



Tethered Twins

MIKE ESSEX

ONE

Emmie Keyes

I felt everything.

A thousand nerve endings in my arm set on fire, as I felt the knife cut through flesh. I felt every inch of skin tear open, as blood seeped to the surface and emerged through the rapidly forming cracks.

I saw everything.

As I watched on in horror I saw blood pour to the floor. Drip by drip, life seemed to be seeping away, time seemed to be running out.

My heart rate paced faster and faster. It felt like a beating drum pounding away, harder and harder as I struggled to cope with the situation. It felt like my heart was trying to escape from my chest, to escape from the reality that was unfolding. Unable to control my breathing I felt a panic attack form, my lungs struggling to cope with the anxiety.

I heard everything.

Trying to hold my breathing steady I heard two figures talking. I had no idea what they were saying and yet their voices echoed with rage.

Almost as if their words were not their own.

As if they were muttering orders from a higher power.

And then they turned in my direction.

Twins. Their bodies had the same silhouette and facial structure, with them both sporting shaved heads. Yet there were subtle differences. One man had a scar down the right side of his face and his jaw was slightly offset, probably from years of violence. He had a belt of knives around his waist. The other man was slightly taller and he had no scars and no bruises and yet his face still had a warped, evil quality about it.

They were both heavily built and seemed unbeatable. The scarred man seemed to be twice my width. His shoulders were so broad and his muscles so big that fighting back seemed like suicide. He walked forward and those muscles of his began to tense, anticipating their next cruel action.

My head was forced backwards and the man stared directly into my eyes. I closed them, not wanting to look back at him, trying to hide from this nightmare but his face remained. I could feel his breath tickling my face. He wasn't going to move.

Reluctantly I opened my eyes and was overwhelmed by the colour orange. Dark pools of an orange liquid were formed in his eyes, circling menacingly around his dark black pupils. The strands of orange twisted and danced like moths around a naked flame.

He whispered something which I did not understand, although every word seemed to drip with malice and rage. There was no reply and then his arm lunged forward grabbing my neck and squeezing the life from me. The ring on his index finger started to cut into my neck and I felt the metal dig and scratch away on my skin.

His fingers gripped tightly and my mouth opened trying desperately to gasp for air. As the pressure increased my eyes began to open wide, forcing me to stare at him. A smile was formed on his lips. Was he enjoying this? What man would enjoy this?

The other man, the one who had no scars, shouted a single word and his twin stopped. *So this is how you remained scar free*, I thought to myself. *By getting your twin to do all your dirty work.* As I looked at him I saw that his eyes were just as orange and distant as his twin.

Air began to fill my lungs again and I inhaled a giant breath. My lungs pumped quickly to gather as much air as they could, knowing that this wasn't the end of the assault. My chest lifted up and down, contracting and retracting in a rapid pace.

For a brief moment I was thankful to the twin with perfect skin and then I saw the knife once again.

Please, not the knife.

The second time was even worse.

The fear of knowing what would happen, knowing the horrific pain and knowing I was completely powerless made every fresh cut feel so much deeper.

As I stared down I saw every cut. Ten cuts on each arm in a haphazard fashion. There was no style here; the purpose was simply to cause as much pain in a quick time.

Then I saw blood. So much blood. My lungs were in overdrive trying to capture the air that had been lost and this only served to pump blood around my body faster. It only increased the rate I was losing blood.

Pools of blood formed on the floor and drips continued to seep from each cut. A reminder of the pain that had been caused. The pain that was still coursing through each arm.

But these were not my arms.

This was not my blood.

And yet I felt everything.

From 150 miles away, in my apartment.

My name is Emmie Keyes and this was the day that everything changed.

Those arms belonged to my twin brother Will. He had endured every cut. He had been the one gasping for air. He was the one whose arms were tied to a chair. He had lost all that blood and I had been right there with him to endure every moment. As his sister I had felt every cut, every gasp for air and every pain filled moment.

Like everyone else on the planet we were Tethered. Everyone is born with a twin and every set of twins were forever connected via their senses, forever feeling every moment of high emotion felt by the other. This connection carried with each twin for their entire life and when one twin died, their brother or sister would die with them.

I'd shared with Will his best times and his worst times. When he got his dream job, I experienced his joy and through every heartbreak I had felt his sadness.

What he felt I felt and vice versa.

Every cut of his arm was a pain I felt. The feeling of dread was as real in Will's heart as it was in mine.

Twins until the end.

But, was this the end?

Nothing had ever felt like this before. As the two men shouted at Will, I could feel the fear in his heart. He knew time was short and if he died I would die too. The curse of being Tethered.

I didn't know if Will was strong enough to survive this. He'd never been strong, always preferring acquiring knowledge to physical skills, especially in choosing a career that helped him put his brilliant brain to use. I didn't understand why anyone would want to hurt him.

In the corner of the room I saw his fiancée, Faye. I'd seen her with Will a hundred times and she always looked happy and full of life. She was one of the most beautiful people I had ever met and I had always envied her long flowing purple hair and perfect smile. Today was a different story.

Her smile had turned into a look of horror and her face no longer showed the happiness she usually projected effortlessly. Instead guilt, remorse and regret were etched upon her as she sat there trying to come to terms with what was happening. With what she had done.

She caused this.

She was the reason Will was going to die.

She was the reason I was going to die.

As it became increasingly clear Will was not going to co-operate the men walked in close to him. All I could see were the ruffles of their black leather jackets. They were covered in dirt and frayed in many places but I doubted fashion was at the top of their priority list.

One of the men removed a sleek black device from his pocket, no wider than a pen. It carried an orange mark on the side, although I couldn't quite make it out. He held it up to Will's ear and a soft whirring noise began.

As he moved in closer I could see past his jacket and watched as Faye began to lift her slender arms up from the floor. She turned around and saw that the men were distracted and positioned both arms in front of her. With whatever strength she had left, she crawled to the door and out into the hallway.

“FAYE!” I screamed, hoping the men would hear my cries and go after her. If this was the moment Will and I were to die I could not stand for her to escape after what she had done.

But I was just a passive observer. I had no control over Will and could only go along with the ride. My life was in the hands of my brother and only he could save me.

As if by pure thought or dumb luck, the man without scars surveyed the room and saw that Faye had gone. He shouted to his twin and dashed after her out of the room.

The whirring grew louder and Will struggled to release himself from the rope that held him and tried to raise his arms. They felt weak and heavy from the cuts he had endured but he didn't want to die. He didn't want me to die.

With all the force he could muster Will lifted his arm upwards breaking the rope. He formed a fist and swung his arm around which hit the remaining thug in the jaw. The device flew across the room and clattered onto the floor. Will slipped down from the chair and landed on his hands and knees. His arms instantly gave way, no longer able to support him. He felt the feeling in them rapidly fading away.

He propped himself up on his elbow and used it to crawl towards the door. The thug rose to his feet, walking towards his device, as the whirring continued to echo through the room. He picked it up and checked it wasn't broken. Will was weak and the attacker clearly felt he could take his time.

He bent down to finish what he had started and went to grab Will. Thinking quickly Will rolled onto his back and kicked the man in the stomach.

This did nothing to stop him. On the next kick, the orange eyed man grabbed Will's leg and twisted it, forcing Will to flip over onto his back. The man leant down and grabbed Will's throat with one hand, whilst holding the device to his ear with the other. We both gasped for air and thrashed our arms and hands wildly unable to free ourselves from his grasp.

The whirring rose to a loud pitch and I could feel it now, echoing through my ears. As the thug held it to Will's ear, the noise became deafening, rattling our ear drums and causing the world to appear as one big blur.

A sharp sensation tingled through my head and I felt the noise impact on my brain. My entire head felt like it was vibrating and blood began to drip from Will's nose and mine.

Our bodies sank to the floor.

I felt a sense of pride that Will had tried to save us. That he had fought for our lives. Knowing I would die with a loving brother was some comfort.

Our breathing rose and then fell, as the last ounce of breath left our bodies.

A piercing screech erupted from the device and all sound vanished from my world.

A tear fell from Will's eye as he said my name "Emmie," followed by "I'm ... so...rry."

I knew that he meant it.

As the world faded to black I saw two orange eyes staring at me from the corner of my room. Someone had been watching me the whole time, not that it mattered now.

I closed my eyes to be greeted by memories of my brother protecting me as a child.

"Will, thank ... you".....

TWO

Tobias Zen

“No man left behind. No man left to die.”

Those words echoed in Tobias Zen’s mind as he stood many miles away from Emmie in the brightly lit dressing room. On hearing back his perfect piece of propaganda he pulled a sly grin that raised the corners of his expertly pruned goatee and beard. Image meant everything to Tobias. From the way he wore his designer suit, to the words that he used whenever he spoke.

It’s why he kept his hair extra short and why he preferred to keep his hair grey rather than try to dye it another colour. Whilst other men tried to hide their grey Tobias saw it as adding wisdom to his overall image. Tobias was his very own personal brand and he tried to put that into everything he did.

Although he could afford any procedure he wanted Tobias had only ever used plastic surgery once, to hide injuries he had sustained in an accident, and he vowed never to do it again. He wanted people to know his face and that meant keeping the wrinkle lines on his forehead, his large nose, and rounded chin consistent.

He continued to practice his speech, ensuring his words were as well prepared as he was. “I promise, that no soldier will be left behind to die. I will give my entire mind, body and soul to protect this country and to protect the brave men and women who defend it.”

“An investment in TethTech is an investment in the future of our nation, an investment in the future of our world and an investment in human lives,” he loved his new copywriter and thought about giving her a raise when this was over.

Tobias looked out on the stage. In a few moments he would appear on the Jonathan Lewis show. The most important chat show in the world.

Unlike Tobias, Jonathan Lewis was a cosmetic surgery addict. He was fifty now but he looked like a twenty five year old. His hair was a rich brown colour and he had no wrinkles on his face. His lips were so plump they looked like they belonged on a woman and the tip of his chin was perfectly shaped into a small point. He wore jeans and a black designer T-Shirt. It sickened Tobias to see someone hide who they were but the show was just a means to an end for him so he was prepared to humour this man, at least for the moment.

Tomorrow morning his company ‘TethTech’ would go public and float on the stock exchange. Turning years of hard work in building his company, into a huge stream of cash flow from new investors.

Tonight, he would kick start that investment with an emotional speech on how his company would revitalise warfare. He would explain how through his use of Tethers, he could protect the life of every soldier on the battlefield and ensure a minimal loss of human casualties.

Playing on human compassion had always worked well for Tobias and tonight would be his biggest trick. No one wanted to see a soldier die, especially after the events of the '20 Day Siege' and Tobias knew exactly how to turn public sympathy into cold hard cash.

"Two minutes Mr Zen," said the announcer.

Tobias looked at himself in the mirror. He straightened his orange tie, checked his hair and buttoned his designer suit. Alongside appearance it was also important for Tobias to stick in people's minds. He looked down at his shoes. A pair of Orange trainers. A vibrant contrast to his tailored suit and that was exactly why he wore them.

"The man with the orange trainers," was a lot more memorable than being just another guy in a suit. Plus Tobias had always had a thing for the colour orange.

The announcer tapped Tobias on his shoulder and pointed to the stage. His moment of glory would come soon. Tobias looked on to the show floor to see a raised wooden platform that housed hundreds of fans. Above them was a giant skylight that looked out on to the night sky and flooded the studio with light from two giant spotlights. It was more like looking out on a stadium concert than an intimate studio interview.

The studio had rafters that ran along the ceiling and around the skylight. They ran cables to the lights and to the cameramen, of which there were two, one either side of the stage.

Jonathan's stage was as cosmetic as the man himself. It was half enclosed in a dome that showed the greatest landmarks of the world all superimposed on to one image. The other half of the dome gave the audience a perfect view of a single sofa where Jonathan and Tobias would soon be sitting.

Between the audience and the stage were a row of metal gates and guards were located around the gates. Tobias had asked for security to be improved for his appearance and the production crew had not disappointed. He didn't want a repeat of recent incidents.

Jonathan took to the stage, "Our next guest was voted Man of the Year in TIME magazine, appeared in the Globox world's best thinkers hot list and was responsible for ending the 20 Day Siege."

The crowd started to cheer. A set of twins held a British flag to their chests, smiled and started to weep, somehow managing to do everything at the same time in unison. Another woman ran to the stage and was promptly stopped by security.

It was clear who everyone was here to see tonight. Tobias could see everything and was in his element.

"He is a national hero and the man who will change the world forever," Tobias heard Jonathan's words and only he knew how true they would be.

“Join me, in welcoming ... Tobias Zen!”

The crowd rushed to their feet, cheers erupted and a chant began. “Zen! Zen! Zen!” They stomped their feet in unison and the wooden stands started to creak from the pressure.

Tobias stood by the entrance to the stage for a moment. He wanted to soak in every last bit of applause before he made his way to the stage.

The woman who had been stopped by security caught a glimpse of Tobias in the stage entrance and she fell to her knees. The sight of her idol proved too much. To her, he was her saviour.

As she fell to the floor, twenty miles away her twin did the same.

Tobias saw the woman and knew that this was his greatest moment. A prelude for what was next to come; his life was about to be forever transformed.

He walked onto the stage and held his hand in the air to acknowledge their applause. “Thank you, thank you.”

Tobias shook hands with Jonathan who grabbed his arm and raised it into the air. “Tobias Zen, everyone!”

The cheers continued long after the audience signs that read ‘applause’ had been turned off.

It was Tobias who stopped the cheers, simply by directly facing the crowd and preparing to speak. The crowd really wanted to hear what he had to say and they quickly let the room return to silence.

He uttered his first words to the audience. “No man left behind. No man left to die.”

The crowd knew where this was heading. His optimistic spiel was exactly what the world needed right now.

As Tobias was about to launch into his masterpiece, he spotted an odd face in the crowd. In amongst the cheers and happy faces, a woman with straight red hair sat stony faced. She looked in her early twenties and although Tobias thought she looked beautiful he could see she also looked unhappy, almost angry.

Oh, well, you can't win them all, thought Tobias.

Jonathan gestured to the crowd for them to sit. It took three minutes for them to contain their excitement and for everyone to sit down ready to hear Tobias continue his speech.

As the last person sat down, the red haired woman took to her feet.

“Tobias Zen,” she stated with a voice that echoed through the silence.

Tobias looked at her, frustrated that he would have to wait to win the crowd over. Jonathan whispered to Tobias that they could have the woman escorted out of the building.

Tobias saw that she was wearing a grey and green patterned army uniform and knowing how important soldiers were to his cause, he encouraged the woman to stay. "Yes, my dear."

"This is a citizen's arrest," she shouted. "I am here to arrest you for war crimes against the people of Britain and the world."

The crowd immediately began booing the woman.

"I can assure you, you are mistaken," explained Jonathan. "Tobias Zen is a national hero, without his help there wouldn't be an army for you to enlist in. Without him you may have never been born."

"You are wrong!" screamed the woman. "Tobias Zen is no hero. He is responsible for the death of one billion people! He is a traitor and he will be held accountable for his crimes."

As security guards made their way to the woman's seat she held an arm out and raised the palm of her hand upwards pointed at the air.

She looked up through the glass ceiling above her and saw a helicopter shine a beam of blue light through the window and onto the crowd. It engulfed the room.

The entire audience were fixed in place. Security guards were like statues held to the spot. Camera men were stuck to their cameras and even Jonathan Lewis, a man well known for rarely standing still, remained motionless.

The only two bodies that could move were now focused entirely on each other.

Tobias and the red haired woman were all who remained.

"Well played," said Tobias.

In amongst a sea of motionless bodies, the red haired woman lunged forward towards Tobias. As he was pushed to the floor, he saw a chain around the woman's neck that held in place a Queen of Diamonds playing card.

THREE

Emmie Keyes

I felt nothing.

I looked down at my arms and saw no scars and no blood. No signs that last night had occurred and yet there was a feeling of emptiness. I no longer felt Tethered to Will and I no longer felt his presence in my life.

