused. After what it seemed like walking for hours, we approached the south side of the Triangle compound. I told Boris and John to follow me west to the river. Boris said, "Lina, where is this hidden path?"

I said, "There is a small hill near the river. We have to climb it to reach the path. It's not steep. General John can do it."

Boris sighed and said, "Can you?"

I looked back at him and said, "I'm fine Boris. I really am."

He had a look of disapproval on his face and said, "You need to sleep when we reach Red. I will make you rest first if you like it or not."

John laughed and said, "Finally someone that can break your stubbornness."

I squinted my eyes and stared at them. Boris said, "She needs discipline."

John laughed and said, "I agree."

I sighed and said, "Let's go!"

Boris laughed loudly and started walking behind me. I didn't know why he was laughing, but I guess his scary serious demeanour is rubbing off of him. I was a little content of this situation, but I will continue playing this game if it will loosen him up a bit.

After a few yards, we reached a small hill. Boris said, "The path is past this hill?"

I said, "Yes, I will go first."

He said, "No you're not. I will carry you on my back. General John, can you go up?"

John said, "Yes. It's not steep."

I looked at Boris and gave him an upset look. He said, "You can fight it all you want, but I won't allow you to do anything stupid from now on. That's an order."

I sat on the ground, folded my arms and said, "You didn't leave any room for argument Boris! And YOU know my answer!"

Boris said, "Lina!"

John said, "If it was up to me, I will smack both of you and lock you in a room all day to argue like children. Now stop it and let's go."

I got up and headed to the hill. I climbed on it slowly and Boris was right behind me. It seemed physically demanding and I was breathing really hard. Boris said, "Why are you slowing down?" I lowered my head and I felt dizzy. I felt Boris was next to me and said, "Get on my back. You can't climb anymore." I nodded and climbed on his back. John helped him to position my feet. John said, "She is getting weaker. I can't believe she had the strength to walk this far."

Boris felt I was secure enough on his back and said, "She is very weak, but strong willed. This will of hers will not last long."

I said, "I'm here. Hello! Talk about me like I'm invisible why don't you?"

Boris ignored my plea and kept climbing up. He reached the top edge and raised himself up. I got off his back and sat on the ground. He went back to the edge and lowered his arm for John to grab it. He pulled John up and they both laid on the ground to catch their breaths. Boris looked at me and said, “We go down this path?”

I nodded and said, “This path will lead you all the way to the Red compound. From the back though.”

He got up and said, “We should keep going then. How long is the path?”

I felt dizzy and lowered my head, I tried to breath and said, “About fifteen minutes.”

Boris rushed near me and said, “You can’t anymore. Listen to me.” I nodded and didn’t say a word. I climbed on Boris’s back and he continued walking. John walked next to him and they didn’t talk.

We got close to the Red compound’s fences. Boris said, “We need to walk around to the main gate.” After five minutes, we reached the main gate, and Boris tapped several times on the panel. A security guard came on the screen and said, “General Boris. I will open the gate. Who is with you?”

Boris said, “Colonel Lina Ard and General John Myr. They have been exiled from the Intelligence compound. They seek refuge here and I authorized it.”

The security guard said, “Colonel Lina Ard has been manually placed in the system as extremely dangerous by you. Can you explain?”

Boris said, “Explain to you?”

The security guard said, "Explain to the entire compound."

Boris angrily said, "She is not dangerous. I put her in the system as that so Intelligence and Triangle will not suspect why I brought her here in the first place. It's only a cover up."

The security guard said, "We will let you in, but you take full responsibility of her and watch her 24/7."

Boris said, "Who is in charge here again?"

The security guard said, "You sir, but we are ordered by you to take extra precautions."

Boris yelled, "Just open the gate!"

The gate opened and we went through. Boris cursed under his breath and whispered, "Idiots. All mindless drones!"

I giggled and said, "Don't get mad. He was just following your orders."

Boris sighed and walked to the main entrance. The security guards standing there rushed to John and grabbed him. They carried him inside. He said, "They will take care of him from now on."

I squeezed Boris's neck and said, "What happens now?"

He said, "Are you trying to suffocate me? Is it your revenge for saving your life multiple times over the last five days?"

I said, "It has been five days?"

He said, "Five days that felt like five years."

I let go of his neck and lowered my body to get off his back. He turned around and looked at me and said, "You need to rest. We

can implement your plan once you are better. We can't do anything now."

I nodded in agreement and walked in the entrance. Boris placed his arm on my shoulder and said, "You need to sleep. I will take you to my apartment. No one can bother you there."

We walked slowly down a hallway and reached a glass door. Boris swung it open and went through. It was a vegetable and fruit garden with a thin pathway in the middle of it. I looked up and saw the blue sky. The garden was surrounded by buildings. He said, "We are self-sufficient. We grow our own food here."

I said, "This compound doesn't get their supply from the Triangle compound?"

He shook his head and said, "Not everything."

He motioned for me to walk and said, "The far off building to the right are the living space areas. That's where a small portion of us live. Majority are families though, and live in the east side of the compound. There are several small buildings and a couple of stores that house supplies there."

I said, "It's like a little city."

He chuckled and said, "A tiny city. 283 people."

I said, "Why such a low number?"

He said, "Not many people want to defend anymore. They find it to be a pointless life. Most people have stayed in Triangle or went to Intelligence."

I nodded and kept walking. We reached the living space areas building, and Boris tapped on a panel. The panel flashed and the door opened. I went into a dark hallway. He said, "We have

limited energy in these areas during the day. We try to preserve solar power as much as we can.”

I walked next to Boris and reached a door. He opened it and it was a flight of stairs up. I walked slowly and he kept looking at me. He said, “What’s wrong?”

I said, “Nothing.”

He stopped and said, “Lina. You can’t go back.”

I said, “I just need something from my room. That’s all.”

He stared and said, “What is it?”

I said, “I have a metal box. It’s under my bed cushion.”

He nodded his head and didn’t say anything. He kept walking up and I followed.

We reached the end of the stairs and we went through a doorway. I saw a long hallway with several doors on each side. It was dim, but not like downstairs. We almost reached the end and Boris said, “Here it is.”

He tapped on the panel at the side of the door and placed his hand in the slot. It flashed and the door opened. I walked in first and the apartment was small, clean and barely had any furniture. I said, “Are you moving out?”

He laughed and said, “You can tell I barely live here. I hardly even sleep here.”

I looked at him and said, “Where do you sleep then?”

He said, “Anywhere else. My office, security headquarters, the lab. Just anywhere.”

I looked at him then walked over to the bed and laid on it. I was very tired. He said, "I will go get you some stuff and food. Sorry I don't have food in the refrigerator." He opened it to make sure and grabbed a moldy green tomato. He said, "I don't think you want that."

He walked near the door entrance and said, "Lina just rest. I will come back soon with everything. Just stay put."

I was too tired to speak. So I nodded and closed my eyes.

Chapter 37

New Home

I opened my eyes, but the room was dark. I looked at the window and it was night time. The moonlight was barely going through the window. I got off the bed, walked until I felt a light switch and turned the light on. I looked around and no one was there. I peeked at the bathroom, the door was open and the room was empty. I was alone.

Near the kitchen sink, I saw two large bags and a food tray. I opened a bag and there were clothes for me in it. It had more Red military clothes and blue shirts and pants. They don't seem to have a selection of clothing eh? I opened the cover to the food tray and there were many kinds of fruits and vegetables cut into small pieces. I was hungry and I grabbed the tray, but there was nowhere for me to sit. So I sat back on the bed and chewed slowly.

I looked around and wondered why Boris even had this empty place. I stopped eating, got up and placed the tray on the kitchen table. I opened the closet, and there were hardly any clothes in it. It had two hanging military outfits and that's all. I closed the closet and sat back on the bed. I felt dirty and it was time for me to shower. I grabbed some clothes out of the bag, not military clothes though, and went into the bathroom to shower. I saw myself in the mirror and the head bandage was falling off. I removed it completely and untied my hair.

After I was done, I went out of the bathroom hoping Boris is back, but to my disappointment, the room was empty. I searched in the other bag for a comb. I combed my wet hair and tied it back up. I wished there was a bandage so I can wrap my head, but there

were none. I laid back on the bed and closed my eyes. After a few minutes, the main door opened, and Boris came in with a small bag in his hand. I said, "Hey."

He smiled and said, "Hello! You're awake. Great!"

I said, "My head feels heavy, did you bring any bandages?"

He said, "I got everything, and medicine too."

I said, "Medicine for what?"

He said, "Antibiotics. You lost a lot of blood too. You need rest, eat and stop being stubborn."

I frowned at him and he laughed. I said, "Why do you treat me like a child?"

He said, "You act like one."

I looked at him and didn't want to argue anymore. After he wrapped my head and injected me with the medication, he said, "You need to rest. That's all I ask from you."

I said, "How is John doing?"

He said, "He is doing well. Doctors took the bullet out from his side and he is resting. He will get better in no time. He will be very useful to us, if he wants to though."

I said, "Obviously, you can't make him do anything."

He said, "No I can't and I won't try."

I said, "What if I can?"

He said, "You have a talent for persuasion."

I winked and he smiled. He said, "Now rest. I got to go back to my office."

I said, "You're leaving?"

He got up and said, "Umm, yeah?"

I frowned and looked down. He said, "Do you want me to stay?"

I looked at him and said, "If you want."

He sat back on the bed and said, "I will stay for a bit."

I said, "I have gotten used to people around me the past few days. It felt different; to be cared for."

He stared at me for a few seconds and said, "Forget mind control. You are slowly changing to what appears as someone else. Vulnerable. You are not like that."

I looked at him and I didn't know what to say. He said, "Lina?"

I stared at him and finally said, "I don't want to be alone anymore. I'm scared of what I will do to myself."

He eyed me and didn't say anything. He got up and grabbed the food tray. He sat back down and said, "You got to eat. I can't get you mentally well quickly, but you need to get better physically soon."

I said, "You don't seem to care."

He said angrily, "Lina!"

I said, "What if I go back to how I was. Day dreaming, hallucinating, talking crazy."

He sighed and said, "That's why I like you. You are different. Crazy, ambitious, carefree, wild and unpredictable. Kind of exciting. Keeps me alert."

I said, "You like the abnormal? What if ..."

He interrupted me and said, "Lina. Whatever happens, I will be at your side. I promise till the last day of my life. Just listen to me from now on. Please."

Boris never says please or asks for any type of gratitude from anyone. I nodded my head in agreement and he said, "That's good. Good start. We are agreeing about something." He handed me the tray of food and said, "You have to eat. Look at you. You're so pale. I want you to go back to the Lina I knew."

I nodded and didn't say anything. I chewed my food slowly and Boris stared intently at me. He said, "I have to go back now."

I nodded and said, "More security work?"

He said, "Mostly. There are some other things I have to watch too."

I said, "Umm, what?"

He said, "What Triangle is doing. They have been loading trucks with supplies and stationing them outside the compound near the west fences. I have no idea what they are planning. They cut off most of the security channels from Red. There are only a few left outside."

I said, "When did this start?"

He said, "Three days ago. There are so many things to worry about now. The machines, Intelligences' selfish endeavours and future

plans, Triangles' secrets." He sighed and said, "I don't know what to do anymore."