The feeling of emptiness lingered even more until it consumed me. When I knew my brother was out there and felt his presence, it was the wall that protected my life. Now brick by brick my world was crumbling.

My brain finally registered the reality. I was overwhelmed with a feeling of loss and the tears flowed down my face. For two hours I didn't speak, I just sat on the floor with my knees pressed against my chest, my arms around my legs and my head held down, my long blonde hair flowing over my knees. I wanted to make myself as small as possible so the world would swallow me up.

I cried. So many tears. Until my blue eyes became sore and itchy but even that sensation couldn't take my mind away from what had happened. My chest became tight and it started to become hard to breathe. Every breath felt enormous, as if I was trying to remove the events from my body and breathe back in some good from the world.

I tried to put the pieces together to make some logical sense but if Will was dead, how had I survived? If your twin died, you died too. That was the way life worked.

I should be dead.

No.

Will should be alive.

We both should be.

Will was the last family I had left and now I was all alone.

"I shouldn't even be alive!" I screamed, unsure how to put my world back together again.

I lay there, not wanting to move and face the world. Not wanting to come to terms with the events of last night. The betrayal. The pain. The loss.

More time passed. How long, I cannot know but it felt like an eternity.

When I finally opened my eyes to look, everything seemed so empty. My apartment had always been small and fairly sparse but now it just looked desperately so. My aged wooden double bed, my chest of drawers that I'd found abandoned on the street and my red leather beanbag that had been left here from before I moved in. What little possessions I had now had less meaning than ever. My world was empty.

My eyes scanned the room looking for something familiar to provide a moments comfort. It didn't take long. I could see into my bathroom and barely used kitchen from my bed and that was all there was to my room. It was only when I looked over at the broken table where I set out my clothes than I saw them.

Two orange eyes staring at me through the darkness.

It took me a moment to register what I had seen. I still felt delirious and wondered if I was hallucinating. The eyes kept their focus on me as I slowly rose to my feet, my body emotionally and mentally drained.

Despite what had happened I still wanted to live. A spark in me still wanted to be alive and I knew that's what Will would have wanted too. I had neither the physical strength nor the energy to fight this foe so I walked backwards to my bedside table making sure to keep looking at them the whole time. I reached down slowly, not wanting to provoke a reaction and slid open the drawer.

Reaching my hand inside I moved it around frantically trying to find my weapon. Instinctively I turned around so I could see it and then realised what I had done. I'd given them a perfect opportunity to attack. I grabbed my gun, quickly ducked in case of an attack and spun round to aim it directly at them.

I was sick of being another average girl; I'd always had an average height and average weight and in this world you couldn't afford to be weak. For the last two years I'd trained to be a police officer and now I had my weapon I didn't want to be afraid to use it.

My arms may have been weak last night but I suddenly found them filled with energy. Filled with life. I held the gun with all my might and walked slowly towards the eyes.

"Put your hands where I can see them," I said, in as calm a tone as I could muster.

"I know who you are and what you did to my brother," I continued to remain as calm as I could. "I am not afraid to use this," I lied.

The eyes did not move, not even a blink.

Who are these people? I thought to myself.

I edged towards the eyes, keeping my gun held firmly in place with both hands. With each footstep closer, the eyes became brighter and clearer.

Were they watching me? What did they want?

As I took another step closer a loud BEEP emerged from near to the eyes. *The device!* I thought, as I dashed towards them feeling supercharged from adrenaline. I didn't want to play the victim any more.

Just as I was about to reach the eyes it became clear what I was seeing. My DualCam was placed neatly next to my computer.

I had completely forgotten about it. A DualCam allows people to record what they experience and what their twin experiences in really high intensity moments.

My brother had given it to me as a gift, before they were even available in shops. He explained that although he lived miles away, I could use the camera to record the important moments in each of our lives and that it would bring us closer together.

Over the last year I had recorded every important event that he encountered and he had done the same to me. We had planned to meet this week to share our memories and to catch up.

He said he would only be gone for one year and now he was gone forever.

All I had left were my memories and everything that I'd recorded on this camera. As I stared down at the black box with its two glowing orange blobs, a need for closure dawned upon me.

This box had recorded every important event in Will's life in the last year. With the memories of Tether events fading moments after they occur, this box could give me a perfect image of everything that had happened.

If I wanted to understand why Will was killed, there would be no better solution, no clearer oracle than this box. A part of me also wanted to surround myself with happy memories to cushion the reality of his death.

I slid my hand down the right side of the box and found a thin opening no wider than a credit card. I slid my nail in and used it to flip open a hatch, exposing a digital display.

I held my thumb down on the display and it was quickly scanned. 'Identity confirmed'. With personal memories you couldn't be too careful and a biometric scanner was certainly one way to ensure your darkest secrets remained hidden.

Pointing the camera at the nearest wall it whirred into life. The two orange eyes, that had tormented me moments before, lit up as two rainbows full of colour that intersected on the wall and started to form an image.

The camera clicked and three thin pencil sized legs emerged, folding downwards until they hit the floor. Once there, they expanded outwards, creating a tripod to hold the camera in place.

With the camera secure, I started to rewind it back to the earliest memory on file.

I watched as Will sat outside my apartment. This was mere moments after he had given me the camera and said goodbye, knowing we wouldn't see each other again for a year (at least).

He seemed uneasy, as if he didn't want to leave. At the time I had thought it was simply because we would be apart for so long but now I wondered what else may have been weighing on his mind. He stared at my door biting his lip, at one point raising his hand to the doorknob as if he wanted to say one last thing. But he did not. He turned around and left the building without looking back.

As he stood outside, rain started to fall on his face and the camera started to flicker.

The twin rainbows coming from the camera started to flicker too and change in colour. As they settled on a harsh orange, the picture began to speed up.

A new scene began but it was so fast I could only make out passing details. In the corner of the image I saw a countdown clock ticking down from 100%.

Every image was bathed in orange. There were so many I could only catch a glimpse of them. The ones that stuck in my mind were; Will's apartment, 88%, a giant glass dome, 72%, a train shaped like a bullet, 51%, Faye holding a knife, 44%.... The video continued to jump forwards and backwards in time showing events I had long since forgotten.

When the readout showed 30% the lights changed again to show a crystal clear full colour image at normal speed. Only this one, I had never seen before. It was a memory Will had somehow kept hidden but which the camera had recorded.

A room full of pipes led way to a single solitary chair surrounded by wires. The wires circulated around the chair and in the middle sat a young man. He was held to the chair with some sort of harness in place over his chest. Wires ran into the harness and tailed off into various machines. Several other wires protruded from his body.

All that remained exposed or uncovered by wires was a round area of flesh in the centre of his torso that had been covered in a silver liquid.

The man's face was shown on camera but was like nothing I had seen before. One side of his face was devoid of any skin, leaving the bone of his jaw exposed and slivers of flesh hanging in place.

The other side was no better; a black eye and a scar that went from his mouth to his ear. He seemed to have been tortured, although how a man could survive so much damage I had no idea. At least I assumed it was a man. With so much damage it was hard to tell.

Yet despite his clear physical pain and anguish he seemed calm. The man sat patiently in his chair. *Is he delirious or just mad?* I wondered to myself.

16%

The camera turned around, I assume showing me what Will could see. He looked down, showing a notepad and focused on it.

12%

I moved in closer to read what the note said. It had clearly been written in a rush but I could just about make it out.

7%

"You can save everyone. You are free."

6%

"I'm free?" I couldn't understand. Did the note mean I was free of my Tether? Free of my brother? And just what did I need to save everyone from?

5%

As I tried to understand the note, I watched as it was placed into a pocket.

3%

The camera looked back at the person in the chair, as a doctor rolled a large piece of metal equipment into the room. A cylindrical tube sat in the middle, with a bubbling orange liquid contained within it. From the tube there sat a long pole, with a razor sharp tip.

2%

The pole was twisted around so it sat over the man's stomach and his eyes became clear. The sense of calm evaporated instantly and he struggled to try and escape. The video moved in closer and I could see an arm emerge from the side of the frame to hold the man back, with two doctors now holding him in place.

As the sharp tip cut into his stomach, the orange liquid formed into a large sphere inside its container.

1%

Pressure began to build in the container and the sphere was once again ripped into smaller pieces and sucked out of the tube with a rapid force. They shot up the pole and out of the razor sharp tip right towards the man's stomach.

He screamed in agony, his head shot backwards and he grabbed his arms onto the chair, holding on for his life. As the second scream began to form on his lips the camera stopped. A solitary message remained on my wall in large letters.

"All footage deleted,"

"What?" I shouted.

I grabbed the camera and the digital display echoed the same sentiment. Every memory I had of Will on the camera was gone.

Changing the camera mode, I switched to the Internet and proceeded to log into my cloud drive that stored all of my files. My entire drive of files had been deleted. Not just my videos but every document, every photo and every file I had ever saved was gone.

As I moved to file a help ticket, the screen froze and a fresh message emerged. "Cloud account cancelled."

I tried to open my other online services but the story was the same. All accounts had been closed. My social networking accounts gone and my files deleted.

I started to feel sick.

I opened one more window, already certain of what I would see. As I logged into my online banking I saw it within minutes.

"Account cancelled: closed due to loss."

"*Closed due to loss,*" could only mean one thing.

Someone had told the world I was dead.

I had been meant to die after all and someone knew that very well. With Will gone, my death was a certainty and someone had been trying to clear up every loose end.

And although they didn't know it yet, I was still a loose end that needed cleaning up.

I reached for the phone and dialled the only person I could trust.

FOUR

Tobias Zen

The red haired woman held Tobias tightly to the floor.

He couldn't understand it. He had a heavier build than she did and yet every time he struggled she was able to turn his body weight against him. He reached his right arm out to grab her and she jabbed it with her elbow. He tried to kick her and she kneed him in the crotch.

She was far fitter than him too. Years of dedicating himself to his research and using his mind as his greatest weapon had kept him lean and a lack of physical fitness had let his once strong muscles weaken.

By contrast, the red haired woman had the body of a gymnast and the power to match. She could move with sheer grace and knew exactly the right way to position her body weight to have the advantage. He was outmatched in every way.

After much struggling he resisted and allowed his body to rest flat on the floor. "OK you win," he said.

The doors to the studio opened and a team of men and women dressed in grey and green patterned army gear appeared, each of them with a playing card held around their neck. Tobias couldn't make the cards out from this distance but it was clear they weren't all the same. "Very effective use of branding," he mocked. "We could use someone like you on the product design team."

Tobias estimated around twenty men and women with playing cards now stood in the studio, alongside the crowd who remained motionless. They all seemed very young, like toddlers compared to Tobias. *None of them look over thirty*, he thought to himself *the youth of today, always causing trouble*.

Despite being outnumbered Tobias was pleased that his backup plan could easily take on twenty people. A hundred would be a far more interesting test but this would have to do.

The red haired woman motioned to two guards who walked over and grabbed Tobias allowing her to walk away and answer a phone call.

Tobias could not hear what she said but something had clearly upset her. She answered the phone with perfect posture and yet throughout the conversation she threw a hand to her mouth as if in shock and motioned her arms wildly into the air as if to issue specific instructions.

Whilst she spoke on the phone Tobias thought about how clever his captor's plan had been; overloading the Tethers of everyone in the room by dazzling them with an intense light. They'd caused everyone to experience a Tether event and stay stuck in place.

"You're all so clever aren't you?" teased Tobias.

She hung up the call and Tobias could see she looked flustered and distressed.

"How strange to see someone so confident in such a state of discomfort," he told her.

She ignored him and whispered something to one of the army men. Moments later she was gone.

"Aww," Tobias wanted more participants for his experiment but this would have to do. He looked at the clock and smiled knowing it wouldn't be long now.

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Grace Wilkerson

The red haired woman continued her walk from the building. Grace Wilkerson hated leaving mid-mission, especially when the target was as high profile as Tobias Zen but she trusted her team mates and this was a matter of life and death.

She had handed Tobias over to two of her team. One of the men; Gabe, was the most muscular of the group, especially in his arms which filled the sleeves of his army uniform pulling it tight. Something which she had always liked and she could confidently confirm that those muscles continued down to the six-pack on his stomach.

She loved his hair most of all, which was a very dark brown, almost black in colour that rose up in the middle and spiralled down either side like a peacock's feathers. He had light stubble that flowed across his face and his broad chin.

For all intents and purposes he was the leader of their team, a burden that she knew weighted heavily on him and she could see this in the bags under his eyes and the age that had started to show on his face despite him being in his early twenties.

The other man Chris, was very tall, six foot five by her estimations which also made him very lean. He had spiky brown hair and long sideburns. His youthful face showed no sign of a wrinkle and combined with his blue eyes made him seem younger than he really was. He was the newest member of the group so was a little headstrong but she knew that Gabe would keep him in check.

She knew her friends would do a good job.

Besides what could one man do against twenty men? With that thought she climbed onto her motorcycle and drove out into the night.

As she rode along the motorway the neon lights from her bike flashed across the road. A stream of red lights snaked behind her and her motorbike had a row of red lights on either side that formed a pattern onto the road in the shape of angel's wings.

She loved riding, especially at night; she enjoyed having the roads to herself.

She passed a billboard for a company called 'TethTech' which showed a man and a woman holding each other in bed. The man had his chest exposed and the woman had her leg and her arm draped across his chest. She was covered by a single white sheet. At the back of the billboard was another man who looked identical to the first. He was watching the couple as they embraced, with a shocked look on his face.

In large letters on the poster were the words "Innocent Blocking Devices, by TethTech", with a further line underneath which read "There are some things twins shouldn't have to share. Keep your intimate moments secret. Available at all Chemists."

She looked at the billboard and it made her laugh. The idea of a twin watching her having sex made her uneasy and she wondered if this was perhaps the greatest invention in all mankind.

These roads had seen better days, back when the Government still invested in public infrastructure. Back when their burden of debt didn't make every non-essential service a massive liability.

When the world lost the tax income of one billion people it started to become harder to sustain life the way it had been. The economy had been built to scale and investments had been set in motion for the existing population. Suddenly millions of products went unsold as there were less people to buy them forcing the economy to collapse. Whilst all of this happened corporations were continually finding new ways to avoid paying tax through offshore loopholes, just to keep themselves afloat and to offset the loss from not selling their products.

The country, in fact all countries, had become unsustainable. With it, millions lost their jobs and the key public services fell on the hands of the public.

"Want better roads? Get out and fix them. Want healthcare? Find a friend who is a doctor."

That was the way the world worked now. If you couldn't do something yourself, then you found someone to help or you paid through the odds.

It split the country into two types of people.

The haves: Those who had money, who worked in or ran large corporations. Those who could afford luxury goods, who never went hungry and who had everything they could want.

The have-nots: Those for whom money no longer had any meaning. People who had to rely on bartering and trading one item for another in order to get by.

It saved our economy. The Government finally had enough money to pay off their debts, simply by leaving the weakest members of society to fend for themselves. If you were one of those with money, then life had never been so good.

What money the Government did have left, they poured into public defence funds. As Great Britain regained its power and financial stability, people started to feel that we would become a target from other countries that had not seen the same recovery.

Countries that had put their people first had collapsed. They had kept their pride until the end, hoping that other countries would work together to help them and ultimately everyone lost out. At least in Britain the rich had stayed rich, even if the poor had no healthcare and no support.

In amongst this chaos Grace had found her home in an organisation known as 'The Deck'. She thought of it as her calling.

Most people called Grace a terrorist. She preferred to think of herself as restoring the balance. A small cog, in a larger machine that wanted to put the world right again.

Stopping Tobias was the first step towards a better world and as she rode down the motorway she knew she was heading for the next step.

"Emmie."

FIVE

Gabe Treeth

Gabe Treeth hadn't expected today to be so easy.

He knew capturing the biggest murderer in history would be a challenge and yet today had been one of the easiest missions in his career.

A captive prisoner, a team with no injuries and best of all no civilian casualties.

These three factors would be impressive on any mission but on this one they were just worrying.

He looked down at Tobias, who was now handcuffed. Tobias was oddly quiet for a man who loved to be heard. He now seemed defeated when mere moments ago he acted like the most confident man in the room.

After much frustration Gabe could no longer stand the suspense. He opened his mouth to speak to Tobias with a few stern questions in mind and before he could do so his questions were answered, his fears were realised.

The gunshot echoed around the studio, as one of the members of his team fell to the floor. A clean shot to his neck and before the soldier could even hit the floor he was gone. A soldier and friend no more.

He lay on the floor, his eyes staring into nothingness. On his chest a Six of Clubs playing card had been covered in blood as it escaped and ran down from his neck.

The remaining team quickly moved from their places to find cover, while they surveyed the room for their mystery assailant.

Each soldier made sure to hide away from the mass of motionless bodies, to ensure any shots were directed far away from them but it dwelt on every one of their minds that a stray bullet could hurt an innocent person.

Two of the team had ducked behind the presenter, Jonathan's desk and took Tobias with them to ensure he could not escape in the panic.

"How would you all like to take part in an experiment?" Tobias was suddenly very vocal. "I wanted to save the unveiling of this new technology for tomorrow but you forced my hand. So run along like good little guinea pigs and enjoy the game!"

Before the soldiers could react, their mystery attacker jumped down from the lighting above the studio. As he fell he quickly flipped round to ensure he landed on his hands and feet to minimise the impact on his body. He dashed under the seats that housed the crowd, moving carefully to avoid the blue light.

He rose to his feet quickly and efficiently and promptly pointed his gun at Gabe. *“Take out their leader first,”* came a voice that echoed in his mind and he began to stare directly at Gabe.

The assassin had a slim build with the body of a runner; a small body but with muscles ready to be used for drastic speed. As he dashed along, his long blue hair swung in a ponytail behind his head. Despite such a unique hair colour, something else about him caught the attention of the team.

His orange eyes did not break from focus. Did not blink. Did not look away.

Not a word was said. There simply was no time for negotiations. Within seconds of landing the assailant fired his shot and Gabe had a split second to shift his body, with the bullet lodging firmly in his shoulder.

He fell to the floor gripping his wound, screaming out in pain.

Their leader was shot and yet the entire team did not respond with gunfire. It was too risky and there were too many innocent bodies in the way to ensure a safe shot.

“So the answer to the first experiment is obvious,” stated Tobias with cold hard fact. *“Are you loyal to your leader above all others? No. You put the needs of innocent people first. A noble response, although one that shows you lack loyalty and are easily manipulated.”*

“Let’s see how far we can push that...” Tobias smiled, as his second experiment began.

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Grace Wilkerson

She had known Emmie for eighteen years and like all good friends Grace was always finding out something new.

Like how Emmie was going to save the world.

She wasn’t jealous, best friends had to support each other. Although she did feel full of guilt that she knew so much about her friend and yet had lied to her about almost every detail of her own life.

So when Grace received a call from Emmie that said she was in danger, she knew it was more important than anything.

As she raced through the city towards Emmie, her red hair flowing out from underneath her bike helmet, she felt very alive.

What a day, she thought We capture the person I love to hate and then the chosen one needs me. Apart from the day she met Gabe, Grace had never felt more wanted.

"But first things first," she pulled up at a public restroom and entered with her large red polka dot backpack.

Once inside she found the nearest stall and closed the door behind her making sure to lock it thoroughly.

She placed her head in her hands and lent forwards.

Steam started to emerge from under her hands, as a chemical transformation began.

The skin from her face started to melt and drift downwards towards the floor in one big long blob.

Beneath her hands a magnificent change began to happen. The white skin gave way to cocoa coloured skin tones as her true face started to be revealed from underneath the mask. Her newly revealed small brown eyes, the curves at the edge of her smile and her thin nose had often seen people refer to her as being 'cat-like' something Grace often saw as a compliment.

The transformation continued to move upwards over her forehead and into her hair.

The locks of red hair changed in colour to a chocolate brunette tone and bit by bit they started to curl around themselves. Two large waves of her hair kept the red colour and made it even brighter. It was a startling contrast to the brown of the rest of her hair. Her fringe stopped just above her eyes and the rest of her hair curled around her head stopping just above her shoulders.

The steam began to stop and in one swift movement Grace scooped her hands downwards and gathered together the ball of skin.

She opened her backpack, pulled out a hexagon shaped box and stored the skin in its silver lining.

Closing the box, she inserted it into her backpack and retrieved a change of clothes. She was now wearing a silver top with short sleeves that stopped just below her elbows. The top had two belts that went across it which loosely criss-crossed over her chest. She put on a pair of dark jeans which had red and black diamonds that intercut with each other throughout the design.

After ditching her army uniform, but keeping her black riding boots she left the stall.

She took a moment to admire herself in the mirror. "Back to normal," she remarked.

The red haired girl was gone. Replaced by a chocolate haired goddess with light brown skin.

"Just like Emmie remembers."

She left the restroom, mounted her bike and drove the last few miles to Emmie's house.

SIX

Emmie Keyes

“What time do you call this!?” bellowed the voice from room 12B.

“It’s Emmie, I need your help.”

Although it was 2am I knew Rex T Jules would forgive me eventually for disturbing his sleep.

“Who is it?” I heard Rufus L Jules ask, Rex’s slightly fatter, camper brother.

“It’s Emmie, I think she’s drunk,” replied Rex.

“Oh that could be fun.”

“Please, could you just answer the door?” My voice began to sound frustrated.

“Ok,” replied Rex.

The door opened and my eyes filled with tears for the tenth time that night, only this time they were tears of joy. Never had I been so happy to see two people.

“Emmie, come here,” Rex embraced me and I became overwhelmed with happiness.

“You can see me? I’m alive?” I asked.

“I think so, although you did wake us up at 2am so this could be a dream for all I know,” said Rufus with a sarcastic tone.

I didn’t mind the sarcasm. This was as real as any other day and I was relieved to know that I was still alive.

In the hours since my brother had been killed I had seen my life erased and was starting to wonder if the phone call I put into a close friend has been real or imagined.

Although I knew I was alive, I still had no reason why. Nor was I any closer to understanding why traces of my life had begun to disappear. Nonetheless this was a start. A brief ray of light in the darkness.

Rex and Rufus had always helped me in times of trouble and had been like having two extra brothers; their kind faces always there to help me get through the loss I’d experienced years before. They were almost identical twins, although Rex had a more muscular build from his work as the town’s maintenance man. Rufus also differed in that he had long brown hair that he wore in a ponytail and Rex instead kept his hair short and spiky. Rufus often told him he had too much gel in it and I tended to agree.

As I looked at Rex's 'Alabama Jones' T-shirt he'd gotten from "the greatest rock gig of all time," as he often put it, despite never actually attending the show, I also realised I was still wearing pink pyjamas with little sheep on them. My long blonde hair was a mess, all frizzy and falling over my eyes. Years ago I'd have felt fine them seeing me dressed like this but I didn't want to feel like a little girl any more even in front of my honorary brothers.

"Would you like to come in?" asked Rex.

I looked down at my pyjamas and decided it wasn't worth getting changed now so I walked in.

"So R&R what's new?" I asked using my affectionate nickname for the pair.

"Nothing much, I'm still living with this muppet," replied Rufus.

Living with a sibling was nothing unusual, in fact I was something of an outsider for not living with my brother. Typically siblings would move out of their family home at eighteen and live with each other until they met separate partners and got married.

Even then it wasn't unusual for twins to date another sets of twins, so a family home could contain a brother and sister, who were married to another family of brother and sister (or any other combination of couples you can imagine – apart from dating across the same bloodline, which would be disgusting...).

Twins shared every moment, although for intimate moments they could use an 'Innocent Blocking Device' to stop their twin from being scarred for life. These devices allowed twins to keep a small amount of their life private when they needed to and for most people they would share everything else, including living together.

It meant R&R lived in a similarly small apartment to my own but they'd changed their kitchen into a second bedroom for Rufus. Instead of the kitchen they had a stove in the front room and a single frying pan that they used for most of their cooking. Their apartment was bare like my own with two wicker chairs they'd carried five miles offering the only source of comfort.

Seeing the sacrifices the two of them made to live together reminded me of just how foolish it had been for me to not live with my brother. R&R knew if one of them died, then the other would too, so it made sense for them to live together and look out for each other.

"Twins should stick together," that was the moral message drummed into me at school.

But with Will's job so far away and my job unable to let me move there really was no other way. Neither one of us wanted to put our life on hold for the other so we went our separate ways, assuming everything would work out.

"So I believe congratulations are in order," Rex smiled one of his big grins and gave me another hug. Just as warm and full of joy as the last. "Well done on passing your exam, my junior police officer."

“Go you! How does it feel to be saving the world, one scumbag at a time?” Rufus had to get involved as well.

“I don’t know yet, it’s my first day next week but it feels amazing to have passed,” I replied, unsure if I’d ever get to wear my badge after all.

“Well, I think it’s an excellent achievement, in this world we need more people looking out for the little guy,” replied Rex.

Rufus pointed to Rex’s belly “Well she won’t be looking out for you then fatso!” Rex wasn’t fat but Rufus did like to tease him regardless.

R&R had been this way for as long as I could remember. They joked that Rufus couldn’t wait to meet a good man so he could be free of Rex and Rex a good woman but in reality the two of them were the perfect mixture of family and friendship.

For the next two hours Rufus and Rex talked to me about old times and helped take me away from my troubles. They were comforting in the best possible way, without trying to pry into what had happened. For all they knew, I was drunk and for now I wanted to keep it that way.

As Rufus explained how Rex was getting a bald patch and had better meet a woman soon my phone began to buzz. It was Grace and she was only five minutes away.

“Ok guys, I need to go but before I do I need to ask you a favour,” I looked at them and the mood changed. My drunken act was gone and I knew this next part would have to be deadly serious.

“Oh?” replied Rex.

“If anyone asks about me you need to tell them you haven’t seen me,” my face showed no sign of a smirk, I wanted them to know I wasn’t joking around.

“Oooh do you have the Mafia after you already? That was quick super girl!” Rufus interjected.

“No but I think Will is in trouble and until I know he is safe, then I need to be careful,” I hoped it was enough information to give them without revealing the truth.

“I see,” it was clear from their faces that R&R understood. They knew Will worked for the military and that carried its own risks.

“Well stay here, we can look after you,” said Rex.

“No, I’m sorry but I have to go, Will needs my help and no one else can know that we met today,” I said,

“I understand,” Rex looked at Rufus, who nodded. “We understand.”

“Thanks guys. I want you to know that you helped me today, in ways I can’t fully explain but thank you,” with that I turned around and headed for the door.

“Emmie wait,” Rex followed me down the hall “One more for the road?”

He gave me one last hug. I smiled. I still didn't feel human again but it was a start.

SEVEN

Gabe Treeth

The second experiment began with a bang, as the orange eyed man revealed an automatic weapon from his jacket, which he aimed at the glass ceiling.

He immediately shot through the seats and up past the crowd directly at the glass. It broke instantly and sharp jagged shards of glass began to rain down on the motionless people.

An elderly man's face was cut from a falling shard, which shattered as it hit the floor. He did not flinch, could not move and yet it was clear he would feel the pain very soon.

The gunman continued to fire, as more glass fell down injuring person after person.

The Deck were powerless to respond, the orange eyed man was so encased in bodies and seats that getting a clear shot meant risking the lives of innocent people and yet if they did nothing those people would be severely injured as well.

Chris Jacobs, a rookie member of The Deck, stood over Gabe's body trying to help control the bleeding and remove the bullet in his shoulder. As the gunfire raged on Gabe looked at Chris and said "You have to stop this."

"I know Gabe, the pain will be gone soon, just stay calm," replied Chris.

"No, you have to stop him. He will hit the chopper!"

Chris knew Gabe was right. A few well-placed shots on the fuel tank and the helicopter would come crashing down, through the ceiling. It would explode in a ball of fire killing a large amount of the audience.

Chris rose to his feet and pointed his gun at the orange eyed man.

The man dashed under the seats, knowing that the more he moved the harder a target he would be.

Chris watched the movement carefully, spotting a pattern and knowing there was only one shot he could make that would ensure success.

Taking a deep breath he fired off a single shot.

The bullet raced through the air hitting the man in the forehead and killing him instantly.

A gasp echoed across the team. They knew this was necessary but seeing a man killed so bluntly was not something they were used to, nor would they ever want to.

Chris breathed a sigh of relief.

Five of the team rushed up, with Chris alongside them to apprehend the man.

“Bravo! You passed the second experiment,” Tobias’ voice echoed around the room. “You were prepared to risk the lives of innocent people for the greater good. The true test of a real soldier.”

He reached his arms together to clap but was unable to do so, with his arms now handcuffed behind his back.

The orange eyed man was pulled out from under the seats and away from the blue light. The bullet was still pressed into his skull. A medic took his pulse and confirmed that he was no more.

“Ok, let’s get rid of the body and ...” Chris was stopped in mid-sentence as he saw something he couldn’t believe.

A blink.

It happened so fast but Chris was sure of it. The dead man had blinked.

He looked at the medic and knew from the look on his face that he had seen it too.

As he turned back to the body he noticed something even stranger.

The dead man’s neck had begun to twitch and his whole body soon started to spasm.

“Cyanide?” asked Chris, looking at the medic.

“No, this isn’t normal ... this isn’t like anything I’ve seen before,” stammered the medic.

As the spasms continued the dead man began to lift his back from the floor. Slowly at first, like a coil beginning to unravel, his body rose up and up, until he was resting on his knees.

“No! Just ... no!” The medic stared at Tobias, startled and unsure just what horror this mad man had unleashed.

With a final push the dead man rose to his knees and stood tall.

His eyes opened again revealing his orange eyes, pulsing much brighter than before. The bullet hole remained in his head and yet this was no zombie. He was as alive as any other man in that room.

He looked upwards at the helicopter and aimed his gun at it.

The team members who had gathered around him took point blank range shots directly at him. Every shot hit the target but he didn’t go down.

In death he had become more than a man.

This time he didn't miss. His bullet hit directly on target.

"Our fuel tank has been hit. Repeat our fuel tank has been hit. Over," the helicopter pilot, Saloma, radioed Gabe and he then knew the mission had failed.

"We can't kill him!" shouted Chris.

"No but you can stop him!" replied Gabe. "Pin the target down at all costs."

The remaining team jumped on the orange eyed man and pinned him to the floor. His gun was quickly taken from him and broken so he could no longer use it.

It wasn't enough.

"The damage is too great. We have to land. Over," and with that the chopper moved away from the building, taking the blue light with it.

What happened next was a blur of screams. The elderly man whose face had been cut by falling glass felt the pain of his attack and let out a deep scream, holding the cut in pain.

The medic dashed for him but was quickly trampled by the now unfrozen audience members in their dash to escape from the room.

The security guards returned to life and immediately began to fire at the men pinning the orange eyed man down. They had no choice but to retreat.

Gabe stood next to Tobias determined not to let him go but was hit over the head by Jonathan with a chair. The force broke a tooth and knocked him to the floor.

"Tobias are you ok? What happened?" asked Jonathan.

"Terrorists. It was The Deck," replied Tobias, knowing this was the type of good PR that money simply could not buy.

Chris looked back at the carnage and at Gabe. Gabe lay on the floor, his mouth bleeding. Chris knew there was nothing he could do, that to ensure victory he would have to escape for now.

Our leader captured, innocent people injured and an unstoppable force being revived by security, he thought to himself. This is bad.

With that thought he exited the building and huddled into one of several jeeps with his comrades. They held their head in shame knowing that the worst had occurred. They had handed the biggest mass murderer in history a golden ticket.

EIGHT

Emmie Keyes

“Grace!” my relief at seeing my best friend was just as strong as seeing R&R, only this time I knew I had someone I could tell my secrets to.

“Emmie Keyes as I live and breathe. Did you miss me?” replied Grace.