I said, "Don't worry. I will help you."

He said, "You have to. It's an order."

I said, "Great. I can't volunteer my services anymore?"

He smirked and said, "I will be back in a bit. Don't stay up for me."

He got up and walked to the door. He turned around, looked at me and said, "I'm glad you're back." Then he walked out and closed the door behind him.

Chapter 38

Exploration

I didn't know what to do. I laid on the bed looking at the ceiling. I was counting the minutes until day break. I got up and turned off the lights. I thought it would help me sleep. I laid on my side and stared at the window. I imagined other cities, people, and life beyond this dreadful place. Will I ever see it? Is it real? How are people living? Are they happy or sad? Are they technologically advanced? Do they have these animals called dogs?

I felt happy just thinking about that possibility. I wondered if Boris thought the same. Was he ever happy with his life? He seemed alone and very distant. Did he like being in power? He didn't seem he did and it looked like it was more a responsibility than a lifestyle. He seemed happier I was on his side now and helping him. It's like he was waiting for me.

I felt I was dozing off, and suddenly, I heard the door open. I saw Boris's shadow. He walked quietly and I whispered, "Boris?" He stopped and turned the lights on. He said, "Lina, why aren't you asleep?"

I said, "I tried to sleep."

He sighed, turned the lights off and said, "I'm too tired to discuss this with you."

He seemed sad and a little irritated. I said, "Is everything ok?"

He didn't reply. He sat next to me on the edge of the bed and took his shoes off. He laid down on his side facing the other way. I said, "Umm, Boris?"

He said, "Lina. Please sleep."

I wanted to find out what was wrong. I got closer behind his back and wrapped my arms around his waist. I placed my head near his and said, "Will you tell me what's wrong with you now?"

He didn't reply and his eyes stayed closed. Was he asleep? I didn't know what else to do. I stayed in my spot and didn't feel like asking anymore. Boris moved his hand on top my mine and clasped it. He said, "Don't leave me again."

I hesitated and said, "I won't."

It seemed he was asleep now and my head felt heavy. I fell asleep too.

The sun rays felt like they were burning half my face. I opened my eyes and stared at the ceiling. I looked around and Boris wasn't there. I raised myself up, and Boris came out of the bathroom wearing a different military outfit. It was darker with blue lining on the shirt cuffs. I said, "Good morning."

He came close to me, placed his hands on the bed and kissed my lips. He said, "Morning. Do you feel better today?"

I nodded and smiled. I said, "Can I leave this room today?"

He said, "Yes. This room is depressing anyways. Who wants to stay here?"

I said, "You."

He laughed and said, "I never bothered. They put me here ten years ago and I didn't want to upgrade."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "Nothing motivated me."

I pursed my lips, stared at him and he said, "Did I say anything upsetting?"

I said, "You are hopeless." I raised myself off the bed and stood up. I walked towards the bags and took out a military outfit. Boris said, "I think it fits you. You're a little tall though."

I said, "Look who's talking."

I went to the bathroom and changed my clothes. I went back out and grabbed my boots. I put them on and Boris leaned on the wall and looked at me. I said, "This is not interesting." He didn't say anything and kept staring. I sighed and said, "Something about you irritates me."

He said, "What's that?"

I said, "You're silence."

He said, "I don't talk as much as you. Is that wrong?"

I said, "No. But you have to answer when spoken to."

He said, "What if I don't want to reply?"

I said, "That's rude."

He said, "Rude? I don't have to answer to everything."

I said, "When I ask you then you do without any questions."

He eyed me and didn't say anything. I said, "Is that a yes or no?"

He said, "Fine. If it makes you happy."

I smiled and said, "Good. We are communicating better now."

He smiled and said, "Grab your gun." I grabbed it and placed it on my waist. He said, "Let's go."

I followed him out of the room, walked down the hallway and down the stairs. Instead of going out, he turned right and said, "The cafeteria is on this floor."

I said, "What time is it? Isn't it early?"

He said, "07:00 am. Everyone's awake."

I walked behind him and he opened a wide double door. I stared and there were four rows of long tables with benches. There were few people sitting, eating and conversing. Boris passed by and they nodded. I smiled back and followed Boris to a table filled with food at the front. I said, "Most of it is fruits and vegetables."

He said, "Most of the food we have is from the garden. We have a small starchy variety we received from Triangle, but we are running out. We use it sparingly."

I said, "It's ok. At least it's healthy."

He nodded and looked sad. I asked, "What's wrong?"

He said, "We can't keep living like this. The supplies are running out. No building materials. Barely any operational trucks left."

I said, "It's ok. We will figure something out."

He said, "I think you should. I ran out of ideas and I am tired."

I stared at him and didn't want to speak anymore. We both grabbed a plate of food and sat on the edge of a table alone to eat quietly. After a few minutes, Bob came in, walked over and said enthusiastically, "Lina! You look amazing!"

I smiled and said, "Hi Bob. How are you?"

He said, "I am great! Is Boris giving you a hard time being himself?"

I said, "He doesn't bother me."

Boris didn't say anything and kept eating. I stared at Boris then said, "Bob, so what's new? It's been a day."

He said, "Nothing too unusual. You know, we try to solve some problems here and there."

I smiled and said, "Boris, say hi."

Boris looked at me with wide eyes, then over to Bob and he said, "Hello Bob."

Bob said hello back and I said, "Isn't Boris sweet?"

Boris shook his head and said, "Don't push it Lina."

Bob laughed and said, "Oh Boris! Where was she all these years?" He kept laughing and walked over to the food table. Boris eyed me and whispered, "You'll pay for this."

I smiled and said, "So I will pay for two things now?"

He shook his head with great disapproval and said, "I'm going to my office. You can roam around if you want. You know where to find me." He got up and walked out.

I was surprised he was leaving me alone then Bob came over and said, "Oh Lina. I know you love to push his buttons, but he is not used to it. Give him time."

I said, "He was never like this. Well, not to the extreme of not communicating or presenting a small gesture to anyone."

He said, "You are slowly remembering what he was really like. It's impressive. I don't think all your past memories are gone."

I stared at him and thought that maybe there are things that I do remember. I said, "Do you know what's going on in Triangle? About the trucks and supplies?"

He finished chewing his food and said, "I heard and saw. It looks like they are moving."

I said, "Moving? Where?"

He said, "Out."

I gestured with my hands and said, "Where?"

He smiled and said, "Oh Lina! You're a breath of fresh air. I can't believe you're a colonel. They look like they are leaving. Where to? We don't know, but there is a big world out there. I'm not worried."

I said, "Are they going out to explore new places, to find life?"

He said, "It seems like it. The supplies are slowly depleting and many people here are dying. This can't be the end of us."

I said, "Why was Boris upset about it?"

He said, "Maybe he is upset because they didn't tell him to come along."

I said, "He wants to leave?"

He said, "He wanted to leave a couple of years ago. He even tried to form a team to explore around the area a few kilometers away for life, but that didn't happen."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "A lot more deaths started happening. People were dying quickly, and he lost some of his team. He was very upset and tried to recruit new team members, but they all decided to back out. They were afraid they can't make it and no one will ever know what will happen to them."

I said, "It doesn't sound like Boris. He would have gone alone."

He said, "Yes. He would have, but something kept him back."

I said, "What?"

He said, "Secrecy of Intelligence. What are they were planning? Triangle's strange over powering commands that made Boris upset. You of course."

I said, "Me?"

He said, "Yes. You were always a reason he was wary of everyone and everything. He didn't know why you changed and it was killing him slowly. I'm surprised he didn't leave years ago and put everything behind him."

I didn't say anything but I thought that Boris lied to me. He said that the old city didn't interest him. He wanted to leave so badly. I don't understand what he was thinking. Bob looked at me confused and said, "Lina? Don't worry about Boris anymore. He will be fine from now on."

I nodded my head and said, "He needs to make decisions and not rely on me."

He said, "He can make his own, but he just needs support and wants to make sure that someone else agrees."

I sighed and said, "I can't believe he has been like this for a decade. I will never forgive myself."

He chuckled and said, "Oh things will get better."

I said, "Maybe I should go now. Do you know where I can find General John Myr?"

He said, "I will ask for you. Let's go."

We walked out of the cafeteria and through the main door of the building. The garden was bright and there were bees flying around. Bob said, "The most beautiful part of this compound is this place. There is life and wants to grow and thrive."

I smiled and nodded. I said, "It's peaceful too."

I walked behind him to the security sector. He opened a door and there were three ladies sitting at their desks. One lady, middle aged with brown hair and glasses looked at Bob and said, "Bobby! Hello!"

He said enthusiastically, "Well ... well ... Noura! You look extra magnificent today."

She giggled and said, "Oh Bob!"

He said, "Hello ladies. Sally and Jeren. This is Colonel Lina."

Noura said, "What a lovely young girl. She was always here though, but never talked to us. At times I thought she was a ghost."

I said, "Umm, hi. I'm here now."

She said, "Is your head ok?"

I touched my head and felt the bandage. It was sort of dry. Maybe I should have changed it this morning, or removed it. I said, "Yeah, a little injury. Nothing too bad."

Bob said, "Nothing too bad? You were almost dead. None of us knew how you survived and standing here today. Maybe someone prayed for you because they love you too much."

He winked at me and I blushed. I said, "Umm, Noura. If you don't mind telling me, where can I find General John Myr?"

She said, "I will search on the computer for you. But I'm sure he is upstairs in the east sector getting well rested. Let me check. ... Yep, room E204."

I said, "Thank you."

She said, "Doll, don't mention it. You're a colonel? I would never in a million years think that's what you do."

I said, "What do you think I do then?"

She said, "Oh something domesticated. A house wife."

I said, "What?"

She giggled and said, "Oh doll. Even when you're upset you look adorable."

Bob chuckled too and said, "Well ladies. It was a pleasure seeing you. We got to go."

He walked out of the door, I waved good bye and followed him. I said, "I don't want to waste your time. I can find my way from here."

He nodded and said, "Oh Lina. If you need anything we are down this hall on the first right door."

I nodded and turned around. I walked down the hallway until I saw a glass paneled door with stairs past it. I went through it and went up. I saw a large sign and it said, "East Wing." I walked past a few

doors and found room E204. There was no panel or any security. I knocked and tried to open the door. The door opened and I swung it in. John was laying down with a few wires sticking out of him. I closed the door and wondered why there wasn't any security on these doors. The room looked more of a hospital room than the one I was in. I sat on the chair near him and stared. He opened his eyes and looked at me. He said, "Lina!"

I said, "Good morning General."

He said, "I can't believe you're here. It's a miracle."

I said, "I'm glad you're here too."

He said, "How's Boris? Is he still mad?"

I said, "Mad about what?"

He said, "Taking you away from him all this time."

I gasped and said, "You knew?"

He said, "Of course I knew. I'm surprised he even talks to me at all. That's why he hardly visited Intelligence for all these years."

I didn't reply for a few seconds, lowered my head and he said, "Lina? It was in the past. Things will get better."

I said, "I don't know anymore. I'm afraid of what I will do and say. I can't control myself anymore."