Grace was the same fashionista she had always been. Every outfit she wore made me jealous and her current top with belt and skirt combo made me as jealous as usual, especially as I was still wearing pyjamas with little sheep on them. She was also incredibly beautiful, something her job as a make-up artist made it very hard to compete with.

Her slightly dark coloured skin went with anything and made her skin always look healthy and tanned, a rarity this time of year with the typical British weather. She wore fake eyelashes with alternated red and brown lashes that went perfectly with the red streaks in her chocolate brown hair. Thanks to her job she got free make-up which was a novelty for most of us and I was always thankful for any samples she could give me.

After she had given me some mascara and lip gloss we laughed and talked like old times. For a brief moment it was as if all was right in the world again.

“You rang?” asked Grace, clearly wanting to know why she had been dragged half way across the country overnight.

“It’s bad Grace it’s...” The next sequence of words were hard to think in my head and even harder to say out loud.

I sat down on a pink bean bag whilst my eyes began to water. “It’s Will,” I said “He’s...” I forced myself to say it. “He’s gone Grace, he’s gone!”

“Gone? Gone where?”

“Gone, gone!” I clarified “I watched him die.”

“No, Emmie. I’m sure he’s ok. If you’re alive that means he’s alive somewhere too. It must be a mistake. We can find him.”

Her words tried to comfort me but it was no use. “This is different. I saw him die and I no longer feel him tied to me,” my eyes started to swell with tears and Grace realised that I wasn’t joking.

Grace sat on the floor with me and placed her arms on my shoulders. She didn’t want to pry but wanted to know more so she could help, “How did he die?”

“He was murdered.”

“No!”

“I saw the whole thing; he was killed by two orange eyed men,” I explained.

“Orange eyed?”

“It was like nothing I had seen before. Their eyes had an orange pulsing glow and they spoke in a language I couldn’t understand.”

Grace nodded along as I explained how Will had died, a dead stare in her eyes as if she heard the words but didn’t really understand what I had said. As if she couldn’t process the how or the why of the situation.

I told her about the DualCam, the last recording it played and how my identity was slowly being destroyed. I felt relief in being able to share what had happened with someone I could trust.

Grace had always been weak. That’s why she clung to me for help and why her job was so low pressure. But she was a good friend and had always helped me when I needed her.

“Emmie, don’t you see what is happening here?” asked Grace, snapping me away from my story.

“Whoever wanted to kill your brother, they think you are dead too. That’s why they deleted your files. You aren’t safe, especially if they know you are still alive,” said Grace.

“I know and that’s why I called you. I want to find out the truth behind Will’s death and to do that I need your help. I need you to help me disappear.”

Grace nodded knowing exactly what I meant. For years she had trained as a make-up artist and this skill meant she could easily change someone’s appearance to make them unrecognisable.

If I was going to find out the truth I needed a disguise, something Grace was an expert at.

“OK, now that I can help with,” replied Grace.

“Great, what are you thinking? A few hair extensions, a tan and some different makeup?” I asked.

She nodded along, waited for a moment as if considering something and then took her backpack off her shoulders. Reluctantly, she removed a silver box from inside and said “I have something even better. This box contains the most advanced make-up kit in the world.”

I stared at the silver box, curious how Grace could fit all of her make-up supplies into it. Sure she was great at what she did but I remained sceptical that she’d have enough bits and pieces in the box.

“This box can make you be anyone you want to be. More convincing than make-up and quicker too,” said Grace. In fact you’ll be the third person in the world to try it out, after me and my boss.

I was excited by the prospect and anything to make the process of putting on make-up quicker was ok with me. "Great! Let's go for it," I replied.

"So who do you want to be? How about 'rocker synth Emmie', she was hot!" said Grace, our past feelings for each other starting to show through a little too much.

During my darker years I loved Rocker Synth, an electronic mix of rock music and dub step. To go along with the style I had purple hair and tended to wear more dark grimy clothes. It was a massive contrast to my blonde hair and calmer clothes I wear now.

Grace seemed to like it at the time and it was fun to be rebellious at least for a little while.

"No, I need to be unrecognisable. Make me look like no one you have ever met before," I said.

"Ok, you're the boss," Grace pressed a button on the silver box and it began to glow.

I wondered what possible make-up kit would need to glow and I instinctively lent forward to touch it.

Grace batted my hand away. "No touching. This thing runs incredibly hot."

This only added to my curiosity. Sensing this Grace asked "What's with all the questions anyway? You're the one with a top secret camera."

She was right; it wasn't as if I didn't have a mysterious box of tricks in my own room.

"We need a computer, does the DualCam let you install programs?" she asked.

I nodded and turned the DualCam on so it was once again reflecting on the wall with its twin rainbows. We ran a search for new devices and found one called "Skin 2.0".

"Is that it?" I asked. Grace lent forward and clicked the confirm button.

A loading screen appeared showing a Queen of Diamonds playing card rotating around and around. I assumed that must be the developers of the software.

"So how did you get to test this anyway?" I asked

"My boss loves me," replied Grace, who had always had a knack for getting what she wanted so this didn't surprise me.

The software loaded up and presented a series of options from skin colour, to hair style and we spent thirty minutes tweaking them until we had found a new face for me. It seemed quite different to my normal look and I was unsure exactly how I could undergo such a rapid change without hours and hours of work.

The computer sent a signal to Grace's device and we boiled a cup of tea whilst we waited.

"So what exactly are we waiting for?" I asked, whilst the kettle boiled.

"It'll have a red light on top when it's ready," said Grace.

“Ready with what exactly?”

“The face we created for you is being made inside the box.”

I looked at the box. It wasn't anywhere near the size of my face. “I know I have a small head but I don't see how...”

Grace interrupted me mid-sentence as she started to pour the boiling water into our cups. “It's simple really. The box creates fake skin that will be placed over the top of your skin like a mask sitting on top.”

That sounded anything but simple. “What? How can that be safe? And didn't you say it was hot? Won't it hurt?” I continued to think of one hundred and one more questions but before I could say them, Grace interjected; “Look at my face. I used it this morning. You'll be fine.”

A red light flashed on the box indicating that it was ready. Grace stirred our cups of tea, threw the tea bags away and poured in milk. She gave them another stir, extra slowly as if she was playing with me.

She paused for a moment and asked “Do you want sugar?”

“Just open the box!” I shouted.

“Fine, fine. You're no fun.”

Grace lifted a lid on the grey box and removed a flesh coloured ball. The ball was shifting slowly in her hands as if it wanted to escape. It wasn't a hard material like a bouncy ball but wasn't runny enough that it ran from her fingers either.

“This is Skin 2.0, are you ready?” she asked.

“No,” I replied, hoping to go back to the make-up idea.

“Trust me Emzie,” she said, using her affectionate name for me. “If we don't use this, you will get caught. There's not good enough make-up in the world to hide anyone completely but with this you have your best chance. Now hold out your hands.”

I reluctantly agreed and placed my hands out in front of me, palms facing upwards. Grace angled her hands downwards and the flesh coloured ball slid down her hands into mine.

The touch was instantly off-putting. It felt like holding a living creature. The ball twisted in shape and its slimy texture reminded me of the snakes that sometimes crept into the downstairs basement of our building.

With the ball firmly in my hands it began to glow. “What is happening?” I asked.

“It's just remembering your DNA,” said Grace, as if this was the most normal procedure in the world. “You know, if you don't trust it you're basically saying you don't trust me. I did design it after all.”

I rolled my eyes at her. I was more than used to this type of playfulness from our college days together.

Once the glowing stopped, I asked "Now what?"

"Place it onto your face and whatever you do, do not remove your hands until I tell you to. Understood?" she said, with her best Headmistress impression. Yet there was an ounce of severity in her voice too.

I placed the skin over my face and it began to expand covering every pore. As the skin branched out, it expanded over my ears and neck and then wrapped around the back of my head to cover my hair. As it expanded over my lips I started to feel it tighten up, like clay beginning to form. It felt like my real skin was drying out and being suffocated.

As the skin on my neck began to tighten I was thrown back to the memory of Will being strangled and I started to panic. My breathing became shallow and I felt my hands begin to drift away from my face.

"It's me Emmie, you're ok. Just calm down," Grace's words soothed me and helped bring me back to reality. She pressed her hands against mine and gently placed them back on my face. I so badly wanted to remove my hands and tear this fake skin from my face but Grace helped to stop me.

I opened my eyes and looked in the mirror, watching as dye started to run from the skin that had covered my hair, changing its colour from blonde to a dark black. Suddenly all of the hair from below my shoulder fell to the floor, as if someone had suddenly cut my hair to that point. For the hair that remained each strand became a little thicker and my fringe lowered down to just over my eyebrows.

"How is it doing this?" I asked.

"The short version?" she replied. "The skin copied your DNA earlier and created new strands of hair. It then rolled up the hair you no longer needed and blah blah science talk blah. Look, the important thing is, you look amazing!"

I stared at the mirror and took in the transformation. My freckles had gone, replaced by perfect lightly tanned skin. My ears were slightly larger with a cute pointy bit at the top that popped slightly out from behind my hair.

"So you couldn't do anything about my big nose?" I asked

"Emmie, the skin goes over your face, I can't change bone matter," replied Grace.

"Ok, ok. Maybe something for Skin 3.0?" I continued to look at the changes. My blue eyes remained but my lips had changed. They were now fuller and far more seductive. A purple colour covered them from top to bottom. "I told you no 'rocker synth' Emmie!"

"Sorry, I couldn't resist, purple always did look good on you. You'll need a new outfit to go with that face," said Grace as she opened my wardrobe.

I didn't own many clothes, mostly just jeans, strappy tops and sweaters that had been abandoned by the 'haves'. The only nice outfit I owned was one I had been bought by Will for my twenty first Birthday. It was the only piece of clothing that wouldn't look out of place where we needed to go. Grace spotted it instantly and handed it to me with a large smile on her face.

I slipped into a pair of light black jeans and high black heels that had not been much fun to walk in last time around. Grace handed me a black top which had a white V shape that ran from my neck down to my belly button, revealing a smaller blue top underneath. It clung tightly to my figure.

My outfit was finished with the one piece of jewellery that I owned, a large pearl necklace that had once belonged to my mother before that horrible day that took her away from me.

As I looked at myself in the mirror it felt odd. As if I was looking through a window at someone else who happened to be copying me. If I couldn't recognise myself then that meant no one else would, which was perfect.

The fake skin no longer felt tight and had settled to feel quite natural and when combined with an outfit that would get ruined within twenty minutes on a typical day in Smyth West I felt ready to go.

"Perfect!" said Grace. "We just need a few more things before I can let you go," said Grace.

"Such as?"

"Well you can't very well have a brand new face and then just start using your existing credit cards or ID. That would defeat the entire point!"

"Ok but where would I even get a fake ID?"

"It's ok, I know a guy. He's a prop designer on set. He makes really good replicas for movies. So good you can't even tell the difference. I'll text him your photo now," Grace really was proving very useful today.

"Cool but don't I need a new name too?"

"Oh yeah, what would you like it to be? Emzie?"

"No, that's ok you can keep that nickname between us. How about Jessica Young?"

"Seems a bit plain Jane to me but ok,"

She took my photo, sent it onward and we waited.

"So you have a new identity, what now?" asked Grace.

I knew exactly where I wanted to go.

"TethTech," I replied.

NINE

Chris Jacobs

Chris stared at the news report in disbelief.

“We have reports just in that an attempt has been made on the life of the highly regarded inventor Tobias Zen,” said the reporter. “Earlier today a recording of the Jonathan Lewis show was cut short when a terrorist group stormed the studio.”

“No, no, no,” shouted Chris at the crackly standard definition screen.

“In exclusive footage CTT News is able to reveal the events that occurred during the attack. We warn you that this is not for the faint hearted,” said the reporter.

Chris watched as the events of last night were distorted and spliced together in a way that made it very clear that The Deck were responsible.

He watched as Grace stood up and started throwing accusations at Tobias. Unsurprisingly the reference to him killing a billion people had been cut from the video. He saw the audience frozen by the blue light, which was quickly disabled by the orange eyed man – whose eyes had now been digitally altered to a brown colour.

In this version of events there was no gunshot on the man’s head. Another digital alteration.

The scene of Chris firing at the orange eyed man had been delayed to make it look as if Chris and the other team were shooting at the crowd. Even the old man whose head had been cut by fallen glass, now appeared to be injured by a stray gunshot instead.

The message in this video was clear. Tobias was a hero and they were the terrorists.

“Shocking scenes, I’m sure you will agree,” said the reporter. “The terrorist group in this video are known as The Deck and this is not the first time they have attacked Tobias.”

“However we can also reveal the identities of many members of The Deck and warrants have now been issued for their arrest,” the reporter motioned to a large screen of photos which flashed by across the screen.

“Oh no,” Chris watched as his face appeared on the screen. A crystal clear image, that seemed to have been taken from a social network or one of his online profiles, rather than from the night of the attack. It would be more than enough for him to be easily caught.

His face on the screen changed, showing another member of The Deck and another until over fifteen team members had been exposed to the world.

They were fugitives now. This made things difficult.

As the photos went by Chris noticed that one of the people from the night did not appear.

Gabe.

The footage of the attack failed to show Gabe at any point. He wasn't shown being shot, issuing orders or being escorted away by Tobias and his guards.

It was as if he had never been there. As if Tobias wanted to keep the fact he had been taken a big secret.

"Tobias Zen refused to comment on the attack but he has stated he will still be giving his press briefing today and that TethTech will be floated on the stock exchange as planned later today," said the reporter.

"And now for something a little lighter. You've seen a human play the saxophone but have you ever seen a cat play one? You have now..." the reporter continued but Chris was in no mood for musical cats.

As he surveyed the concrete hub they called their base, he saw the worried faces of the remaining team. Many of them had now been revealed to the world, leaving a handful of people who could now travel outside safely. For everyone else it would only take a quick glimpse of a security camera for them to be spotted.

The remaining team would be enough to gather supplies but not enough to save Gabe or stop Tobias.

"Thank God Grace had worn a disguise. She is our best hope now," said Chris.

TEN

Emmie Keyes

It was time to go. Grace had received word from her friend that ID's would be waiting on route to help us get into the city undetected. With my new face fully formed, I was ready. I packed up some clothes and cosmetics into a backpack, grabbed my police badge and gun and left the apartment.

We passed Apartment 12B and I thought about saying goodbye to R&R. Who knew when I would see them again or when I would return; my apartment would likely no longer be the safe haven it once had been. But I realised I had nothing to say that would make any sense. Plus knowing I'd never said a final goodbye would give me a reason to come back when this was all over.

"Aren't you going to wear a disguise?" I asked Grace.

"You have the only Skin 2.0 in existence. But there's no need for me to use it, they don't know who I am and a face like this is too good to hide," she joked.

We left the building and stepped out onto the street. The sun was just rising as I turned my head and took one last look at my home. There was no turning back.

I lived in the small have-nots town of Smyth West. We were far from one of the poorest communities in the UK and everyone worked on a bartering system. I got free rent in return for training to become a police officer to protect the town. Other people worked on farms and traded food for shelter, whilst some people specialised in healthcare, building and more.

When we needed a new skill, someone would train in it to help the community. It helped make Smyth West a town that could sustain itself amongst the broken economy. We lived outside of the Government and away from the large cities. Our town didn't receive any of their support and as we didn't sell anything (merely trades) we didn't have to pay tax. In many ways our town was a regression to the way people lived hundreds of years ago.

It worked but we were always afraid that one bad harvest or not having enough medicine would mean our entire town could be wiped out very quickly. We lived in houses that had been abandoned and we made them our own with whatever items we could find. Our homes were rarely repaired; whilst some of the houses had sunk into their foundations, others had become flooded and some had burnt down. For every house or apartment that was liveable another three were destroyed or boarded up. Despite this we tried to ensure everyone in the city had a place to live.

It wasn't paradise but we survived day by day.