He said, "I don't know what will happen from now on. Just relax and get better. Nothing is worth it anymore."

I said, "What about Triangle and Intelligence?"

He chuckled and said, “Those bastards? They can do whatever they want. They don’t have powerful leadership to put a stop to their stupidity.”

I said, “Triangle is planning to deploy a large exploration team to search for life in other areas.”

He looked at me and said, “Who are they sending? Mutated genes carriers?”

I said, “Umm, I don’t know.”

He said, “They want to get rid of as much unhealthy humans as they can to die far away.”

I hesitated and didn’t know what to say anymore. He stared at me and said, “Lina. Don’t do anything stupid. If you ever need my help, I’m here. I owe it to you. Now, just listen to Boris’s suggestions. You may not agree with him all the time, but there is room for compromise.”

I said, “Compromise? Boris?”

He chuckled and said, “Yes. He may be the most stubborn person I ever met, following you of course, but I think he is bendable.”

I frowned and had a hard time imagining it. I said, “Do you need anything General? I should leave you to rest.”

He said, “Oh Lina. Just knowing you are still here and out of anyone’s control is all I need.”

He smiled at me and I smiled back. I got off the chair and walked out of the room. I laid on the wall past the room door and wiped tears from my eyes. I didn’t know what to do anymore. I felt lost. I sat on the floor and covered my head between my knees and didn’t want to go anywhere anymore.

Chapter 39

Mistake

I stayed on the ground for over an hour, and then I raised my head up. I looked down the hallway to both directions and there was no one in sight. I got up and walked back to the door leading to the stairway. I went down and then I wondered where I should go.

I walked slowly and thought, "Should I go visit Bob and the others, or go to Boris?"

I walked a little bit and then suddenly, two women walked the same hallway. It was Vicky and another lady. I stopped and they approached me. Vicky stared at me and said, "You're still here?"

I looked at her and didn't know what to say. The other lady said, "I can't believe she was at training every day and interrogated everyone for data collection."

I said, "Umm, I was mind controlled."

Vicky said, "Really? Is that the latest excuse you believe?"

The other lady said, "She doesn't look tough at all. Why is she here?"

Vicky said, "Boris brought her."

The other lady said, "No wonder."

I said, "I didn't come here to cause any trouble. Believe me."

Vicky with her dark jacket, buttoned up shirt, knee high skirt and pride-like demeanour said, "I'll be watching you." Then she walked past me along with the other lady. I looked back towards them and felt sad. What have I done to be this untrusted and hated?

I didn't feel like talking to Bob and the others. I headed over to Boris's office and knocked on the door. After a few seconds, the door slid open and I went in. Boris looked at me and said, "Hi Lina."

I nodded and there weren't any empty chairs. Boris didn't seem he liked anyone visiting him. He looked at me and didn't say anything. I went to the edge of his desk, got up and sat on it. He looked at me and then back at his screen. He didn't seem to care.

I said, "What do we do now?"

He said, "Intelligence is up to something." He pointed at the screen. I saw a wide angled view of the army of machines at the front gate. They were walking out of the gate and taking position at the fences. Boris switched the view to east, west, south and north corridors of the compound. The machines were everywhere. I said, "Now they are defending?"

He said, "Against what?"

I said, "Umm, maybe they are afraid of us."

He said, "Who? Red?"

I said, "Maybe, or afraid of something else."

He said, "Triangle?"

I said, "No silly. I think they are afraid of what's out there."

He stared at me and said, "Maybe. But how long will they live like this?"

I said, "I don't know. Maybe we are wrong."

He said, "What's right then?"

I thought about it for a minute and tried to think about how the minds of Intelligence administration thought. I just couldn't picture it. I said, "Maybe we should ask John."

He said, "Then what?"

I said, "We can't make a decision until we know."

He sighed and said, "Nothing makes sense. What are we doing? Why are we watching them?"

He got up off his seat and said, "I don't want to know anymore. I don't care."

I said, "But you're the head of Red."

He brushed his hair and said, "Lina. We should leave."

I said, "Leave? Where?"

He said, "Anywhere. I don't care about this place or anyone. You're back and that's all I need."

I said, "You will leave everything? All these people? They need you!"

He said, "No they don't. I will give up my position. Someone else can be in charge. I had enough. I waited all these years and I am tired. Time to go."

He looked frantic and confused, I stood up and said, "I can't convince you not to. But I have to go into Intelligence no matter what."

He said, "Why Lina?"

I said, "To get the metal box."

He said, "You will risk your life that? What's in that box?"

I said angrily, "Photos of me when I was a child!"

He stared at me and said, "What? Where did they come from? You can't go there. I won't allow you."

I shook my head and said, "You can't control me."

He yelled at me and said, "Yes I can!"

He grabbed my arm and said, "Listen to me. I'm sick of everything. We need to go."

I pulled his hand off my arm and walked out. He kept yelling, "Lina! Come back! It's an order!"

I ran down the hallway. I couldn't believe him. He wanted to control me. I still had the gun on my waist. I felt him running behind me and I ran faster to the main entrance door of the compound. The guards on each side looked at me and Boris yelled, "Stop her!"

The guards ran behind me and they were so close. I reached the gates and stopped. I took out the gun, turned around and pointed it at them. They stopped and pulled their guns out. Boris caught up and stopped. He said, "Lina stop your craziness."

I twisted the gun and pointed it at my forehead. I said, "Open this door or I will shoot."

He said, "Lina! Stop acting crazy!"

I said, "Now!"

He said, "If you really love me you would not act like this!"

I said, "Don't! I had enough of you!"

He stared at me and looked at the ground. It felt like minutes and he said, "Open the door for her." He turned around and walked back. One of the guards walked to the panel, tapped a code and the gates opened. He walked back and stared at me. I lowered the gun and stared as Boris walked back. He passed the main entrance and disappeared from my sight.

I hesitated. I couldn't move my legs. The guards kept staring at me wondering if I will move or not. I took off the bandage from my head and threw it on the ground. I turned around and walked out of the gates. I kept walking and I heard the gates door close. I turned around to look and I saw the guards walk back. I was out for good.

Chapter 40

My Plea

What have I done? I slowly walked on the half paved road. I couldn't go to Intelligence in day light without a plan. Where then? Take refuge at Triangle? No. Where do I go? I took a right turn and headed to the old city. As I approached the broken small bridge, I sighed and stared down at the river. I sat down at the edge and just stared. I removed the hair tie and let my hair fall down.

There was no life around. I laid on the ground and closed my eyes. Why did I leave? Boris questioned if I even loved him. He has loved me for so many years and waited. I couldn't even show him full gratitude in the past five days. Am I selfish? Maybe he thinks I am now.

I opened my eyes and just kept wondering what will happen to me. Do I even care about myself anymore? What am I trying to figure out, and why?

I shut my eyes and I fell asleep. I was too tired to care anymore.

I felt my eyes burning from a strong light beam. I opened them and it was light from a small truck's headlights. I got up and the engine stopped. It was night time. Did I sleep that long?

The headlights were still on and two men jumped off the truck. One came into focus and it was Bob. The other guy was Nizar. Bob said, "Are you ok Lina?"

I stared and said, "How did you guys find me?"

He said, "Boris keeps an eye everywhere. He knew you didn't go to Intelligence or bothered to go to Triangle, and told us to start searching here."

I said, "Where is he?"

He said, "Back in Red. He sent us here to reason with you."

I said, "But I can't."

He said, "You can't what Lina?"

I said, "Go back now."

He said, "Oh. So you have chosen Intelligence over Boris?"

I said, "You don't understand. I have to go and get something. That's all."

He said, "Is it that important? The past is more important than the future?"

I hesitated and said, "I just have to."

He said, "I can't change your mind. I told Boris it was hopeless. Nizar, let's go back."

I said, "Wait. You will leave me here?"

He said, "No one can make you do anything Lina. It's your absurd choices. Just wake up and grow out of them one day, ok?"

He was disappointed and jumped on the truck. Nizar followed him in. He turned on the engine and backed up. He turned around and drove away.

I tucked my head around my knees and tried to think of a plan. A plan to go into Intelligence without being noticed. My stomach starting hurting. I was getting hungry and thirsty. It was a dark

cloudy night. Maybe I should stay put till the morning and just sleep. I laid back down and closed my eyes.

I felt a gentle brush on my cheeks. I opened my eyes and it was still dark. I focused and saw it was Boris. I raised myself up and looked at him. He didn't say anything. I looked around and there was a truck. He was alone. He looked at what I was staring at and back at me. He finally said, "Do you want to get that box from Intelligence?"

My eyes widened and said, "What?"

He said, "There is an underground path from Red to Intelligence. It hasn't been used it for years. I don't think Intelligence is protecting it in any way."

I stared at him shocked with what he was saying. He looked at me and sighed, "We can go tomorrow night. It's safer that way."

I said, "You don't have to come with me."

He said, "Yes I do. I acted like a jerk today and it's not fair to you."

He grabbed the edge of his necklace and said, "This is what I have left of her. It keeps reminding me of what I lost."

I said, "I can't let you do this Boris."

He sighed and said, "It's the least I can do."

His eyes in the dark seemed watery and I stared at him. He said, "We have to go back now. Please just come with me."

His voice was shaky and I wanted to discuss this plan further. I said, "Listen Boris. I can't be what you want me to be. Things have changed."

He nodded in agreement and I continued, “We will leave this place after I get the box. We will go anywhere you want to. I won’t argue or ask anything anymore.” He turned around and said, “I just can’t see you lying on the ground again with blood under you.”

I said, “What?”

He said, “One person left me, and you almost did. I can’t take it anymore.”

Was he confessing to me? Were his emotions taking over him?

I came closer to him and hugged him tightly. I said, “Boris. I really do love you, but you have to also let me make this choice. I have to get the photos. I will never know where they came from, but it’s my reminder that I am someone worth a picture to someone.”

He raised his head up and nodded. He said, “I agree.”

I smiled and kissed him. He let go and said, “We should go back.”

Chapter 41

Knowing

We walked to the truck and drove back to the Red compound. I asked, “Why do I sleep so much? I always wake up in the dark.”

Boris said, “You were sleeping all day? So much of thinking of a plan.”

I said, “And you had this plan up your sleeve and you never told me?”

He said, “It was never a plan. It’s a desperate final thought.”

I sighed and looked forward. We approached Red’s main gates. Boris stopped the car and got out. He walked over to the panel. He came back after a minute and the gate opened. He drove in and parked the truck behind the main building on the left side. He got out and I did too. He came over to my side and said, “We will go directly to the living spaces areas.”

I nodded and followed him. The building had a back door and a security panel. He tapped on it and the door opened. We went through and climbed the stairs. We walked down the hallway till we reached his apartment. We went in and he closed the door. I was unbelievably tired and laid face down on the bed. He said, “I will go get some things.” I didn’t reply and he sighed. I heard the doors close again and I turned my head.

He was so helpful and caring. Unlike me who is selfish and uptight. Why did he love me? I raised myself up and took my shoes off. I got up and walked towards the window. I looked outside and just stared. I kept thinking of tomorrow night and if this plan will succeed at all. I just had to go to my apartment on the third level

to room B34, get the box and leave. It's a fool proof plan. But what will we encounter along the way? Was defence by the machines internal too? What about all the security cameras? This plan is not very solid and the success rate seemed to lessen as I thought it through.