There was one item I owned that I didn't trade for or find and that was my motorcycle. A gift from Will, it helped me to explore outside of our town and to make trades with other local villages.

Thanks to solar power I never had to pay for fuel, even with the typically dull British weather, so as long as the bike didn't break I could keep living this 'free' existence. If it did break I may have to train to become a mechanic, as Smyth West currently didn't have one.

Grace and I mounted our motorcycles, left the city and headed up the country towards Birmingham, the biggest city in the UK. London was no longer the once glorious capital it had been before the 20 Day Siege.

The roads were quiet. With most of the UK's population now living in ten large cities, people rarely travelled and if they did then they would use trains that were far quicker. As Smyth West was far too small a town to have a train station, we used the roads to reach our destination.

What vehicles we did see included old cars that had clearly been previously abandoned and seen better days. They were probably unwanted relics from the rich, who had no need for them in the large cities, which had now been reclaimed by other have-nots.

We also saw duocycles, which always made me laugh. They were designed as a way for twins who liked motorcycles to travel together safely. Motorcycles had been deemed one of the most unsafe ways to travel so an inventor decided they would be safer with two twins together. His logic was that they would both be paying attention to the road and therefore it could prevent accidents.

The bikes were the same as normal motorcycles but with two seats one behind each other. They also had a roll-cage at the top and a plastic dome around the entire bike. They looked awful and had been one of the worst selling inventions of the century.

The inventor's loss was the have-nots gain. When the product flopped the haves, who were now embarrassed to be seen on a duocycle, had gotten rid of them. Over the years they had worked their way down to our communities. We still thought they looked stupid but if you wanted a free way to get around, they were very effective.

After fifty minutes of riding we approached a service station and Grace signalled to the left for me to come off the motorway. I did and we approached an abandoned petrol station with a few toilets and a greasy burger stand. There also stood a large retail stand which had once housed over one hundred shops but which was now a burnt out building that looked like it could barely support itself.

Ash floated through the air and clogged my lungs. The air stank of death and dampness lingered on. The remaining structure blocked out the sun leaving an echo of darkness blocking us out. The building may have been a shadow of its former self but it was still an imposing structure.

The building was supported by several large concrete pillars that sat around the outside of it. The entire wall in front of us had collapsed to the ground long ago leaving rubble shattered across the car park. Every car was either rusted or had been damaged by an amalgamation of glass, signage and merchandise from the stores. They were useless and a horrific reminder of the people who had no doubt been trapped inside the building when it burnt down.

The main centre itself was a horrific mass of twisted metal that had become warped from the flames. Almost everything I could see was a different shade of grey or black and the damage was absolute. There was no way anything inside had been spared from the flames.

It was easy to tell what had happened here. These places had once been thriving with people who needed to stop on long journeys but with most people now living in large cities and the have-nots having little money to spend, they were now mostly abandoned.

I imagined that the retail store had been looted and burned down, by scavengers or even the owners, and it simply made no sense to rebuild it. The owners probably took the insurance money and retired with no thought for the people they killed. Compared to the 20 Day Siege no one would bat an eyelid at a few hundred deaths especially in a region that wasn't controlled by the haves.

"I need to go inside," said Grace.

"Really? It doesn't look stable at all," I replied.

"It's ok; I've been here lots before. Why don't you wait outside and grab us a burger?"

I looked at the greasy fast food stand and figured 'why not?' *"Who knows how long I'll be alive anyway?"* The owner seemed friendly. I asked him if he would be prepared to trade anything for two burgers and he asked if I could use my motorbike to charge a battery he used to power the heat in his shack. He hooked the battery up to my motorbike and I revved the engine.

I watched as Grace entered the burnt out shopping centre and I wondered exactly what kind of prop designer would want to meet in such a place.

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Grace Wilkerson

The chaos that had happened years before was all too apparent as Grace kicked her feet through the ash of what had once been one of the UK's biggest shopping centres.

The inside of the centre was a dangerous walk. The roof had originally been made of glass with metal lines zig-zagging back and forth which held triangular pieces of glass in place. Most of the pieces had shattered and splintered to the floor but a few still lingered in place. It was clear one day they would fall like jagged shards of death. As Grace looked up at them she hoped today was not that day.

The floor was covered in ash, rubble and dirt that had blown its way in from outside. The walkways had become waterlogged from the rain and soaked up the dirt covering the floor turning it into mud which filled cracks in the floor to make an uneven and slippery surface. As Grace carefully traipsed through the mud she could see where it had been dislodged from those who had dared enter this building before.

Each shop had been looted, their surviving products long gone. This had once been a centre full of colour where big brands competed for attention. The fire had destroyed almost all of that

vibrant branding and the centre was little more than browns, greys and blacks. Each shop looked almost identical and had returned to their original shells. They were now just burnt out husks of metal architecture, collapsed metal shutters and broken products.

Grace pushed a bike out of her way. It was nothing more than a twisted column of steel and it clattered as she threw it down. She constantly shifted her gaze around the centre as she walked a well memorised route. As she walked a path she knew well she heard the loud rumble of a store collapsing. The damage done to this building would never end and as one of the stores collapsed in on itself the sound of metal on metal shook her ear drums.

Rather than stopping to assess the damage she ran forward and away from the sound. As she saw the mangled face of a burnt out mannequin, she jumped backwards in horror. Its plastic face had almost all melted away leaving his eyes and bright red lips hanging there in mid-air from three twisted coils. She always felt this mannequin was mocking her, especially today.

The grizzly sight of the mannequin was nothing to the horrors this place had held the first time Grace came here. Back then this place had been full of death. Charred remains were scattered across the floor and each face she saw had a look of horror. She could picture the chaos that had emerged that day and could see how they had tried to escape but it hadn't been enough.

Their bodies were fresh back then; mere weeks after the centre had been burnt down. Yet the smell still lingered. The smell of rotting flesh and decay. It made her sick then and still made her gag every time she walked through this place. She could never forget what she had seen that day.

She had been only eighteen the first time she entered this horrible mausoleum, arriving on a whim thanks to a note from a man called 'Gabe'. What she saw that day changed her life forever.

The dead bodies had since been removed and buried in a mass grave around the back of the building. The first time she met Gabe, Grace had demanded that they give the bodies a decent burial. He agreed and helped her to dig the grave and carry the bodies out one by one. Through his compassion he and Grace had grown close.

Grace didn't know any of the survivors but her conscience couldn't bear the thought of all those people spending eternity strewn across a burnt out building. As she walked down the corridors past a burnt out hut of teddy bears, she hoped those people now had some sort of peace.

At the end of the corridor Grace spied a grey panelled maintenance door located next to some toilets. She entered a code on a digital keypad and the door clicked open.

Walking through the door, she passed down several sets of stairs into a basement area. This section was made of pure concrete that had protected it from the fire. It was the only liveable part of the building and was now protected with a lot of security.

Reaching the bottom of the stairs she reached a fresh set of double doors and entered a different key code this time. This door was far more secure and made of reinforced steel. It had clearly not been part of the original design.

The doors opened up to reveal a large concrete room. By the entrance were smaller rooms that branched off and were sectioned off with temporary panelled walls. The walls were decorated

with the symbols of a deck of cards – hearts, diamonds, spades and clubs were scattered across the walls. At the back of the room a walkway branched off to more living areas.

Once inside a man ran up to meet her. “Chris!” Grace said and smiled.

“Great to see the true Grace, I’ll miss the red hair,” replied Chris.

“Can you believe it?” replied Grace. “The technology works! I’m sure we can use it on many more missions and I can’t wait to see Tobias and rub the smile off his face.”

Before he could congratulate Grace on Skin 2.0 Chris pointed to a giant wall of computer monitors. “Grace I have something you need to see,” he played back the news report from last night, showing the team attacking innocent people and their identities being revealed.

Grace could only stare at the events. “You shot an innocent man!?”

“No, the footage is mostly fabricated. We were attacked and Tobias escaped,” said Chris.

“But how?”

“An orange eyed man. He couldn’t be killed and he set the guards free who attacked us.”

“Wait, he couldn’t be killed?”

“I shot him in the head. The medic confirmed him dead and we continued to shoot him when he came back to life. He survived everything,” said Chris. “When he attacked our helicopter we had to retreat to protect the civilians.”

Where’s Gabe? I need to see him!”

“Captured.”

“NO!” shouted Grace. “At least tell me he wasn’t hurt?”

Chris looked down at the floor, ashamed by what had happened. “He was shot in the shoulder. I gave him some medical aid but he will bleed out if not given proper care.”

Grace punched a nearby wall in anger. She looked back at her knuckles to see they had reddened and the skin had broken on them. A tiny bit of blood leaked through one of the cuts. She was glad. The pain gave her a moment’s relief from reality.

She went to throw her fist against the wall again, unsure how to cope and Chris quickly grabbed her hand and held it towards his chest. Grace refused to cry, it wasn’t in her nature but she wanted to more than anything.

“So what on Earth do we do now?” she asked. “They showed your face. Nearly everyone’s faces? What can we do?”

“You’ve already done the hard work for us Grace,” said Chris. “Do you have the Skin 2.0 test kit?”

Grace realised she already had the perfect solution for hiding identities in her backpack. "But we only have this one unit. It's not enough to help everyone."

"No but you've proved it worked. We can now make more disguises. Enough for everyone."

"Ok. But what should I do about Emmie? She's determined to go to TethTech."

"Perfect. You have to take her to Tobias. She's the best chance we have for answers."

"Are you insane? I agreed to take her there when I knew Tobias was gone, I don't want her anywhere near that freak!" Grace knew Chris was right but she didn't have to like it.

"Boss's orders," he stated.

"I see," Grace knew the orders of the boss hadn't been wrong before.

"I know it sucks and how close you are to Emmie but she's the best chance we have now. When we can mobilize the rest of the team we will support you. Until we can create fresh faces for everyone we are stuck here," said Chris.

"Ok," she sensed there was no reasoning with him. She had her orders and would see them through.

"Here are the passes you wanted. This will get Emmie and you to Tobias. Remember she can't know who you really are. It will jeopardise everything."

"I know," Grace had wanted to tell Emmie about The Deck many times before but knew it was forbidden. She'd have to keep pretending to be a make-up artist for a little longer. "I have to go; she will be looking for me soon."

"Good luck and don't worry we will find Gabe," said Chris.

Grace left Chris and walked back outside.

She saw Emmie standing next to the burger stand with two greasy cheeseburgers. The owner of the stand now had a brightly lit shack and seemed very happy.

"All good?" asked Emmie.

"Yep, let's do this," replied Grace.

ELEVEN

Emmie Keyes

Birmingham: Ten miles.

Almost there, I thought.

“Emmie,” I heard Grace’s voice over my headset “So what’s the plan?”

Although I’d told Grace where we were going I hadn’t even explained why or what exactly I hoped to achieve.

“Will worked at TethTech. They’re a military contractor and if he was a part of anything that could have gotten him killed it would be to do with them,” I explained.

“What makes you think they’ll tell you anything?” asked Grace.

“I have no idea but if I can understand what types of projects Will may have been working on then that may be my best chance for answers.”

We approached the ringed gate around Birmingham. An electrified barbed wire fence ran around the edge of the city, enclosing its thousand square miles from outsiders. Behind the barbed wire was a concrete wall fifteen foot tall, which had more barbed wire on top of it. Security cameras ran along the perimeter. Apart from the thirteen gates that ran around the outer walls there was no other way into the city on foot.

As I looked at the imposing structure I suddenly became very aware of the fake identity in my pocket. I repeated my new name over and over in my head *“Jessica Young, Jessica Young, Jessica Young.”*

There were only six of us in the queue. It was rare for people to leave or enter the city. Once you were in there was little reason to leave. Despite this the queue moved slowly, with extensive checks required for each person visiting. A necessary requirement to protect the city.

“Name please,” the guard faced me and it was my turn to be scrutinised.

I paused for a split second to make sure I got it correct. “Jessica Young.”

“ID Please,” he asked.

I reached into my purse and spotted my real ID sitting right next to my fake ID. *“God Emmie, did you even think this through?”* Grabbing the fake ID and making a mental note to hide the real one later I handed it over.

The guard looked at the holographic seal on my ID. *“Surely that would be hard to fake? Especially for a movie prop designer,”* My faith in Grace’s colleague started to wane.

“Hold on one moment,” he showed the ID to his colleague and I placed my hand on my motorbike keys ready to escape if the ID didn’t work.

His colleague looked at the ID from inside his security room. I couldn’t see what they were saying but it was an agonising minute and a half.

The guard returned and asked “Are you her?”

“Who?” I replied.

“Your name; ‘Jessica Young’. Are you really her?” he asked.

I wondered if this was it. The ID was worthless. I’d fallen at the first hurdle. Will would be so disappointed. Running wasn’t an option; they’d shoot me dead before I made it to my motorbike. I had no choice but to continue the lie. “Yes, I’m Jessica Young.”

“Yeah but are you *the* Jessica Young?” he emphasised the ‘the’ as if there was something special about the name. Then it dawned on me. Jessica Young was also the name of a famous British athlete who had won gold in a running event a few years before. No wonder the name sounded familiar when I plucked it from the air.

“If only, sadly I’m no athlete,” I replied.

“Shame, my daughter would have loved your autograph. I mean her autograph,” he said.

In a world filled with debt, we still had heroes and hope.

I looked behind myself at Grace to signal that everything was ok. She released the grip from her motorbike, she too had been ready to escape at any sign of trouble and she proceeded to be interviewed.

The first guard waved me along and I walked through to the second guard inside the security box. This small box was just large enough for the two of us and a desk. There were metal bars above the doors that could come down at a moment’s notice. It seemed like a temporary prison.

He had the exact same face as the previous guard. It felt like Déjà vu but was fairly common. Tethered twins who worked together stayed safe together.

“So were you her?” he asked.

“Nope, sorry,” this was the first truthful thing I’d said so far.

“Ah, never mind,” he directed me towards a full body scanner. I sensed he was hoping to get to peek at an Olympians body but mine would have to do.

As soon as I entered the scanner an alarm rang out. The guard jumped to his feet, holding his gun directly at me. I moved from the scanner and looked right at him in fear.

“Ok maam, I will ask you this only once. Are you carrying a concealed weapon?” he asked.

Yes, I thought to myself. I’d bought my gun along just in case but hadn’t anticipated that I’d be subjected to such tight security. I’d never been to one of the main cities before.

“Yes,” this time I said it out loud.

“Ok,” the guard did not put his gun away. “Please remove the weapon and place it on the table.”

I reached down to my side and grabbed the gun. *How am I supposed to do this?* I thought. If I angled the gun the wrong way he might shoot me. I had no idea of the proper protocol and tried my best to keep the gun pointing away from the guard, whilst I placed it on the table.

So bad was my movement that the guard flinched a couple of times but he didn’t fire at me which was a relief.

“Please can you explain why you are carrying a weapon?” his accusation startled me into telling another truthful statement.

“I’m a police officer,” I handed him my badge and then realised this was a huge mistake. First of all, for all intents and purposes my alias Jessica Young wasn’t on the police register. Secondly the badge I handed him was registered to my real name; Emmie Keyes. If he scanned the badge ID that could set off a red flag that I was alive. Not that it would matter if this guard shot me first for my other deceit.

“Thank you. Please remain standing,” he took my badge and gun, and then dialled a number from the phone on his desk.

A senior sounding man answered the phone on loudspeaker. “Lee? Is that you?”

“Hi Wilfred, how are you doing?” asked Lee the guard.

“Same old. Are you still up hitting a karaoke bar after work?”

“Absolutely! Let’s go for some songs from the noughties era.”

“Wilfred you know I hate retro music and which century are we even talking about?”

“Honestly Lee you have no taste, the early years 2000’s were great for music, not like that rocker synth rubbish you used to listen too.”

“Anyway Dad,” Lee looked away from the phone as his father continued to talk. He interrupted him. “Dad, Dad, Dad! Thank you. Could you run a trace for me?”

“Sure, what have you got?”

“Two things; a weapon for the serial number Alpha, Tango, 7-8-5-4-6-1-1-0 and a police badge 5-6, Mike, Golf, 5-5-1-4-9 Kilo.”

Wilfred repeated the numbers back, which Lee confirmed. I looked out of the window for Grace but couldn't see her. She must have gone into a separate booth for her own interrogation. If nothing else, I knew Grace would be safe. She had no weapon and a real ID.

"Ok. The weapon is registered to an Emmie Keyes," said Wilfred.

"*Crap!*" in my mind, I knew the game was over before it had begun. How could I explain having someone else's weapon?

"Miss, can you please explain why you have someone else's weapon?" asked Lee.

I looked at him bluntly, unsure what to say. I could lie; sure but wasn't exactly sure what would be a plausible explanation? "*She was a fugitive? I killed her? I am her but in disguise wearing fake skin and I secretly want to interrogate one of the most powerful men in the world to get justice for my brother?*" No, none of that would do. I'd so far managed an "Um," and an "Err," neither of which seemed likely to help.

I was temporarily saved by Wilfred. "aaand, the police badge is registered to a, Jessica Young."

Now I was even more confused. That was impossible.

Before Lee could dish out his own justice, I was once again saved by Wilfred. "It looks like both Emmie Keyes and Jessica Young are police officers at Smyth West and that Ms Young requested a transfer of Ms Keyes' firearm about a week ago. The paperwork has been signed off so it all seems legit to me." If Lee didn't want to go for karaoke with Wilfred, I certainly did.

"Thanks Dad, see you later."

"Bye Lee, say hi to your brother for me," Wilfred hung up.

"Ok Ms Young, you are free to go. You might want to get your weapon taken to a gun store so they can fully transfer it to you. It will make things easier in the future."

"Thank you, I'll do that," I replied.

"Oh and sorry for pointing a gun at you. We can't be too careful in protecting our capital," I nodded, relieved that I didn't find out what they did to real terrorists. "If you could hand me your keys I'll get your bike put into storage for when you leave the city."

I tossed him my keys and walked out through the gate and into the city. As I waited for Grace I started to have doubts about her. Getting a fake ID was one thing but falsifying police records?

Something wasn't right about Grace Wilkerson.

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Tobias Zen

“Home sweet home,” Tobias walked into a darkened room and flicked a switch. “It’s good to be back.”

The room was suddenly bathed in light as two overhead lights flickered on. In the middle of the room sat a large chair, which was padded all around.

“Come on then,” Tobias motioned over to two of his team who escorted a third man into the room. He wore a blindfold over his eyes.

Tobias’ men sat him down into the chair and turned two large plates around so they covered his chest. They connected wires to the plates and placed electrodes onto his head.

“How are you feeling?” asked Tobias as he removed the man’s blindfold.

“Fantastic, let’s change the world,” replied the man.

“That’s the spirit,” said Tobias. “Now let’s make you more than a man.”

TWELVE

Emmie Keyes

I knew two things for certain. The first was that Grace was hiding something from me. The second was that I needed her as an ally and that whatever crimes she and her friend had broken to get me this far were worth the deceit.

For now I needed Grace on my side and that meant hiding my suspicions. She clearly had friends in powerful places, that much was true and when we had finished in TethTech answers would need to be shared.

“Everything ok Emzie?” asked Grace, after she finished her interrogation.

“Yeah,” I hushed my voice so it couldn’t be overheard by the guard. “The documents worked like a charm.”

“Excellent, for a second I thought I may have to go in guns-a-blazing!” Grace was far less quiet. *Does she have a gun?* I thought to myself. This was just a research mission and talk of firing guns didn’t appeal to me. I’d only bought my own gun with me to protect myself.

“Well let’s get going,” Grace grabbed my hand and dragged me towards a huge sign that showed the different routes through Birmingham. “TethTech,” said Grace and the map zoomed into show their building on the map alongside the words “TethTech is located on Broad Street on the Pride line, Building B.”

In front of us were five large buildings, each of them enormous warehouses with giant letters from A-E on the front of them. We headed towards the building with a giant letter ‘B’ that filled the entire front of the building. A ramp led up from the floor and we entered through the lower part of the B.

Inside the warehouse was a platform that filled the building from left to right. As I looked up I could see what looked like two or three more platforms that could be accessed through a sequence of stairs. A further set of stairs also descended downwards to what I assumed were more platforms.

“We want the Overground Level 2, come on Emzie,” she continued to hold my arm and led me up a wide staircase towards the 2nd level. The station was buzzing with activity and everyone around us seemed to be in a rush. Heads down, legs running, no one in the entire station seemed to say a word to each other, even couples that were clearly together.

We dashed through the crowd of people to our platform and saw the giant train sitting on the platform waiting. Coloured in a metallic grey and designed with a curved shape it gave the

presence of a giant bullet. Inside the train there were two clear compartments, one for the haves and one for the have-nots.

The haves would prefer to keep Birmingham all to themselves and at one time it had been that way. Prices had risen in the city to such an extent that it had become possible for only the wealthy to live there.

But the have-nots fought back. They built small towns on the edge of the city to provide things that the wealthy could not. Food, clothing and shelter were still three basic human needs and there would always need to be people to provide the raw materials and put the work in. So the edge of the city had large blocks of farmland and factories that provided food, dothes and building supplies. The have-nots were also worked in the city power plants to do the jobs the rich felt like they were too good for.

In return they didn't receive a salary but were guaranteed a place to live, heating, electricity, clothes, and food for their family and a rail pass for their daily commute. They got the bare essentials, with clothes that were usually unwanted rags from the rich and food that was often the leftovers from city centre stores that would go off that day.

If they wanted anything else they could only get it by keeping back some food and selling it. A trade that was seen as illegal. If the Government couldn't make tax from something then they'd arrest you. Unlike the town I grew up in, bartering was strictly forbidden.

I instinctively walked onto the 'have-nots' section of the train and Grace followed. This end of the train had stained seats, broken tables and a horrible carpet that looked like it had seen better days. I walked past a man who was probably living on the train. His clothes were torn from months of constant wear, he smelled like he hadn't had a bath in a year and I swore I could see flies buzzing in his vicinity.

We took a seat two rows down from the homeless man. As I sat down in my seat the fold down table in front of me snapped off and an adult magazine tumbled down onto my lap.

"Eugh!" I batted the magazine away with my hand, trying to touch it as little as possible.

"Now that's service," remarked Grace. "Where's my free magazine? Ah, I know where we can get one," and with that my hand was once again in hers. She walked me through the carriage and handed me a golden piece of paper. Printed on it were the words;

First Class Ticket: Jessica Young – Pride Line

It seemed Grace's connections did have some advantages. We scanned our tickets on a control panel and the doors to first class opened. The first thing that hit me was the smell. Gone was the rank odour of 'have-nots' dass, replaced by a light smell of perfume. I was greeted by a stunning looking man who walked us to our seats.

Everything about first class was extravagant. The lights were dimmed slightly to create a serene atmosphere and each set of two passengers got their own private rooms with a TV, separate lighting, air con and a mini bar. The seats even folded down into a bed, which was madness given that you could cover the whole city in around an hour.

“You like?” asked Grace, already knowing the answer simply by looking at my wide eyes and slightly open mouth.

“It’s amazing? But don’t you feel a little guilty sitting here whilst people in the other class have so little?” I asked.

“If it makes you feel better, I didn’t pay for the tickets. Technically we’re robbing from the rich.”

“That helps a little,” I looked back at the ‘poor’ class, knowing this could possibly be the only time in my life I’d get to enjoy this much luxury, and decided to make the most of it.

We sat down and fastened our seatbelts. Walking while the train was in motion was strictly forbidden, due to a high top speed and the tight corners that allowed the train to snake around the city skyline.

“Thank you for choosing Kaitu trains and for visiting the amazing city of Birmingham. I will be your driver this morning on a beautiful twenty degree day. We are almost ready to depart.”

My seat began to vibrate as the engines under the train started to burst into life. The driver started a countdown and Grace began to join in. In the background I could hear the ‘have-nots’ carriage counting down but here in first class Grace and I were the only ones who seemed to care. For the ‘haves’ in first class this was just a normal day.

The countdown reached its crescendo “3, 2, 1, Go!”

I expected to be thrown back into my seat and although the train set off at a speed of 150 miles per hour I felt nothing but the faint rumble of the engine below. I imagined it would be a lot more fun in the other class.

“Birmingham has undergone a massive change in the last one hundred years to become one of the largest cities in the world and the pride of Britain. Now covering an area of one thousand square miles, Birmingham has seen rapid expansion, also encompassing the city of Wolverhampton, Coventry, Redditch and Stafford.” a TV switched on and began to show how Birmingham had changed. We quickly turned it off, instead preferring to watch the real world version by looking out of the window.

The entire left side of our cabin was made of a see-through glass. People couldn’t see in but we got a perfect view of the city as we raced past at breakneck speed.

First of all we saw the farms and factories on the outskirts of the city. The train roared past this area at a ferocious speed and there were very few stops. For the ‘have-nots’ they would have a long way to walk to their homes or to work. There was a simple beauty about this part of the city. It felt like a larger Smyth West and I hoped they had a similar community spirit.

Grace seemed to be enjoying the view as well. “The Overground is so much better than the Underground, why would anyone not want to see this?” she stood up from her seat, with no regard for the fasten seatbelt sign. “Come on Emzie, it’s first class, we won’t feel any of the G force in here.”

She was right, it was as easy to stand in here as it had been on the flat ground of the station platform. We looked out on the city as we approached the rich part of town and watched as skyscrapers whizzed by. Pillars of industry stood tall, with almost all of the world's biggest brands taking presence on the city skyline.

The richest families of the UK all took residence here. The McDougals, the Joneses and the Kings, their three buildings seemed to touch the sky, like giant hands reaching out to God. Their towers held their three companies and each had a crane sitting at the top of the building. As each family grew in wealth they added more floors to their building, as a power play and a series of one-upmanship to their rivals.

Right now it seemed The Joneses were winning, followed by the McDougals then the Kings, although it seemed fairly close. Despite their size and clear wealth I had no idea what either family did. The Kings had a series of satellites on their building, the Joneses' building showed images of drugs and pharmaceutical products down the entire side of its building and the McDougals had a sleek black building that offered no clues. Whatever they did it was clear they had not been affected by the 20 Day Siege like the rest of the world.

On the horizon I saw a building that had not gone for height but had instead chosen to dominate the city with its width. What better way of showing wealth than by taking up a large city block? Anyone could build upwards but to build outwards, in a city with such scarce free land? That was a real power play of dominance.

That's not to say the building was short either. It rose into the sky in a single pillar that twisted from top to bottom. Around the pillar were orange beams of light that ran down in twin spirals from each side of the building. The two spirals twisted with each other like DNA strands, connecting at the bottom and top of the tower in a raised point. At the top of that point sat two T symbols. They seemed almost like crosses, as if this was a place of worship.

The lower, wider part of the tower contained a glass circle that had spikes around the edge. Looking down on it as we approached the building made it seem almost like a giant glass crown. The glass was intercut with a map of the world, with the main base of the central tower sitting where the UK would be on the map.

As we approached our fifth stop, I started to check my backpack for everything I'd need. My weapon, police badge, and the fake ID Grace had given to me. I stared at the weapon hoping I wouldn't have to use it but it felt better to have at least some protection entering a military base. I slipped the weapon and badge under my jacket and placed the ID into my pocket.

The train slowed down and passed by the TethTech tower, circling back on itself so everyone could get a better look. This didn't happen with the towers of the three richest men in the world but it seemed this building had been deemed to be worthy of a second viewing. The track ran around the edge of the building in a circle and then came to a stop several meters from ground level.

We grabbed our stuff, left the train and started to walk down the stairs that would lead us to TethTech. We stashed our backpacks in lockers by the main building and grabbed a quick snack to keep us going.

As I swallowed the last mouthful we heard a loud roar from the TethTech building.

“Something is happening, something big,” shouted Grace and we ran towards the building, heading inside the glass dome and into a screaming crowd.

THIRTEEN

Emmie Keyes

“Zen! Zen! Zen!” chanted the crowd as a man in orange sneakers took to the stage.

“That’s Tobias Zen,” said Grace, “he runs the company.”

I watched as Tobias strode on with perfect posture. He wore a grey suit, which had an orange zigzapped shape on the side, which was similar to the dual lines on the side of his tower. His hair was short and grey but perfectly symmetrical on all sides. The most striking feature of all was his orange trainers. It seemed wrong for a businessman to be wearing something so casual and visually striking.

The way he walked around the stage with a cocky swagger and took in the applause meant I could tell he was a man who liked to show off. The reason why was clear, the crowd loved him.

“Thank you, you are far too kind,” said Tobias “Today is a fantastic day for TethTech, for our soldiers and for the future of this country. Today I bring you a single, simple promise.”

The previously ecstatic crowd fell silent in anticipation.

“No soldier left to die. Ever.”

The crowd cheered. As I surveyed their reactions I spotted the very same words on several campaign powers around the dome. Those six words were clearly very important to Tobias Zen and his fans.

“That’s a promise,” he continued. “As long as I have life in this body, as long as my company runs, I will never allow a soldier that uses my technology to be left behind on the battlefield.”

I could see why his promise was so appealing. What mother or father wouldn’t want to be reassured that their children would survive any war? With economic divides being formed it was clear in many people’s minds that war was an inevitable reality to rebalance the scales of life.

I remained sceptical. “What’s he selling, magic potions?” I said to Grace who laughed.

“But first, we have a remarkable new product,” said Tobias. “The connective powers of Tethers have been well documented and I have spent the last twenty five years examining why bonds are formed between our brothers and sisters and how those bonds can be used to build a safer world.”

“Everyone in this room has experienced it,” he explained. “That moment when your twin has a feeling of high emotion and you lose control. You are overwhelmed by their feelings and get to

experience their life as if it was your own. It's fantastic and every time one of us experiences such a feeling is a moment to be shared forever."

"Now you can do just that, with a DualCam," he said, "a camera that records those moments that you and your Tether share. Those moments of intense feeling can now be shared forever with this never before seen invention."

I looked at the camera and felt smug to have owned one a year ago thanks to Will. The crowd clearly liked it, with more whoops and cheers than the man deserved. It should have been Will on the stage getting this glory, not Tobias. Will invented the device. *Was that why he was killed? So Tobias would get all of the money from the DualCam invention?* I wondered.

Before I could examine that thought Tobias continued. "I'll tell you a secret. We invented the DualCam over a year ago but didn't want to release it until today as the technology helped us to discover something quite wonderful. Something we couldn't share until today."

"The DualCam was just a means to an end," he explained "It allowed us to monitor exchanges between twins so that we could understand how such a bond is formed. As you've experienced, in moments of high emotion you lose all control and have to simply watch as your twin experiences the moment. We wanted to change that and allow people to take control from the other side."

A highly decorated soldier walked onto the stage in a slow methodical fashion. He focused on every footstep with precision. He was dressed in a dark green army uniform which had badges and medals above the front left pocket. He wore a green hat with an orange band around the rim. Beneath the hat his face was slightly hidden with his ginger handlebar moustache by far the most noticeable characteristic.

"So how can this save lives? How can this ensure our brilliant boys and girls that fight for us are kept safe?" said Tobias. "Well, let me introduce you to General Kull."

The crowd cheered and General Kull stood firm on the spot. In true British army fashion he didn't move or get overwhelmed by the applause. He simply stood firm and gave off the slightest smile.

"So, can you juggle General?" asked Tobias.

"No sir," he replied.

"Prove it," Tobias tossed him three juggling balls, which the General attempted to juggle very badly for several minutes. The crowd found this hilarious, especially as it was quite silly to see a senior officer attempting something like this. I just wondered where it was all going.

"As you can see the General is a terrible juggler. General, if you could lie down on the table over there for me please. Ok and go camera number two," The General obliged and placed his hat on the floor.