The moonlight was very bright. It was a full moon and I kept wishing I lived a different life. I stared intently and stopped caring about anything.

I felt a tap on my shoulder and I turned around. Boris looked at me and said, "I was talking to you but you didn't reply. Are you ok?"

I stared at him and said, "Why me Boris?"

He was confused and said, "Because? I'm not sure what you're asking."

I looked down and back at the moon. I said, "Why do you love me?"

He sighed and said, "Because you always looked at me like I was someone worth something. You never cared what people thought of me. You always made your own judgements and had a lively personality."

I looked at him and said, "That's not the main reason."

He was more confused and said, "Oh. Well... Tell me?"

I stared and he said, "You have pretty eyes."

I laughed, patted his shoulders and said, "Oh Boris! You are hopeless."

He seemed uncomfortable and said, "Is that a reason?"

I enjoyed his gullible and innocent answers. I felt we were still young and at school. He was clueless about so many things. I said, "I'm getting tired. My head is heavy. I should lay down."

I walked over to the bed and laid down. He looked at me and said, "I like your long hair."

I laughed so hard and said, "Please stop it. You're hilarious."

He stared and was so confused. He walked to the edge of the bed and stared at me. He said, "I don't understand."

I turned to my side to stare at him and said, "What did you do today when I left?"

He said, "I was very upset."

I said, "When did you tell Bob and the others what happened?"

He said, "I told them about what happened as soon as you left. I kept watching the security cameras to find you, but you never showed up."

I said, "So what did you do then?"

He said, "I panicked. I didn't know what happened and how I can fix it. I didn't want anything to happen to you because of me."

I said, "So you care about me more than yourself?"

He said, "Of course I do. You mean everything to me. You always have and I love you."

I smiled, turned on my back and said, "That's the reason."

He stared and didn't reply. I guess he was thinking about everything and I said, "I can't keep my eyes open anymore." I turned to the other side and said, "Time to sleep. Good night."

I opened my eyes and it was still dark. I felt that this night was the longest I have ever experienced. I turned to the other side and Boris was sleeping. I raised myself up and looked at the window. I lowered my head and placed them between my raised knees. After a few minutes I felt a tap on my shoulder. I looked up and Boris was looking at me. I said, "Did I wake you?"

He shook his head and said, "I couldn't sleep well."

I looked at him and he stared back. He said, "Do you want to talk?"

I said, "About what?"

He said, "Whatever you want. I can listen and you talk."

I laughed and said, "Is this how our relationship will be like?"

He said, "It always have been. When you talk no one can stop you and I just listen."

I said, "Tell me then how I was. When I was younger? How did we meet? What did I really want to do with my life?"

He said, "Well, I have known you since you were little. You were always loud and carefree, and many kids stayed around you. I watched you from far away. I didn't think you ever noticed me or wanted to talk to me."

I said, "And?"

He said, "As we grew up, maybe we were twelve or thirteen, I can't remember. Well, many boys were around you."

I said, "Boys? Were you jealous?"

He sighed and said, "It happens. You were the prettiest girl there. Even prettier than Vicky. She was jealous of you."

I laughed and said, "Vicky? She is our age?"

He said, "A year younger. She is married now and has two kids."

I said, "Really? She doesn't look like the type."

He said, "Type to what?"

I said, "Settle down."

He chuckled and said, "She had to. It was her father's dying wish. He didn't want her to stay alone."

I said, "Did her father suggest you?"

He said, "God no. He knew I couldn't stand her but tolerated her presence for him."

I giggled and said, "She is something else."

He stared at me and said, "Well, I couldn't talk to you. I didn't talk much to anyone really and just kept my focus on learning."

I said, "You are smart."

He said, "Not as much as you. Professors didn't know why you were wild and unfocused, but were brilliant at the same time."

I said, "I was? I don't remember."

He said, "When you started hallucinating and day dreaming all the time, I guess that's when they realized you had a problem. They took you out of class and from everyone's sight for two or three days a week for over six months."

I said, "Did I change?"

He said, "You were quieter and more reserved after that, but there was still a spark about you they couldn't fade out."

I said, "When did I start talking to you then?"

He said, "We were eighteen, and I decided with a few others to train and become Red infantry no matter what they thought we should do after we take the test a couple of years later. I felt that I had to defend no matter how smart I was. One day, you came to our private training and asked everyone what our plans were and what kind of life we wanted. You kept asking like a confused child wondering what group to join. To become Red or continue learning and becoming Intelligence."

I said, "Then?"

He said, "I guess no one's answer was satisfying to you. So I was sitting alone in a far corner and you walked over to ask me the same thing."

I said, "What did you say?"

He said, "I didn't reply because I was so scared you were even talking to me. I just stared at you and you kept looking at me."

I laughed and said, "Oh my God. You haven't changed a bit."

He said, "Umm? Well, after a few seconds of you staring at me you put your hand out for a hand shake. You said your name is Lina and you will do the same; defend those that can't."

I said, "Ahh! That's such a sweet story. I wish I remembered it though."

He said, "I guess I loved you as long as I remember."

I placed my head down on my knees and looked at him, "I loved you too. I just never showed it. If I remember anything, then maybe I would have changed you a bit to loosen up."

He said, "What's wrong with me?"

I said, "Oh please. You scare everyone and so demanding."

He stared for a few seconds and said, "I'm a General. I have to be tough. I care about everyone's wellbeing and I am smart. I can make well-planned decisions quickly and I respect everyone."

I said, "Oh yeah? What about this plan to go to Intelligence at night. Did you think it through?"

He stared for a few seconds and finally said, "Sort of. But there was a higher chance to get you back here instead."

I said, "Wow buddy! What does this mean? Is there even this underground pathway? Did you lie to me?"

He sighed and said, "I didn't lie. There is this path. It's too dangerous to think of what might happen."

I said, "So what now? We're not going to go?"

He said, "I can't stop you, but we need to get help. I can't let you go alone."

I got off the bed and said, "I'm going now!"

He got up and said, "Wow Lina. Please stop. I don't want to repeat what happened yesterday."

I angrily said, "Then what?"

He said, "Listen to me. Please. We just need to plan it right and think of every possible scenario that we may encounter."

I looked at him and I sat on the bed furiously. I said, "I trust you. Just think of this plan quickly before tonight. I'm tired of this place."

I don't belong here or anywhere in these compounds. I want to leave."

He smiled and said, "Great! That's the spirit!"

I sighed, laid back on the bed and said loudly, "Uff!"

He looked extremely happy and said, "Lina. Trust me. We only have each other now."

I stared at him for a few seconds and said, "Don't push it because I have a soft spot for you."

He said, "Well, that's great. In the meantime since we are talking about this plan, umm, do you have any suggestions?"

My eyes widened and said, "You don't know what to do?"

He brushed his hair and said, "I was hoping you knew what to do since you're eager to get it over with."

I grabbed a pillow and threw it at him. I was so angry and yelled, "Boris! Uff! You're hopeless. I will ask John."

He smiled and said, "See! I knew you were thinking of a plan."

Chapter 42

Constructing a Plan

I laid back down and stared at the ceiling. Boris stood still for a few minutes then sat on the edge of the bed. He said, "What will you ask John?"

I said, "I don't know Boris. Can't you tell I'm thinking?"

He said, "I can't read your mind. So no."

I raised up and said, "That's it!"

He raised an eye brow and said, "I'm lost."

I said, "Sara knows. She knows how to get through and manipulate everyone and everything. We just have to sway her in a different direction. She kept wanting to go back. Maybe she can help me go back and get the child that was lost all these years."

He said, "I don't follow. You also got rid of Sara."

I said, "Where does the path go to in Intelligence? Which sector? Do you know?"

He said, "It's in the basement below S3. Project Merge."

I said, "Perfect."

He said, "You can't do what you are planning. Also, what will Sara do? You want to go to your apartment and get the metal box. That's it. Sara? Child that is lost?"

I crawled over to him and grabbed his shoulders, "Revenge."

He said, "You're that vengeful?"

I said, "Come on Boris. We can strike two birds with one stone."

He said, "Do you want to revive Sara so she, I mean you will sabotage Intelligence?"

I said, "Yes! Let's end the machines! Let's destroy everything they built and what they did all these years to me. To you especially."

He eyed me and said, "Are you sure?"

I said, "Come on Boris. We are a team."

I kissed him really hard and he pulled me tightly to him. I let go and said, "For our love that should have flourished all these years and they stole it from us. We have to do this."

He nodded and kissed me again. He let go and laid me on the bed and said, "I'm in. So why you need John?"

I said, "He will help us with the cameras and internal security. Do you think he is awake?"

He looked at the panel on his wrist and said, "Lina? It's 03:45 am."

I said, "Oh? Should we go back to sleep?"

He sighed and said, "I'm hungry." He got off the bed and walked over to the kitchen counter. He grabbed a tray and sat on the bed. He said, "Maybe we should eat a lot today. It seems we will have a long night ahead of us."

I giggled and said, "You're so funny. Maybe I fell in love with you because of that part."

He was chewing and tried to say, "What part?"

I said, "Your innocent and gullible part."

He continued chewing and said, "You love me because of that?"

I nodded and said, "So, have you ever killed anyone?"

He said, "No."

I said, "You may have to today."

He said, "I know. I have been waiting for this day for a long time."

I said, "Great!"

He said, "But my number one priority is to protect you. So you have to promise to stay with me at all times."

I said, "I will try."

He said, "You will not try. You will just do what I say."

I said, "Control again?"

He said, "It's not control. We are both soldiers and have a single objective. We need to stay together to complete it."

I stared at him and said, "Maybe your right." I closed my eyes and he said, "Lina? Do you want to eat? Drink? Did you even put anything in your mouth today?"

I opened my eyes and said, "Leave me alone. Let me sleep for a couple of hours. I will eat and drink later."

He continued chewing and said, "Suit yourself."

It was day time. I knew because the sun was burning my eyes. I thought that Boris really needed window blinds. I opened my eyes and turned around. Boris was looking at the ceiling. I said, "Good morning."

He turned his head and said, "Morning."

I stretched my arms and yawned, "Big day ahead of us!"

He said, "Yes."

I raised myself up and looked at the window. I said, "If there is anyone out there. Do you think they will welcome us?"

He said, "I hope so."

I looked at him and said, "I can't wait to leave. I don't care anymore what's out there."

He nodded and said, "We should start implementing the plan soon. It's 09:15 am."

I said, "What? You let me sleep this long?"

He said, "I'm not going to wake you up when you're so tired."

I sighed and said, "Well I'm awake. Let's get going."

I got off the bed and stood up. Boris didn't move and just stared at me. I walked around the bed, then suddenly, my head was heavy and I felt that something was pounding on it and I fell down. He got up and helped me sit on the bed. He looked at the bruise on my head and said, "It looks bad. Worse than before."

He looked back at my pillow and grabbed it to examine it. He said, "There are little spots of blood. I will bandage you and take you to the ward. We can talk to John there and get some antibiotics in you."

I said, "I can't be weak. We have to do this tonight."

He shook his head and said, "Lina, your health is more important for now."

He looked disappointed and proceeded bandaging my head. He asked me if I was comfortable walking and I nodded in agreement. I followed him slowly. He sighed a few times then carried me to the ward. As we approached John's room, he said, "I will take you in to talk to him while I get a doctor from across the hall."

He opened the door, John looked at us and said, "Valiant aren't you Boris?" I giggled. Boris was confused and said, "She is not well and I have to get a doctor."

He sat me on the chair and walked out. John looked at me with a concerned face and said, "What's going on?"

I said, "Oh you know Boris. He worries too much."

He said, "It's his duty."

I said, "Umm, General? How are you today?"

He enthusiastically said, "I'm doing great. The doctor last night said I'm good to go. I wonder what I can be helpful with at Red. Maybe I will garden."

I nodded in agreement and said, "Sounds wonderful, but is that what you want to do?"

He said cheerfully, "God gave me a second chance at life, and I should dedicate the rest of my days being a servant to mankind in any way I can."

I hesitated and wondered where Boris was. He looked at me concerned and said, "Lina? Is there something you want to say?"

Suddenly, the door swung open. The doctor and Boris were there. The doctor said, "Lina! General Boris is being a little panicky." He walked over and looked at the bandage and said, "I don't see any blood stains. Let me take it off." He grabbed a pair of scissors to

remove it. He looked at my bruise and said, "It's external. Nothing too serious. I will bandage you back up and inject you with an antibiotic every six hours for three days. You will have to stay here in the ward so we will keep an eye on you. Also, you look very pale and your eyes are blood shot."

I gasped, looked over at Boris and said, "No no no!"

The doctor looked at me and then back at Boris and said, "Did I say anything upsetting?"

John said, "She seems she has something important to say."

Boris stared at me with pursed lips. The doctor said, "General Boris?"

John was angry and yelled, "Lina! Talk now!"

My eyes widened and I stared at John. I tried to speak and Boris interrupted me and said, "She wants the metal box in Intelligence and she wants to get it tonight!"

John looked confused and said, "Metal box? Intelligence? What are you talking about?"

The doctor interrupted us and said, "She can't go anywhere unless it's a suicide mission. If that's the case, then you don't need me."

Boris came closer to the doctor, grabbed his shoulders and said, "Just bandage her and give her an injection."

The doctor said, "Yes General."

I couldn't move and the doctor proceeded with his task. I stared intently at Boris and then at John. John wasn't sure what to say and remained silent. When the doctor was done, he excused himself and walked out. John stared at me and said, "I may not

have authority over you anymore, but I have to question your motives and your ridiculous plan.”

Boris stared and waited for me to speak. It was an indication to tell John the entire plan and our planned departure. After I spoke of the plan, John looked at me and didn't speak. He sighed, looked at Boris and finally said, “You're a General. Don't let your emotions cloud your judgements.”

Boris hesitated and said, “I have no choice in this matter.”

John yelled and said, “Yes you do! She is insane! Sara didn't leave her at all. She wants her to die. It's a final protocol to end her.”

Boris's eyes widened and he looked frozen. John looked at me and said, “Are you sure there is a metal box with your photos? Ever? Did you hallucinate them?”

I said, “Yes I'm sure of it.”

He said, “You also want to destroy the machines using Sara's magical powers?”

I hesitated and said, “Yes.”

John sighed and was silent for a few seconds. I looked over at Boris and he looked at me. John then spoke and said, “I have some unfinished business that I need to take care of in Intelligence. I will need all your soldiers Boris. I won't take no for an answer. As for you Lina ... stay with Boris. At least there is one sane person between you two.”

I smiled and jumped at John to hug him. He said, “Wow there. Boris, you have a wild one to deal with here!”

Chapter 43

A Single Flash

John hugged me back tightly and said, “If my daughter was alive, I would have loved for her to be like you.”

I let go of him, sat back on the chair and said, “What happened to her?”

He said, “She didn’t make it past nine years of age. She had severe fevers and bloody rashes all over her body, and the doctors were too late to help her.”

I said, “That’s terrible.”

He said, “At the time we were very weak and were trying to build this society. We had to learn how to do everything again.”

I said, “When was this?”

He said, “Thirty years ago.”

I looked at Boris who was listening intently and said, “Do you remember my family?”

He said, “I only heard. I wasn’t in Red. I was in Triangle and we were reconstructing Intelligence compound.”

I said, “Red? My parents were Red?”

He said, “Lina? Don’t you know? I know your memory was jeopardized, but I didn’t think all of it was since the time you were a child.”

I said, “Tell me! What do you know?”

He said, "Your parents were exploration collectors. They travelled around the compounds every day to nearby deserted cities and collected whatever they can carry. That's why there is a large supply area in Triangle for everyone. Clothes, material building items, computers, electrical equipment. You name it, it's there."

I said, "It was just them two?"

He said, "No. There were others. Let me remember some names. Umm, there was Elijah, Lee, Nathan, Jamila, Omar, Isaac."

Boris said, "Isaac? The guy in charge of the supply stores for Red?"

He said, "I'm not sure. Maybe him."

I looked at Boris and said, "Does he look like my parent's age?"

Boris said, "Yes, but ..."

I stood up and said, "Let's go!"

Boris nodded and John said, "Do you always agree with her orders Boris without thinking it through?"

Boris chuckled, brushed his hair and said, "Sometimes."

John sighed and said, "Just go. I need to get up and get ready. Remember what I need Boris. Make it happen."

Boris grabbed my hand and sprinted to the door. We were out in the hallway and he said, "The supply store is in town. It's about a ten minute walk from here. Can you walk?"

I nodded and smiled at him. He said, "Good."

We went out of the building and took a left turn. We walked on a paved road and saw some people coming and going. Almost everyone nodded at Boris and I smiled. As we reached the town,

there were many buildings next to each other. There were two or three stories high. There were children playing on the grass who were no more than two or three years old. Their parents were sitting on a bench conversing. They looked at us and nodded.

I smiled back and Boris looked at them and nodded back. I said, "Acknowledging people. Was it so hard?"

He looked at me and didn't say anything. I giggled and kept walking until we reached a warehouse. The large door opening was shut. Boris said, "We should go to the side door." We walked around and saw a door. He knocked and waited for a response but nothing. He knocked again and sighed. I said, "Where did he go?"

He said, "I don't know." He looked around and said, "I think that's him over there."

The gray haired middle aged man walked over and stared at Boris. He said, "Wow General! I swear I did nothing. It was all Jin's fault!"

I looked puzzled and Boris said, "I don't care what you guys are up to. I'm here to ask you a question."

Isaac looked confused and said, "It was all Jin's fault. I swear!"

Boris was so irritated. Isaac stared at me and said, "You look familiar young lady. It's like I've seen you before."

I said, "Yes! Maybe I look like my mom or dad?"

He eyed me and said, "Who are your parents?"

I said, "Well, I don't remember. My name is Lina Ard by the way."

He was shocked and said, "Ard? Lina? Elias's and Dina's daughter?"

I said, "The explorers!"

He looked at me and came closer. He said, "What have they done to you?"

I said, "Who did?"

He said, "Triangle and Intelligence."

I noticed he was looking at my head bandage and Boris said, "Umm, so you knew them. They were exploration collectors a few years ago."

He kept staring at me and said, "Yes. A long time ago. Remember that they died from a truck accident. It was raining heavily one day, the truck looked like it hit a large rock and rolled multiple times. We couldn't find the truck for two days. When we did, we found them dead in it near the river at the west side of Triangle."

I frowned and said, "That's how they died."

He said, "Yes. It was a shame. We even tried to save the baby in her stomach since she was six months pregnant."

I gasped and said, "What?"

He said, "The baby was dead too."

I kneeled on the floor and started crying. I could have had a brother or sister?

Boris kneeled down and said, "Isaac. Was there anyone else left? Did anyone watch Lina? Or did they take her to Alliance right away?"

He said, "Of course there was. General Nadine, her grandmother. Her mother's mother."

Boris said, "What? She was the first in charge of the compound when Red was formed over fifty years ago."

He said, "Yes. But after a few months from the incident she died of heart complications. I guess since there wasn't anyone else left, they had to take her to Alliance."

I closed my eyes and covered them with my hands. I couldn't stop crying. Boris grabbed my waist and brought me closer to him. He then said, "Isaac. Do you remember if at any time her dad or mom found an old camera that produced pictures right away by paper? It may have been an antique found while exploring."

He thought about it and kept saying, "Umm. Umm."

After a minute, Boris became irritated and said, "I don't think you remember that."

Isaac enthusiastically said, "Wait! Yes! Oh, twenty five or twenty six years ago, we were assigned with them two on a mission at an old town north, more than two hundred kilometers from here. It was a small place with a few old buildings and large fields. One small building was an antique store and had even older things everywhere. They were useless stuff and we couldn't possibly find a need for them. Elias grabbed this object, a funny big camera, and wondered if it worked. He turned it on and clicked on it. It flashed light at the wall and a piece of paper came out of it. The paper changed a few seconds later to a picture of the wall. Dina was so amused and grabbed it from him. She said that this is the best invention ever made by humans. An instant permanent memory collector she said. Does that sound right to you guys? She had that bubbly lively personality and she was always amused by everything. No one knows why Elias married her. She was the total opposite of him."

I looked at Isaac and said, "So my mom took those pictures of me?"

He nodded his head, gestured with his hands and said, “Knowing her, she must have.”

I looked over at Boris and said, “We have to go get them now!”

He nodded and said, “Isaac. You don’t seem fond of Intelligence or Triangle. Want to carry a gun and do some military work again?”

He laughed and said, “These old hands General?”

Boris said, “It’s for her mom and dad’s sake. And the agony they have done to her all these years.”

He eyed us and didn’t ask for any more reasoning and said, “I’m in. Where are the guns? I haven’t held those suckers in years!”

Chapter 44

The Gathering

Boris raised me up and said, "Isaac. Meet everyone at the main entrance of Main at 07:30 pm. You will know the details then."

Isaac saluted Boris and said, "Can I bring along Jin and the gang. You know they are eager to hold a gun and shoot."

Boris eyed him and said, "This will not be a show to see who looks better shooting!"

Isaac said, "I know. I know. Don't worry. We promised to be in service to Red for the rest of our lives. Also, can't say no to a pretty lady." He winked at me and I blushed. Boris was so irritated and said, "Yes. Yes. We got to go."

We walked and I waved good bye to Isaac. I said, "So, what's the grand plan?"

He looked at me and said, "John will tell me. In the meantime, we are heading to the ward and get you rested."

I stopped and said, "Wow Boris. Were you back there? Did you hear the story?"

He sighed and said, "Yes. The plan will be implemented tonight!" He looked at his wrist and said, "It's not even 11:00 am."

I said, "Oh."

He smiled at me and said, "Now I know where you got your eagerness and crazy wild self from."

I frowned and I didn't want to reply. He looked at me then motioned to walk with him.

We reached the Main building and entered. We headed upstairs to the ward and we went to a room where doctors were sitting in a lab. He went to talk to the doctor and then came over and said, "Lina. Just go with Dr. Mendez. I will be back later. Ok?"