A large screen behind Tobias buzzed to life showing a man sat in a chair. The screen was a bit fuzzy but I could make out that the man was also dressed in an army uniform but he had white

camouflage patches mixed in with the green pattern of his suit. He had no hat on which revealed his short ginger hair and a very thin face.

What was most shocking was not the man but the harness on his chest that held him to his seat. Then there were the wires that disappeared from the harness to the dark corners of the room. I recognised the setting instantly.

“And this is Colonel Kull. Not quite as good a rank as your brother?” taunted Tobias.

“No sir,” replied Colonel Kull.

“Is everyone ready for an experiment?” Teased Tobias and the faces of the crowd lit up. “This is a world first. What you are about to see is unbelievable but it is no trick.”

Tobias walked over to the General and placed an orange cloth over his face.

Two stunningly attractive nurses then walked on to the stage, their breasts practically popping out of their far too tight and bright orange nurses’ uniforms. One of them pushed a heart monitor and the other held a hypodermic needle which she showed to the crowd as if it was some wonderful prize. The crowd loved every bit of the showmanship.

Tobias took the needle. “This injection contains Phenzolum, a compound that stops heart function within 60 seconds. It is more lethal than any poison.”

He walked towards the General and once again held the needle up to the crowd. This time there were less cheers and an air of suspense filled the room.

“Is he going to kill that man? Shouldn’t we stop him?” I asked Grace.

“It’ll be a trick,” she replied, her face seeming to tell a different story.

“Ladies and gentleman, I will now inject this compound into the General. You will see his heart stop but I promise you, the results will be very worth it,” said Tobias.

With that he lent over the General and injected the needle into him. His heart beat began to slow and then the beat of the heart machine stopped altogether.

The crowd’s voices fell to silence as they realised their hero had deliberately killed a man live on stage.

FOURTEEN

Mr King

Mr King stared out of the highest floor of his tower. He looked out on the city skyline and saw the buildings of his rivals; the Joneses and the McDougals. He had been staring at their towers for sixty years, even since his father first showed them to him. Since then he had taken control of the company and every grey hair, wrinkle and stress line on his face showed the private battles he had faced to get here.

He had earned this view and the million pound penthouse he sat in now through cut throat tactics and more than a few personal demons. He slouched back in his brown leather chair and turned away from the window to look at all that he owned.

The office part of his penthouse was textured with a rich golden brown coloured mahogany that spread across every surface. He had rows of bookcases that showed his willingness to keep hold of the printed word in a world that was now digital. His chair was made from a black leather material and was padded to the point of excess.

A huge steel door sat at the entrance to his apartment. It was double locked and could only be opened with both his finger prints and a retinal scan. Mr King lived in his tower at all times and only a few people knew his real name or even that he was the owner of the company. He had his reasons for keeping things secret and could pinpoint the exact moment that had made him this way.

It all came back to Tobias Zen.

Mr King had achieved so much to try and put his past behind him. His telecommunications empire covered every inch of the globe, even supplying a reliable phone service in previously untapped parts of the world such as deserts and frozen mountain tops. Once an explorer could get perfect phone signal at the top of Mt Everest, he knew his company had reached the pinnacle of its potential. When you've covered the world in a phone signal where do you go from there?

Despite his company reaching the height of its power, he couldn't reach the height of his rivals' towers and worst of all, TethTech were gathering so much media attention that no one seemed to be interested in his company any more. So when TethTech confirmed it would be floated on the stock exchange, his board of directors were buzzing with excitement.

The last thing he wanted was to invest in Tobias 'bloody' Zen but when the entire board of directors out voted him he had no choice. He invested 25% of his company in TethTech shares and prayed it had been the right move.

He began to watch Tobias' demonstration on TV and hoped the investment had been a wise one. He hated being told what to do with his own company and giving money to Tobias was the ultimate insult. He vowed to bring sweeping layoffs at the next board meeting to impart his revenge.

As Tobias darted across the stage, Mr King had to admit there was a certain amount of showmanship about the man with the orange sneakers. Something he himself lacked in his efforts to remain hidden from the world.

After Tobias announced the DualCam, things started to look up. The share price took a nice rise and Mr King wondered if he should just sell his shares there and then and make a small profit. But he'd never been a man to think small before so he eagerly awaited the next announcement.

To his horror he then watched on as Tobias picked up a needle filled with a lethal injection and killed a man in front of everyone. "No!" shouted Mr King, wondering if this was what Tobias had wanted all along. He had always thought Tobias would do something stupid to destroy his own company one day and today seemed to be the time.

"So that's your plan Tobias. Get your biggest corporate rivals to invest in your business and then destroy your own company so we all go broke?" said Mr King. "You crazy bastard!"

Mr King switched over to the finance channel and saw as the share price in TethTech began to fall. Pound by pound he could see his net worth dwindle. Almost all of his personal worth was tied to his own company. He was only one of the richest men in the world if his business was a success and the business was what allowed him to live in secret. If his business failed he'd lose everything.

"Well I won't let you have the satisfaction," he grabbed his phone and dialled his accountant. The phone dialled. "Pick up! What do I pay you for," he screamed at the phone.

"Hello, Jarvis accounting," said an assistant.

"Leo Jarvis, now!" It made Mr King irate that he didn't have a direct line for his own accountant. Especially after all the money he had given him over the years. The assistant knew straight away who was calling, no one else would be so abrupt. "Hold please," she said.

"Come on, come on," Mr King tapped his feet in a panic. He looked back at the TV screen and could see the shocked looks on the audience as Tobias continued to work the crowd, probably apologising for what he had done. "You can destroy your own business but you won't take me with you Tobias..." he was cut off mid-way through by Leo, "Hello, how can I help?"

"Leo. Sell all of the shares we have in TethTech, now!" said Mr King.

"Are you sure? I know they are taking a dive now but isn't this what Tobias does? He puts on a show and then everyone loves him again," said Leo.

"I can't take that chance. You know I didn't want to invest in that man and now he's going to make a fool of me. Sell them," said Mr King.

"I'm sorry sir but I need the authorisation of the board to do that," stated Leo.

“The board? I am the board you prick. Without my family you wouldn’t have a company and you would just be a poor person living in one of the have-nots scum hole towns outside of this city,” said Mr King.

Leo held the phone away from his ear so he didn’t have to listen. At the age of forty two Leo was starting to become bored on this speech. He’d heard this all before. How Mr King gave him this job, how he owed him everything, yadda yadda yadda. “Ok, here’s what I can do. If you send me an email saying you are happy to override the board’s decision then ok.”

“Hmm. Fine!” Mr King hastily wrote out an email. It had several spelling mistakes but the key information was there. He had agreed to take all responsibility for any outcome from cancelling the shares.

“OK, that’s all received, I’ll sell them now,” said Leo.

“Do it quickly or so help me I will put you to work in the hottest and smallest telecommunications station I own. You will be begging me to give you a new job,” threatened Mr King.

Mr King hung up the phone and Leo started to sell the shares. He took some comfort in the fact Mr King had just lost 10% of the value of his company in a single morning.

“You really are an idiot,” Leo smirked, as he repurchased the shares himself at the new low price. Mr King’s loss would be Leo’s gain and he was sure Tobias would have something up his sleeve to restore the share price.

FIFTEEN

Emmie Keyes

Not one person stopped Tobias. Even as the General let out his last gasp for life nobody helped. *Is this his plan? To see if we are all uncaring enough to do anything about it?* I wondered.

Tobias asked for anyone in the audience who was a doctor and a man sheepishly walked onto the stage. He was dressed in casual clothes and his nervousness made me assume he wasn't an actor. He took the General's pulse and confirmed there was none. Another doctor came up to do the same and it was the same story. A man had died here today, that much was true.

"It's a trick, it can't be real," said one of the crowd.

"He wouldn't kill someone," said another.

"My friends, I can assure you he is dead. But he is not gone. Imagine if this was your son or daughter at war and the enemy had killed them. Before today that would be the end but for soldiers fitted with TethTech it is only the beginning. Colonel Kull. How are you feeling?"

The crowd had forgotten about the General's twin. They focussed their attention on the monitor. They had assumed he would die too but he seemed fine. "Never better," he replied to gasps from the audience. He seemed unworried by his brother's death. Clearly he knew something we did not.

"Ok, let's make things interesting," The camera moved in closer to the Colonel and that's when I saw it.

He had orange eyes.

This was a different man to the one who attacked my brother but his eyes had the same unearthly glow. The crowd noticed the eyes too, with one of them screaming "What has happened to his eyes?"

One woman rather hysterically shouted "Demon!"

"The orange eyes are a bug we are working to fix," explained Tobias. "They are caused by the psychic link we are tapping in to. They even come in pairs," he swooped his arm around and removed the orange handkerchief from the dead General's face. A cameraman moved in close to show his face on the monitor and he revealed another set of orange eyes but that wasn't the most alarming thing. The man's face seemed as fresh as before he had died. The heart rate monitor continued to show a reading of zero.

“As you can see the General has yet to show any visible signs of death,” said Tobias. “A Tether has been made between him and his twin, which is keeping him alive. That means we can do this...”

The Colonel in the dark room started to move his arms like a puppeteer. He wore gloves that had the same double helix of orange that Tobias wore on his suit. As he moved his arms his brother began to move.

Moments ago we had seen a man die and this was his reincarnation. The General rose to his feet and started to move across the stage. He looked at the crowd, who looked like they didn't know whether to be happy or scared.

Tobias grabbed the juggling balls again and tossed them to the General. He caught all three of them perfectly. He then tossed the balls into the air and started to juggle them from one hand to the other. This seemed remarkably easy for him, given the difficulty he had minutes ago and that he had died.

In the background the General's twin moved his arms in a juggling motion that was a perfect mirror image. “Let's make this interesting,” said Tobias, who emerged on the stage with two long white poles that had pieces of fabric wrapped around them. From the fabric a thick translucent liquid dripped across the stage. The General placed the juggling balls down and took the poles; he held them out in front of him. Tobias then took out a lighter and set the poles on fire.

A burst of flame shot upwards from the poles as they ignited. Despite the intense heat no sweat formed on the General's head and yet in the background you could see his twin staring to sweat, it seemed like he was feeling the heat instead.

Or perhaps he was simply sweating over the next performance. He threw his arms into the air, as his twin did the same, sending both flaming poles skyward. The Colonel turned his head sideways quickly, which led to his twin spinning around on the spot as the poles started their descent. He stopped spinning his head and held both arms aloft. With perfect timing he clenched his fists and his brother did the same, catching the poles from the air before they hit the floor or himself.

An assistant put out the fire and the General sat down on his bed. His brother breathed a sigh of relief.

“You seem to be quite the juggler Colonel Kull,” taunted Tobias.

“Yes sir. I was Junior Juggler of the Year in Secondary School,” replied the Colonel.

“And how about your brother. Could he juggle?”

“No sir,” the Colonel laughed. “He was awful. Still is.”

“What you have just seen ladies and gentleman is a Tether moment between two brothers,” said Tobias. “One of whom can't juggle and the other was a UK champion. The Tether stayed intact through death, allowing one brother to control the other. Instead of being powerless, one brother was able to make the other even better.”

He was starting to win back the crowd, although there were still grumbles from a few people that this could just be an elaborate hoax.

As if he had read their thoughts Tobias set himself a new challenge. "So we could have faked this right? The General could simply have been pretending to be bad at juggling earlier. It's a fair point and I'm sure that some of you are thinking it. So let's try something extreme that can't be faked."

Tobias took the orange cloth from earlier and tied it around the General's eyes. He then placed a pair of dark goggles over the blindfold so the General could no longer see. Tobias then removed a gun from inside his jacket and placed it in the hands of the General. The heart rate monitor continued to show a complete lack of vital signs.

The General stood up and pointed the gun at the crowd. I instinctively ducked and dragged Grace down with me. I'd told her all about the orange eyed men so she stayed down there with me. We watched through a gap in the crowd.

"Colonel, it's your move now," said Tobias.

The screen showing the Colonel was split in two. One half showed him and the other showed the view from the weapon held by his twin.

"As you can see, the Colonel can now see the gun on a monitor. If he truly is controlling his brother then he will be able to move his arms and shoot the weapon. If this is all a hoax then the General will be the only one who can fire it and as he can't see, then that could end badly," Tobias felt proud that he had discovered a way to prove his technology worked.

"I'm so confident this will work, that I'm prepared to be the target," he placed an apple on his head and stood several feet away from the General. He deliberately moved his body so it wasn't in line with the gun. "Aaaand, go."

Watching the split screen we could see the Colonel raise his arm and as he did so the gun on the screen began to move in the same direction. There were some wobbles, as he became familiar with the weight of his brother's arm but eventually we saw as the apple appeared on the gun's camera.

"It was nice knowing you everyone," said Tobias, teasing the crowd. He closed his eyes. There was no sound and then...

Bang. The apple exploded instantly and burst across the stage.

The crowd cheered. They had seemingly forgotten about the live killing show and then their minds returned to that thought as they started to feel guilt at applauding what they had seen.

"I see you are still wondering about why I *killed* the General," said Tobias. "Here's the great part. When I *killed* the General, he had already been taken over by his brother. This means his brain has yet to realise he has been hurt in any way."

The nurses returned. One of them put the General back into the heart rate monitor which remained at zero. The other held a fresh needle, this time with a red liquid.

“This is the antidote. What? You didn’t really think I’d let a man die did you? Really?” his surprise was fake; he’d planned every aspect of this demonstration to the finest detail. “It’s only effective if applied within 60 seconds of the original virus being injected. Right now we’re at, oooh ten minutes so the chances of it working are, well, zero. Let’s give it a go anyway.”

Like a masterful magician Tobias knew how to work a crowd. He once again presented the needle and injected it.

“The results aren’t quite as quick this time so let’s move on for a second,” said Tobias. “The other big announcement is that TethTech has now floated on the stock exchange meaning you can buy shares in our company and help invest in the future of our children. Let’s take a look at the share price so far.”

A green chart appeared on the screen, replacing the other soldier, showing TethTech’s share price. It was like seeing a sheer cliff face. Shares had started at £75 a share an hour ago and within minutes of Tobias’ live death demonstration; they plummeted and stood at £10 a share. It seemed shareholders didn’t like seeing a man die on live TV.

“Ouch,” said Tobias. “Looks like some of us need a little faith.”

As he said the word ‘faith’ he raised his arms into the air and the General sat upright and took a large gulp of air.

“I give you one soldier, alive from battle and free to protect the country another day. If a soldier is hurt at war, we can use their twin to bring them back safely from behind enemy lines. We can then keep them linked to their twin whilst we heal them. No man left to die. Ever.”

The crowd went insane with applause. Their doubt was removed and suddenly their hero was back. Those £10 share prices would soon be a distant memory as people across the world started to heavily invest in TethTech. By the end of the day shares would reach £300 each, a 400% increase from their £75 starting price. Practically unheard of in this economy. Tobias’ little show would quadruple the value of his company in a single day.

The doctors who had checked the General earlier returned to the stage and confirmed he was fit and healthy. In fact his body didn’t seem to have any negative effects from the original toxin or anything that occurred once he was Tethered. It was as if the act of being Tethered had made him immune to harm.

“I have one more surprise. Earlier today we held a competition on TethTech.com for five lucky people to get a free DualCam before anyone else,” said Tobias.

Except me, I thought.

“The winners are.... Glenn Poe, Tina Hall, Finn Yung, Jessica Young and Tom Snauser.”

I looked at Grace, *Did she do this?* I wondered.

As she looked back at me the answer was clear. This was nothing to do with Grace “Emmie, I don’t want you to go inside but you have to go.”

“I can’t do it. What would I say? They’ll know it’s me,” I said.

“Listen to me. As long as you are in disguise you are safe. I can’t even recognise you, this is the best chance you have for answers,” she replied.

I looked at Grace and knew she was right. No matter how scared I felt, if I didn’t go inside the building I’d never know what happened to Will.

“You will be safe Emmie; you have your disguise and your phone. I’ll track your location with my phone and if you need help just tap the face button four times. I’ll shoot my way in if I have to,” said Grace.