I nodded my head and he went out the door. The doctor motioned for me to go with him and we entered another room across the hall. I laid on the bed and he hooked me up to a machine and said, "I will keep checking on you every hour. A couple of soldiers will come soon and guard the door."

I said, "Soldiers?"

He said, "Oh you know the general. He can't function at all knowing someone is vulnerable and away from him."

I sighed and said, "That sounds exactly like him."

The doctor chuckled and said, "Just relax. We will take care of you."

I stared at the ceiling wondering how slow this day has been. Everything that has happened to me the past week was incomprehensible. I wanted it to end. I felt my head was so heavy and I fell asleep.

I woke up and I felt my hands were clasped. Boris had his head on my chest too. I said, "Boris?"

He raised his head and looked at me smiling. He said, "It's time to go."

I gasped and said, "What time is it?"

He said, "08:45 pm and everyone is ready."

I gasped and said, "What? How did I sleep for that long?"

He said, "I brought a bullet proof vest for you and a couple of guns. Remember to stay with me at all times."

I nodded my head and I tried to raise myself up. I couldn't because he kept pushing me down and staring at me. I said, "Boris?"

He said, "I don't want you to go, but you will hate me if I don't let you."

He helped me put on the vest and secure it. I stood up and placed the guns on each side of my waist. I gestured that I was done and ready. I walked to the door and tried to open it but he pulled back my other hand. I looked back and he kissed me really hard. It was like a final kiss to say farewell. He wouldn't stop for over a minute then suddenly the panel on his wrist beeped. He stopped to look at it and sighed. He hugged me and said, "Always know that I love you no matter what happens."

Chapter 45

A New Territory

We walked out of the ward and headed downstairs. Boris's facial expressions seemed he was about to kill someone and no one can dare stop him. I sighed and I kept holding my head but he stopped and said, "What's wrong?"

I said, "I want to get it over with. I'm tired."

He nodded and said, "Listen Lina. I can abort this mission right now if you want. Otherwise, everyone's ready and waiting for my command."

I stared at him and he looked so serious. He had a look that I have never seen before on him. I said, "Ok General. Let's keep moving."

He looked at me dumbfounded. It was the first time I acknowledged his position and respected his authority. He said, "Let's go colonel."

I followed him until we reached the basement area that was a flight of stairs past the main foyer. There were about a hundred soldiers waiting. They all stood up and saluted Boris. John nodded too and said, "You like to take your time Boris? Did you two have a farewell party just in case?" He winked and there was laughter from the crowd. It was from Isaac and his friend's direction mostly. Boris composed himself and didn't say anything. I wanted to laugh too but giggled instead.

Suddenly, there were high heeled footsteps behind us coming down the stairs. It was Vicky. She walked in front of us and eyed Boris and said, "What the hell you think you're doing? Are you starting a war?"

Boris looked at her and said, “Vicky leave. This does not concern you.”

She said, “Really? You brought all the defence down here and want to jeopardize everyone else’s safety who is left? That’s a breach in security. I will not allow it.” She turned around and yelled, “Everyone! Abort mission! Boris has lost his mind!”

Everyone was hesitant and didn’t move. I had enough of her and the way she accused Boris. I took my gun out and pointed it at her. I said, “Vicky! Leave now or else!”

Boris stared at me and didn’t say anything. Vicky turned around, looked at me and said, “You want to shoot me? Is this what the *smart* people at Intelligence taught you? Get rid of the weak and carry on? I had enough of you. I am contacting Intelligence now and telling them of what you are doing.”

Boris pulled me back and lowered my gun. He said, “Colonel, stop.”

I looked at him and said, “She is serious! She will ruin everything!”

He pushed me back and whispered, “Let me handle this Lina.”

With a swift move, he took his gun out and shot Vicky twice on both legs. She screamed and yelled, “Boris!”

He said, “Crawl upstairs and tell them. Everyone! Let’s go!”

The guards swiftly walked to the entrance and a couple opened the large door. Each of them turned on a flash light and walked through the entrance with John leading them. Boris looked at them and down at Vicky and said, “You will never understand.”

He grabbed my hand and we walked at the end of the line. The path was dark and Boris took out a flash light to turn on. He didn’t

say anything for a few minutes. I broke the silence and said, "Are you going to tell me the plan? Now is a good time."

He continued walking and said, "No. Just stay with me."

I sighed and said, "Yes General."

In the dark with shadows bouncing across his face he smiled and said, "The path is about two kilometers long. It will give us time."

I said, "Time for what?"

He said, "Time to enjoy this."

I was confused and didn't want to press this issue. Maybe he did lose his mind. I guess I rubbed off on him.

After a few minutes of walking, we heard John yelling at the guards to be prepared. Boris gripped my hand tightly and whispered, "You and I will sneak up to Project Merge while the soldiers guard us on the way there. After that, it will be just us two."

I nodded, walked behind them and then I said, "Do you think there are machines inside?"

He said, "Yes."

I stared at him with wide eyes and said, "Ok."

The guards reached the end, and John tried to open the door but it was locked, He yelled for everyone to move back and a few seconds later, there was an explosion and fire coming from the door. The guards ran fast through the hole it made and Boris started running too. I ran alongside of him and went through the hole. John said, "Everyone, take your positions."

He walked to the closed door leading out of the basement and leaned to hear something. He smirked and said, "Oh boy! This will be absolutely fantastic!"

He opened the door and all the guards held up their guns. He said, "Let's go!"

He ran out first and Boris ran behind him. I said, "Wow! The soldiers?" He said, "They are right behind us. Go!"

We ran up a flight of stairs and John stood at the edge of the hallway. He motioned for Boris that it was safe and said, "There are no cameras beyond this point. Lina, you know what to do. If you need to, just blast everything."

We walked down a hallway, but it was different than the previous one. Boris said, "John told me the code for this door."

We turned right to a large gray door with a small side panel. I looked closer at the door and it was engraved with the symbol \forall and M on top of each other. I said, "Uff! What does it mean?"

Boris looked at me and said, "I know what \forall is for. It means for all or for each one. As for M? It could mean anything. In Roman numbers it could be a 1000, or Greek letter mu, or ..."

I said, "Wait a second? It's math related? Numbers?"

He said, "Maybe. I have no idea what it really means, but the universal explanation is ... "

He hesitated and I said, "Is?"

He was confused and remained silent.

I said, "Oh my God! Why can't it be so simple like Merge? M for Merge."

He looked at me and said, “Well, for each merge? For all merge?”

I sighed and said, “Maybe. That sounds about right. We need to go in. What’s the code?”

He tapped on the panel vigorously and the door opened. I said, “That was easy!”

Boris nodded and walked in slowly. He held my hand and raised his gun. He looked up at every corner and nothing was there. We slowly moved forward to another door. He grabbed the knob and swung it open.

Beyond the door was unimaginable. I couldn’t believe it. There were rows of machines, but there were shut off. I said, “We are screwed.”

He grabbed my hand and said, “Follow me. John said to keep turning left until we reach the control room.”

I nodded and walked beside him. After maneuvering through multiple hallways, we reached a large glass paneled door. Boris looked through and said, “No one is in there. Let’s go in.”

He swung the door open and we walked in slowly. There were many monitors and computers around. Boris sat on a chair and said, “Lina?”

I said, “I can’t remember.”

He stared and said, “Lina? This screen has a picture of you.”

I couldn’t see the screen from the angle I was standing. I tilted and gasped. I said, “That’s Sara!”

He said, “Yes.”

I crouched over him to have a better view and said, “Should we wake her up?”

He hesitated and said, “How?”

I looked around and saw a dangling wire that looked oddly familiar. I grabbed the wire. It had a pointed needle at the end. I said, “Maybe?”

He looked at me and said, “It seems the wire is attached to something. Umm ... ” He tried to move around some equipment to have a better view and said, “Yes. It’s definitely attached to this computer with her face. I think this is it.”

I looked at the wire, he looked at me and said, “What do you want to do Lina?”

I stared at him for a few seconds and realized that he was in charge now. He was in the seat with the computer in front of him. I said, “Let’s see how smart they say you are Boris.”

He looked puzzled and stared at me. He then stared at the wire and at the computer screen and said, “I can control you then?”

I said, “You got it.”

He smirked and said, “You might hate me after this.”

I punched his arm and he said, “I’m kidding Lina.”

He tapped the screen and my picture disappeared. There were symbols all over the screen and machine code instructions. He was reading each line carefully. He finally said, “There has to be another wire somewhere.”

I said, “Another one for what?”

He said, “To attach to me.”

I was confused and said, "Why does it need two attached?"

He said, "I need to control Sara physically. Virtual instructions are not enough. I will set everything up and give her a different direction. Search for a wire in here."

I nodded and looked around. Boris was tapping furiously on the screen and after a couple of minutes I found one a drawer. I walked over to him and handed it over. He said, "I think this will work."

He attached the wire to the back of the computer and held both by their edge. He looked at me and said, "No matter what Lina, you have to be stronger mentally and make her stop the machines somehow. I think one of these computers controls the machines and Sara knows. Maybe. I will be here too because if anything happens, I can physically stop her."

I said, "What will you do?"

He said, "I may have to kill her."

I said, "But Boris! That's what she wants!"

He said, "No. She wants you to kill her."

I said, "That's not right. You tried to kill me before because of what she made you see in the hallucination."

He interrupted me and said, "You wanted me to see it. Not her!"

I stared at him but he looked angry and I said, "But why you wanted to shoot me then?"

With a serious tone he said, "I had no idea what they have been doing to you and if you changed completely to someone I can't

stand. I wanted to kill you to end my misery from the past ten agonizing years of my life.”

I stared at him and frowned. I said, “It’s black and white for you then?”

He angrily said, “Lina. I don’t view life like that. You do, and you need to stop that extreme thinking. It will kill you at the hands of her! That’s why it was easy for them to control you instead of me! You never take things lightly.”

I eyed him and said, “Do you really think that of me?”

He said, “Everyone has a flaw. It’s worse if it’s a mental problem too.”

I said, “I don’t think you have a flaw.”

He stared at me and said, “Lina. I’m not perfect. *Believe me!* I am not perfect.”

My eyes started watering and I said with a low voice, “I don’t think so. I never thought you did. You’re perfect in my eyes. Since we were young I viewed you as one.”

He stared and said, “Please Lina. It’s not the time to start remembering. Are you even remembering or just want to play with my emotions? Please. Can we discuss this later? Can we? Can you even do this now? Do you want to or should we leave and go to your apartment now?”

I said, “I will do it alone.”

He looked at me and said, “I can’t let you. Either both of us or abort this mission and go to your apartment.”

I angrily said, “I will do it alone!”

He threw the wires and slammed the screen with his fist that the glass shattered. He yelled and said, "No one is going!"

He grabbed a screw driver laying near the computer and vigorously slammed it into a computer and shattered the screens. He continued slamming and breaking all the equipment. There was nothing left on and the room looked like it was in ruins. He stopped and tried to catch his breath and stared at me. The emergency lights turned on and a loud beep burst into life. He said, "See! Am I perfect?"

I couldn't help but laugh. I kept laughing and he started laughing too. I said, "I may have forgotten about your bad temper."

He said, "I think we upset something. We have to run!"

He grabbed my hand and we ran through the door. I tried to say something, and the noise got louder. There were movements and Boris stopped. I grabbed his hand tightly and he whispered, "There is a door down this hallway. Let's go in it."

We sprinted down the hallway until we reached the door. He grabbed the knob and tried to open it. He said, "Damn it. It's locked." He looked around and said, "Lina! Someone is coming." He took his gun and shot the door knob. He kept shooting and trying to open the door. He slammed it with his body and the sound of movements were getting closer.

He slammed the door with all his might and it opened. He looked at it and grabbed my hand. We went through and it was a dark black room. It was empty. I said, "This is the room! I was in here and confronted Sara!"

He said, "How did you get out of it?"

I looked around and said, “There was another small door. There it is!”

We ran to the door and there were loud sounds behind us. Then suddenly, there was a gun shot. Then multiple shots. We turned around and to our horror, they were robotic machines. Boris opened the door and ran down the white walled hallway. We ran then reached the door and he shot the knob and slammed it open.

We continued running as fast as we could and ran out of sector S3 until we reached upstairs to third level of sector B. We couldn’t stop, and the machines kept running after us. Boris said, “Lina! I need to distract them until you open the door to your apartment.”

I nodded and said, “Ok!”

He let go of my hand and turned around. He raised both guns and kept shooting. The machines continued shooting back. Boris kept ducking and hiding at the edge of the hallway. I ran to the door of my apartment and tried to catch my breath. I kept hearing gun shots and Boris yelling for me to hurry up. Then suddenly, his yelling stopped and the shooting stopped.

Chapter 46

Grabbing on to History

I looked back and Boris was laying on the floor. I yelled, “No!” I ran towards him and the machines got closer. I grabbed my guns and shot at them. One fell down and then another. Then they suddenly looked back and multiple ones were falling on the ground. There were loud gun shots and I saw Red soldiers firing. I stopped and crawled over to Boris.

I yelled and said, “No! No!”

I looked at his body but there weren’t any blood stains. I looked at his head and lifted it up to examine it, but there was nothing. I said, “Boris?” I looked at his vest and there were bullets stuck on it. I thought that the bullets may have gone through the vest but I couldn’t tell. I didn’t have time to unfasten it and just inserted my hand under his vest and through his shirt to touch his chest. I felt that nothing has gone through. Suddenly, Boris gripped my other hand and whispered, “Are you trying to be romantic?”

I took my hand out and hugged him tightly. He grabbed my body and said, “The impact from the bullets were too strong and I fell backwards and hit my head. I guess I was knocked out for a minute.” He looked at the soldiers and the massive fight down the hall and said, “Lina let’s go.”

We ran to my door again and tapped a code on the panel. Then I placed my hand in a small hole and the door opened. He grabbed my hand and went through. I closed the door, breathed heavily and said, “My God! All that for photos!”

Boris stared at me dumbfounded and said, “It’s your idea!”

I said, "Why you never stopped me!"

He brushed his head furiously and yelled, "Lina!"

I looked around the room and said, "Welcome to my home!"

He looked around and said, "Charming."

I said, "Well it's better than yours! I have a couch, table, chairs, and window blinds." I walked to the window and grabbed the blinds and said, "Look! They block sunlight!"

He stared at me and said, "You are the most insane person I have ever met in my life. It could have been a short one too!"

I walked over to him and kissed him. He grabbed me closer and slowly laid me on the bed and continued kissing me. He stopped and said, "They are under here?"

I looked at him and said, "Oh yeah!"

He got off the bed and I kneeled down on the floor. I squeezed my arms under the cushion and felt the metal box. I pulled it out and placed it on the bed. I opened it and took out the photos. I said, "Boris look!" He grabbed the photos and looked at me and said, "You really haven't changed one bit. And that little girl you saw while hallucinating was exactly like those pictures. Clothes too!"

I giggled and said, "See ... I wasn't imagining things!"

He stared at me and said, "Do you remember anything else? The last hallucination was not caused by Sara or any type of mind control. You are remembering."

I stared at him and then back at the photos and said, "I'm not sure what else to remember. I guess I figured out most of what I needed."

He frowned and said, "Sure you did."

I was puzzled and said, "What do we do now?"

He said, "We got to wait until John contacts us that his part of the mission is complete."

I said, "What did he plan to do?"

He smirked and said, "An overthrow of your plan."

I was confused and said, "Can you explain?"

He sat on the bed and motioned for me to do the same. He said, "If mind control was unsuccessful for any reason, then he had to capture a few people involved in this turmoil and force them to end it. Obviously that was the case since the machines in Project Merge turned to life!"

With wide eyes I said, "John and you never trusted my plan to work?"

He said, "Well, he really didn't and wasn't going to risk it."

I squinted my eyes and said, "At least someone is still on my side. Why did you destroy the computers and especially Sara?"

He said, "Years of built up anger. Also, I didn't want to see you ever again being a drone."

I said, "I don't know how to work with you from now on Boris. You're unpredictable and never follow a plan."

He gasped and said, "Excuse me?"

I looked at him and said, "I guess that makes you more human like, and not so serious all the time."

He stared at me and said, "Whatever you think. I need to stop trying to understand what you mean. You give me headaches."

I sighed and then I touched my head bandage. He looked at it and said, "You need to go back and rest."

I said, "What about leaving the compounds for good?"

He said, "Yes we will, but when you get better."

I said, "Oh."

He nodded, laid down and closed his eyes. I said, "Is it time to sleep?"

He said, "I have never been so tired in my life. Maybe I'm getting old."

I said, "Hello! I'm your age! That makes me old too!"

He said, "I'm almost eleven and a half months older than you."

I sighed and laid down next to him. I held the photos up and kept staring at them. Boris opened his eyes and looked at them too. He said, "It was worth it."

I looked at him and smiled. I secured the photos in my shirt's pocket. I looked at the ceiling and he said, "Well, we need to kill time."

I looked at him and said, "Aha?"

He looked at me and came closer to kiss me. After a few seconds, his wrist panel beeped. He said, "Damn it! Can they wait a few minutes?"

Chapter 47

The Machines

I laughed so hard because he was so upset cause of it. He raised himself up and tapped on the screen with his index finger. He said, "Lina, they need you to be there."

I said, "What for?"

He said, "No idea. Let's go."

We walked to the door and Boris raised his gun and told me to do the same. He opened the door and looked at the hallway at both directions. He said, "We have to go back to Project Merge."

I nodded and we sprinted down multiple hallways until we reached S3. We went through the door that we ran out from and walked slowly. As we went into the large dark room, we saw John pointing a gun at Ellen, Joseph, Zack, Abe, Michelle and Marie. There were soldiers around him too pointing their guns as well, and a couple of machines laying on the floor.

John smirked and said, "Well ... well. Your human experiment is here."

I stared at him and at the crowd crouched on the floor and said, "Are you going to kill them John?"

He said, "Not yet. I made them stop all the machines in Intelligence and Triangle. We only have to worry about collecting scrap metal. We can use it for something more useful."

I stared at Ellen and asked, "What was the real plan? Why did you even create these machines?"

She stared at me and said, “We need a great defensive force to protect us. We have no idea what’s out there and how dangerous it is. What’s left of us is slowly dying and others are terminal. We can’t continue knowing we are vulnerable to what’s out there.”

I said, “What if there was nothing out there?”

She said, “Only you would think that. Everybody else is afraid.”

I said, “Why did Triangle need the machines too?”

She said, “They needed defense as well. They weren’t going to rely on Red and their dying population.”

I said, “Dying?”

She said, “Yes, but as humans, we have the right to die peacefully and not in agony or mercy of others.”

I was confused and stared at Boris. He seemed confused as well and asked Ellen, “Why Lina? Why did you choose her for your experiment?”

She laughed and said, “Easy. She is extremely tough physically and has a mental problem that we used to our advantage.”

I said, “Instead of trying to solve my mental problem, you played with it? You controlled me?”

She said, “Yes. If not, who knows what would have happened to you. Maybe an extreme case of violence or withdrawal from society. You’re still alive now. How did you do it?”

I stared at her not knowing what to say. Boris looked at Ellen and said, “She is not mind controlled anymore and you tried to kill her. You wanted her to die so she would not ruin your plans.”

She said, “Yes ...” She paused then said, “She is smart too. Smarter than anyone alive and that is the reason we were able to build this machine force. Her intelligence helped us.”

I said, “What are you talking about?”

She said, “You built these machines. You collected and analyzed the data for us. We tried for years to find a better artificial intelligence method that was close to human’s intellect. You discovered and implemented it a year ago. Not only are you a soldier, but the greatest scientist there is. We only used Sara to guide you and keep you on a sane path. We helped you.”

I screamed and said, “You didn’t help me! You ruined my life! I didn’t want to be a scientist or be any part of Intelligence! You used me and when I slightly swayed off your plan, you wanted to get rid of me!”

I pointed my gun at her and said, “You need to die!”

Boris grabbed me quickly and took the gun out of my hand. I yelled at him and said, “Leave me alone! Let me kill her!”

He shook his head and said, “Allow me.”

He turned around and shot Ellen’s chest. She fell on the ground and stopped moving. The others kneeling on the ground panicked and John said, “So Zack? Was I next?” He shot his gun at Zack’s chest and he fell on the ground.

I grabbed the gun from Boris and shot. John did too. They were all dead. John said, “Well then. We got rid of the cause of the problem. Now, soldiers, I mean General Boris will guide you to what to do with the machine’s metal. From now on, I’m no longer a general or want to carry a gun.” He threw his gun on the floor and said, “I want to live in peace for the rest of my days.”

John turned around and walked out. I said to Boris, "Am I insane? Am I violent?"

He said, "Not as much as me."

He turned around to the soldiers and said, "Everyone, your duty from now on is to disassemble these machines and create a pile of metal in Red fields. We will use some of the metal to fix old and rusty trucks. We need those trucks operational in the next few days."

I said, "Great thinking. We need the trucks so we can leave."

He nodded and said, "People here need the metal for other stuff too. They can make use of it in the future."

He grabbed my hand and said, "We got to leave. Let Intelligence figure out that humans will always be smarter than any machine."

I nodded and said, "What will happen to me now?"

He looked at me puzzled and said, "Nothing. What do you mean?"

I said, "Will I turn back to how I was? A mentally disturbed person?"

He said, "Well, I think that bruise on your head and your strong will is slightly changing that. I still think you're insane by the way, but I need to always be alert. You make my life interesting."

I punched his arm and he said, "Ouch Lina."

We walked out of the building and I said, "Boris? What time is it?"

He looked at his wrist and said, "12:38 am"

I said, "I'm hungry and tired."

He said, "Me too."

Chapter 48

Rest

We walked over to Red, and there were some soldiers walking behind us. Some were carrying injured soldiers with them. I said, "I hope no one died."

He said, "I don't know. I hope not."

We reached the gate and said, "Boris? What about Vicky?"

He tapped on the panel to go in and said, "I should have killed her."

I gasped and said, "Why? She didn't mean any harm. She is doing what she thinks is right."

He said, "You were going to shoot her."

I said, "God no! I wanted to scare her cause I was pissed off of what she said about you."

He said, "Lina. She has been a bitch to you since you were young. She made your life miserable and you always turned the other way and ignored her."

I was puzzled and said, "What?"

He said, "I'm glad that you don't remember that. But she always made you feel low and unimportant. At times I found you crying alone in a corner near Alliance. Other times, your friends tried to comfort you and helped you ignore her. She was mean and ruthless. I have no idea why she was heartless towards you. It was more than jealousy. Just pure hatred of towards you and what you will never have."

I said, "What I didn't have?"

He said, "Yes. A family. A home. Someone to defend you when you were weak."

I stared at him and said, "That's not a reason to kill someone Boris."

He gestured with his hands and angrily said, "What do you want me to do now?"

I said, "You have to go to her and apologize for what you did."

He said, "What? No! Never!"

I said, "Boris! If you don't then you will go nowhere near me ever again! She is human and she has her flaws. No reason to be cruel!"

He gasped and said, "Are you serious! Of all that she has done to you!"

I said, "Just do it!"

I walked in through the entrance and towards the ward upstairs. I felt sick and my head was barely carrying my body up. I entered a door and Bob and the others were waiting for me. Bob said, "There she is." He ran to me and hugged me tightly. I said, "I need to lay down."

He took me across the hall and I laid on the bed. I said, "Hook me up later. Let me sleep."

I opened my eyes and saw the sun rays gleaming on the floor. I raised my head up and looked around. There was no body in sight. I put my head back on the pillow and hoped that Boris apologized to Vicky. She must be here at the ward. I got up and walked to the

door. I opened it and I stood in the hallway. Which room was she in I kept wondering. The best solution was to ask the doctors.

I went across the hall and opened the door. I saw a doctor who said cheerfully, "You look a lot better this morning! I should tell them to get you something to eat."

I said, "Not now please. Can I ask you something?"

The doctor said, "Yes."

I said, "Is Vicky here?"

The doctor said, "Oh. I will check for you."

I stood still waiting for the doctor to search on the computer screen. The doctor came back and said, "She must have come here way after you. I didn't know. Are you sure you want to see her?"

I was confused and said, "Yes? Is it ok?"

The doctor touched my shoulder and said, "She is not well. She has genetic mutation that they found in her last night and of her organs are functioning slowly. It's too late to do anything anymore. The bullets from last night were very external. Barely a scratch and they were easily taken out."

My eyes widened and said, "What room?"

The doctor said, "Two doors to the right of your room."

I sprinted to the door and opened it. I walked to Vicky's room and held the door knob. I was hesitant to go in. I stared down at the ground for a few seconds and opened the door. I saw Boris sitting down on a chair and another man, it might have been her husband. They looked at me and Boris said, "It's my fault."

I shook my head and stared at Vicky. She was laying down on the bed with her eyes closed, beautiful long golden hair, and a pale tone of her skin. I walked closer to her side and stared at everyone. The man said, "I'm Alex. Her husband. You must be Lina."

I nodded and said, "I didn't want this to happen. I never meant it to be this way."

Alex said, "It's not your fault or Boris. Vicky has many personality flaws that were causing endless problems in our marriage. This genetic mutation is a wakeup call for us."

I stared at Alex and then at Boris. I said, "It's not fair to her. She doesn't deserve this."

Alex stared at me and said, "Lina. I think you should go rest. You being here is not good for you. I don't want Boris to suffer like I am now."

I stared at him and Boris got off the chair and said, "I will take you back to your room."

I walked out silently with Boris to my room. He motioned for me to lay down and he sat on the chair. He then said, "After you left, I went over to her office. The door was wide open and she was laying on the ground. I thought she was dead. I took her to the ward and the doctors removed the bullets. They barely made a scratch because I aimed it to the sides of her legs. When they took them out, they hooked her up to the machine and scanned her body for any other problems and why she was still unconscious. They noticed that her motor functions were shutting down rapidly. They ran a DNA analysis and found that her genes were quickly mutating in every part of her body. I told Alex what happened and

he told me that she knew but didn't tell anyone. She wanted to die alone."

I stared at him and said, "Why? Why did this happen to her? She was not born with it."

He said, "I know, but like John told us earlier, they discovered that it may happen to anyone at any time. It can happen to me tomorrow."

I said, "But how can we stop it?"

He stared and shook his head, "I don't know Lina. Humans have suffered so much in the last century. It could be this very earth that we stand on and eat from that is causing it. We don't know."

I looked away from him and stared down at my hands. I didn't want to hear anymore. I felt Boris staring at me and I said, "John has resigned from his position as General."

He looked at me and said, "Yes?"

I said, "That means that I am rightfully in charge now. I hold the power in Intelligence, if the compound still wants me."

He stared at me wondering what I was thinking and said, "Lina? What are you getting at?"

I said, "Intelligence has smart scientists who want to help our world. They were swayed to another direction for no purpose other than blind power. They need to find a cause and cure for this mutation. I have to go back and make sure it happens."

He nodded and said, "I agree."

I said, "Now what about Triangle, the trucks and supplies?"

He said, "They left this morning. I guess many people want to find a new home."

I said, "Oh no. Did they have genetic mutation?"

He said, "I don't know. But there were many that left. Close to 500 people."

I gasped and I said, "That's more than half of Triangle."

He said, "I don't know Lina. I can't think anymore."

He lowered his head to the ground. I got off the bed and said, "You're still the General of Red. Act like it."

He looked at me with wide eyes and I said, "I have to go now. You know where to find me."

I winked at him and walked to the door. He didn't stop me.

Chapter 49

New Start

I reached the main entrance of Red and told the soldiers to open the door for me. They complied and let me through. I sprinted to Intelligence compound and saw many Red soldiers picking up the machines and piling them up in rusty old trucks. I went over to the gate and entered the code on the panel. It then required me to place my hand. The screen changed to my face. I still had access.

The door opened and I headed in. I walked through the hallways and wondered who I should speak to. I decided to go into a nearby lab and try to talk to anyone. I opened the door and the room was empty. It was strange and I went back out. I walked a little bit and opened another door to a lab, but it was empty too. I thought that this was weird and something is up.

I kept walking slowly and wondering if I should go to the cafeteria or internal garden. Suddenly, a man walked in from a perpendicular hallway and looked at me. He was wearing a lab coat and thick glasses. He stared at me with wide eyes and yelled, "Oh my God! She is here!" I froze in my spot and had no idea if it was a sign for help to get rid of me. I wasn't carrying a gun.

A lady ran to him and said, "Lina! You're alive!"

I guess the news of my miraculous survival didn't reach this compound. She ran over to me and hugged me tightly. I said, "I'm here. I'm alive."

Many others came running down the hallway and cheered I was there. They were relieved I was standing there. I said, "Lots of

things happened the past week. I'm sorry for everything. I should have been stronger to protect this compound."

A man said, "Did General John really resign and leave us? We are relieved that Ellen and her gang are gone. We were so scared of those machines and what they were capable of doing. We don't want this life."

I nodded and said, "We have to stick together from now on. We need to think positively and place our energy and intellect to help humanity."

Another lady said, "Will you help us Lina? Will you help with the discoveries and future experiments?"

I hesitated and didn't know what to say.

An older man walked near me and held my hands. He said, "You can help us. Your intellect is what will save us."

I looked at him and I nodded. The crowd cheered and one man said, "We have our new general and scientist!"

I was dumbfounded. I was shocked by what they wanted me to become. Did they want me as a scientist and a leader?

A lady said, "Lina! Your head! We will help you from now on."

I walked with them and they took me to a room to lay down. A doctor rushed in and took care of my bandage.

I remained silent. After few minutes I said, "I have to talk to Boris."

The doctor said, "General Boris of Red?"

I said, "Yes him. Please. Can you contact him for me and ask him to come here?"

The doctor nodded and left the room. I stared at the ceiling and waited. After a few minutes, the doctor came back and said, "He is coming."

I smiled and said, "Good."

After twenty minutes, there was a knock on my door and the doctor opened it. It was Boris. I was cheerful he was there. The doctor excused himself and left us in the room. Boris sat on the chair next to mine and said, "Why are you always laying on a bed? Every compound! Oh that head!" He tilted down and kissed my forehead.

I said, "They want me to be general of Intelligence. Should I?"

His eyes widened and enthusiastically said, "Lina! Of course!"

I said, "What about us?"

He was confused and said, "I'm not sure. We can still be together."

I said, "I know, but they also want me as a scientist too. I have to be here and stay in the labs all day long. I won't have time at all to do anything. General. Scientist. Endless responsibilities."

He scratched his head and didn't say anything.

I said, "Boris? I want you. You're my first priority."

He sighed and said, "I can't be the one you give up everything for. It's not fair to you."

I stared and thought for a few seconds. I got out of the bed and sat on his lap. I kissed him and said, "Do you want to be in charge of two compounds?"

He said, "What?"

I said, "I can't be both. You're better at it."

He said, "Are you sure?"

I kissed him and nodded. He said, "We can build a better world together."

I said, "Yes. But I will never address you general. Got it?"

He smiled and said, "Can you be my wife?"

I kissed him and enthusiastically said, "Yeah!"

Chapter 50

A Sweet End

Weeks after, I got the news that Vicky didn't survive. I was deeply saddened by it and I walked in to Boris's office and said, "Life is too precious and we can't keep losing to this problem." He nodded and said, "Lina, you have to stay in Intelligence and not worry about me anymore. You need spend all your time and effort figuring out what is causing it no matter what."

I said, "You don't mind me being there all day long? More than fourteen or even sixteen hours per day?"

He shook his head and said, "I don't mind. You will always come back at night to me. If you can't, I will go and keep you company. You can't keep excusing yourself to come back to me and be a good wife."

He smiled and kissed my forehead. He said, "Now go. I know where to find you if I miss you."

I said, "Oh? *If* you miss me?"

He chuckled and said, "Lina. Just go!"

I squinted my eyes and punched his arm. He looked at me and said, "Want to fight?"

I said, "You will fight me?"

He said, "If I have to. I don't mind. I will blow some steam because you always piss me off."

I stared at him and he looked back at me. He said, "Well?"

I punched him really hard on his arm and ran to the door. He yelled, "Ouch! Lina!"

I giggled and said, "Catch me if you can! I will be in Intelligence!"

He smiled and said, "I will see you later!"

Months passed and majority of the leaders in Triangle that were holding all the power have died. Old age and genetic mutation took a toll on them. Boris stayed committed only to Red and Intelligence and suggested that Triangle only has a general who is committed and willing to go with a new reconstruction plan. He wanted to revive the exploration collectors and go around cities and towns, and find things that we can use for the future. He was more eager to find life around.

One day, while we were laying on our bed and looking out the window I said, "Do you think they are watching us now?"

He said, "Who?"

I said, "Our parents."

He said, "Of course they are. They have to because we believe they are."

I said, "Do you think we will be good parents?" I patted my bulging stomach and he said, "Of course. It's our duty if we want the human race to continue."

I smiled at him and said, "I think that's a good plan."

He leaned over to kiss me and looked out the window. It was a bright night sky and the stars were shining. I said, "Why do you hate window blinds? You will never change Boris!"