Whilst Grace’s words filled me with comfort, I still really hoped she didn’t have a gun. I stared at the building for a few seconds to brace myself and then walked towards the other winners as Grace mouthed the words “I’ll protect you.”

SIXTEEN

Grace Wilkerson

“What the hell Jill?” Grace moved away from the crowds at TethTech as she shouted through her earpiece. “Why did you rig it so Emmie won the competition?”

Jill Blackwood heard the shouting through her rack of monitors back at The Deck’s base. She rolled her chair over to the monitors, sending her short black hair whipping over her eyes. Her rounded red glasses almost fell off as she stopped in front of a large speaker. She motioned to Chris to come over and listen to the call.

“Nice to hear from you too Grace,” replied Jill. “It was the boss’ orders. Emmie wants answers and this is the only chance she’ll have of entering the building. Hacking their website was far easier than hacking their keycards and this way she can travel safely.”

“Boss’ orders,” Grace was beginning to feel a little sick of these orders, especially when she always found out about them after they’d happened. “Then why didn’t you rig it so I would be able to go in with her? She’s completely on her own in there!”

“It’s too risky,” replied Jill, moving her hair away from her eyes. She wished she had a fringe. “Just yesterday you had your body pressed up against Tobias and if there’s even a chance he could recognise you then that’s a risk we can’t take.”

“But you can risk Emmie’s life? Why?” replied Grace.

“She’ll be fine Grace. We can watch her through the security cameras,” she lied. “Emmie is still our number one priority. We won’t get a better chance than this.”

“So you are just using her for answers?”

“We all want answers Grace. We all want revenge for what Tobias did.”

Grace knew this was true and knew there wasn’t another way. “If anything happens to her...”

“I know, don’t worry,” Jill hung up and turned to Chris.

“It’s up to Emmie now,” said Chris.

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Emmie Keyes

I walked through the large double doors into the TethTech building with the other contest winners who seemed far happier to be there than I did. In front of us stood a wide golden staircase waiting to usher us into the factory.

“Can you believe this,” said Glenn, a thirty-something man with rimmed glasses and a receding hairline.

“It’s amazing. We’re one of only a handful of non-employees to ever see inside this building. Eeep,” Tina squealed, showing far more enthusiasm than you’d expect from someone visiting a science factory.

“I knew he’d never kill someone,” said Finn in a deep Scottish accent.

“It was just an act,” replied Tom, a short man with a low cut brown fringe. “The guy never really died. It was all faked.”

The three other winners stared at Tom, amazed that someone would actually question Tobias. “Are you insane?” asked Glenn. “What about all the doctors who checked?” said Finn.

“Easily faked. Tobias is a conman,” I had a feeling I’d like Tom. Finally someone with a brain. The other winners were less impressed. Glenn walked back to the guard at the double doors and exclaimed “This man is not worthy,” pointing his finger directly at Tom. “He doesn’t deserve to enter this sanctuary.”

“What is this, a house of God? Don’t be ridiculous,” exclaimed Tom. “Look, I like Tobias ok? But you have to admit we shouldn’t just believe everything he tells us on faith.”

“How dare you!” shouted Glenn, clearly taking this far too seriously. He wasn’t the only one. Finn and Tina had joined in by this point. “Kick him out!” shouted Tina. “He doesn’t belong here,” said Finn.

This was insane, how could people have such blind loyalty to Tobias? Looking at the winners they all appeared to be in their thirties, making them old enough to remember the events of the 20 Day Siege that had occurred twenty one years ago. For myself and fresh faced Tom, that day was nothing more than a lesson in a history book. Everyone else here had lived it and that showed.

“Fine, I’m gone!” shouted Tom, as a security guard grabbed him by his arm and dragged him around to the back of the building and away from us. “Good riddance,” said Glenn and I realised I hadn’t said anything this entire time. “Yeah, he wasn’t worthy,” I said, aware that my true feelings would get me removed as well. A risk I couldn’t take.

“Welcome winners!” a young looking scientist entered the room. He wore a white lab coat, with an orange surgical mask hanging down over his neck. “I’m March and I’ll be your guide on this tour of the factory.”

I was immediately sceptical of March. If anything he was too good looking to be trusted. His strong jawline and youthful features made him seem more suitable to be a model than a man of Science.

Besides anyone who was a loyal servant of Tobias was not a friend of mine.

Not that it mattered for Glenn who let out a cheer. An actual cheer, at having the chance to look around a factory. I rolled my eyes but it went unnoticed by the group who looked at March like hungry dogs waiting for a treat.

“Please follow me,” we followed March up a small staircase that opened out onto a grand open plan and brightly lit walkway. The room was pure white with coloured lines – oranges, pinks, blues, greens and reds – forming off to different doorways and paths. On the walls were photos which I assumed were of the TethTech team, that were arranged into circular patterns that intersected. Some of the photos’ contents included their homes, partners, pets, and children. They seemed so normal.

I walked towards the wall and one photo stood out at me. It was a photo of me – the real me, with Will stood behind me. When no one was looking I grabbed the photo and shoved it into my pocket. They wouldn’t need it any more.

Walking back to the group I looked down at the floor and saw an orange pencil sketch of hundreds of happy faces. Everywhere I looked the room was plastered in faces; the walls, the ceiling, the floor, thousands of faces all forming into concentric circles that started to move, intersecting and decreasing in size like a sound wave.

In amongst the waves of faces I thought I saw a face I recognised and as I walked towards it my feet slipped on the floor and I began to fall forward.

Before I could land on my face an arm had grabbed me from the side and pulled me upwards. As I steadied myself I saw the face of the man who helped. It was March.

“Are you ok?” he asked. He seemed kind and genuinely helpful. This wasn’t at all what I’d expected the organisation to be like.

“Yes, thank you.”

“Excellent, I see you were admiring the floor. Amazing isn’t it? These are soldiers who fight for this country every day. They are a reminder of the people we want to protect with our new project,” he sounded sincere. TethTech seemed like a normal office of normal people. I had no clue why they’d want Will gone.

“Sorry I didn’t get your name,” asked March.

“It’s Jessica,” I replied.

“Well Jessica, would you like to see something special?” His model-like good looks made him a hard person to ignore but he seemed unaware of this charm.

“Sure, why not,” If it could give me answers then I would see anything.

I followed March to the back of the room and our feet walked along a pink coloured pathway that ran across the floor. The line stopped by a pink rectangular panel located on the floor, which had a handrail. As we reached the panel I surveyed the room and saw that the other winners

were no longer following us. They were talking to another technician, following a green line and didn't seem to notice my absence.

"Why isn't everyone else coming?" I asked, worried that my cover had been blown.

"Your entry form said you were a journalist for BBC News. So we wanted to show you an exclusive demonstration. A worldwide scoop," he replied.

Grace, what have you done?

"Please hold the rail," said March as the pink panel began to rise upwards through the tower.

SEVENTEEN

Mr King

Mr King stared at the screen, the bright green numbers taunting him. *"It can't be,"*. He looked at the numbers over and over and there was no denying it. TethTech was showing a 400% increase in share price, which showed no sign of stopping its improvement.

This was the worst day of his life. When he'd seen the share price fall he had panicked and wiped out 10% of the entire net worth of his company to stop any more losses and now it seemed if he had stuck with the shares he would have increased them in value by 400%.

He wondered how he would explain this to the board of directors. They were unaware he'd sold the shares and their emails were starting to arrive in one by one.

"We're rich!" said one. "Just bought a new boat," said another. None of them knew of Mr King's deception and when they found out what he had done they would have the power to remove him from his own company.

He sank back in his chair. Tobias had defeated him. The latest daily company accounts would be sent to the board in a few hours. Very soon they would then know the truth and Mr King would be out of a job and on the street. His personal wealth would be stripped away from him and he would have nothing.

He picked up the phone and hit the 'redial' key.

"Hello, Jarvis accounting," said the assistant.

"Barbara, how are you?" said Mr King, trying his best to sound calm and polite. Two characteristics that felt unusual to him.

"I'm very well, thank you. May I ask who is calling?" she said.

"It's Mr King," he replied.

"Ah, sorry I didn't recognise you," she'd never heard Mr King speak this nicely to anyone. "I'll just put you through."

Barbara called through to Leo who let out a large laugh. Leo had just made millions thanks to the shares he'd purchased from Mr King and he had no intention of helping him anymore. "Barbara, can you please tell Mr King that unfortunately we are dropping him as a client. His accounts will be sent to him within seven days for him to seek a new accountant."

Barbara laughed too. This was a victory for both of them. For too long Mr King had filled their lives with abuse. Today they were free. "Right away sir."

The words hit Mr King hard. He'd dropped hundreds of suppliers from his business before but had never been on the receiving end. He started to verbally throw swear word after swear word at them down the phone but they had hung up long ago.

He was in a desperate situation. His career, money and life were all about to be destroyed. He had less than a day to save himself and he knew now the only man who could help him was Tobias Zen.

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Emmie Keyes

We stopped on the 27th floor and March asked me to step off the platform. This room was nothing like the one before. Gone was the open-plan format, replaced by a sequence of tight corridors that were framed with angular white metal structures that held large pink coloured pipes to the walls either side of us. I could feel the heat from the pipes as we walked through the hallway and March assured me it was perfectly safe.

As we worked our way around the tight corners the heat started to make me feel dizzy and I wondered how anyone could work in these conditions. I started to feel sweat forming on my brow and I brushed it away for fear that it would ruin my disguise. I looked at the two pink lines that ran on the floor in front of us and told myself if I could just keep walking that I'd be safe.

"We're almost there," said March. The heat didn't seem to bother him but his face showed a concern for me that encouraged me to keep walking. We reached a steel door and finally the pipes around us veered to either side where they went off to destinations unknown. The door was marked 'Broadcast room' and a red panel was positioned above the door, which read 'On Air' and was currently turned off.

March motioned for me to look away which I pretended to do, quickly turning around when his back was turned. I saw him retrieve a keycard from his pocket which he swiped on a grey panel next to the door. As the door opened I turned around again hoping he would have been unaware I was watching him.

We entered the room and I saw a recognisable face; Colonel Kull. His slim face and ginger hair making him an easy man to identify; especially given he was still held in place with a harness like device. There was no denying this was the same man the world had just seen take over his brother's dead body like a twisted marionette.

An orange eyed man.

Except now his eyes had returned to a neutral blue colour. He appeared completely normal as the scientists around him removed the various wires that were connected into him.

As I looked around the room, which was now no longer covered in darkness but was basking in the glow of overhead fluorescent lighting, I tried to take in as many details as possible. What struck me instantly was how similar its design was to the room I had seen earlier on my DualCam. The pipes on the ceiling, the harness around the man's chest and the wires that snaked around him, they were all the same, yet this was not the same room. The one I had seen appeared more

primitive and rushed together. This room was pristine and every piece of technology looked brand new.

The man was also different from the one I had seen recorded. There was no way he was the same man who had his jaw dislodged in the DualCam footage. Neither was he the same as the man who attacked Will.

“Just how many people have orange eyes?” I wondered to myself and I hoped I hadn’t stumbled upon something much, much bigger than myself and Will.

“Hi I’m Frazier,” said the man in the chair, jolting me back to reality.

“I’m Jessica,” I said as I shook his hand. He continued to sit, despite now being free from the vice. I was unsure if he chose to sit or had been ordered to do so.

“Jessica is a reporter for BBC News,” said March. “We wanted her to see the technology that allowed you to put on today’s demonstration and to meet you so she could tell the world that what it saw today was no trick.”

“Oh, I can assure you it wasn’t,” said Frazier. “I controlled my brother and it felt amazing! For every other Tether moment of my life I have had to sit back and feel him experience something amazing but now I got to take control and it was unbelievable.”

“I don’t understand,” I said.

“It’s complicated,” he explained. “Everything my brother saw I could see too. I saw him get injected, I saw him die and then I saw his arms as I juggled and fired his gun. I felt everything he did, but I also had complete control. That’s why he could suddenly juggle; despite the fact in real life he’s awful!”

“So it was as if you were him?”

“In a way. I still had all of my own thoughts but I could move him with my mind. Those arm movements you saw when I aimed the gun they were just for show. Tobias sure does love a good piece of drama.”

March stepped forward and I sensed that Frazier had said something he shouldn’t. “Don’t write that in your article,” he said in a stern voice. “Although Frazier moved his arms during the demonstration this was purely to increase the sense of spectacle of the event,” March explained. “In truth, our technology allows someone to control their twin simply by the power of thought. We added the arms in, in order to confuse any of our competitors who wanted to mimic our technology.”

I had to admit that was a pretty clever double bluff. Anyone who wanted to try and build the same thing would waste years trying to understand how the arm movements allowed them to control each other.

“However,” he continued. “I must reiterate that you cannot write that in your article and that you sign this,” he walked me towards a document in the corner of the room called a ‘Non-

Disclosure Agreement'. The wooden bench it sat on didn't fit in with any of the other furnishings in the room. It seemed like the desk had been quickly added to the room in preparation for my visit.

"By signing this, you agree that we can approve any content that you write about TethTech before it is published. It ensures that only the right aspects of today's technology are revealed to the public," he explained. "If we give away too much, then anyone will be able to copy us and we lose our competitive advantage."

I really didn't care about the document and had no problem signing it. After all, it's not like there was anywhere I could write about them and with a fake identity it would be hard to do so.

As I finished signing my fake signature I realised I now had the upper hand for the first time today. A real chance for answers. I was excited at what else they may reveal to me now they trusted me fully.

"Thank you Ms Young. Now you have signed the document I can allow you to meet with Tobias. He is waiting for you on the top floor of the building," said March.

Suddenly the upper hand didn't feel like it was worth having.

EIGHTEEN

Rex T Jules

Rex knew it was going to be a long day as he looked at the long list of tasks in front of him. As a maintenance man for Smyth West he spent his days fixing everything from plumbing problems to electrical issues and today looked like it had plenty of challenges in store.

He looked down at his blue denim overalls that had been stained with so many DIY jobs. Oil, paint, grass and dirt covered his overalls like battle scars or medals and to Rex were the marks of jobs he had done well in the past.

Not that he'd ever wanted to be a maintenance man but in Smyth West you just got given the job that needed doing and were thankful to be doing something to help. If there was one thing Rex liked doing it was helping people and over the years he'd found he was best suited to helping fix the hundred and one problems the town always seemed to have.

"Ok. So I'll fix the broken sink in Mrs Hull's apartment and then it's over to the Owen's residence to see why their pipes are making a hissing sound..." His eyes scanned the list, hoping for something more interesting and his voice trailed off.

He still felt tired from the unexpected Emmie encounter this morning. Emmie was another one of those people he always liked to help and as much as he loved seeing her, three hours of talking in the early hours of the morning did make work a lot harder.

As he looked at the list he spotted that he wasn't quite done with helping Emmie for the day. She had requested that someone fix her creaky floorboards and Rex had been putting the task off for a while. It wasn't quite as urgent when you had flooded buildings and electrical fires on your list.

Today seemed to lack any urgent issues and he felt like it would be a good idea to check on Emmie again. He regretted letting her leave last night without him being able to help and he hoped she would be a little more forthcoming on a second visit about exactly what was wrong.

He packed up his equipment and left the shack that he called his office. It wasn't much. Just an old garage with a few supplies but it was enough to get by and that's all you could ask for as a have-not.

As he made his way back to the apartment where Emmie lived he found himself with a spring in his step. Seeing Emmie once in one day simply wasn't enough and he hoped one day they'd be able to spend all of their days together.

Not that she'd know it. Rex had kept his feelings for her locked away for a long time and was convinced Emmie would only ever see him as a big brother. So that's the role he took on, always helping Emmie with a shoulder to cry on, in the hope one day she would notice him as more than a friend.

So being the best friend that he could be he walked up the steps to her apartment, making a mental note to add 'fix the lift' to his ever growing list of tasks. He reached her door and raised his hand to knock it. Before he could, he saw that the door was slightly open.

He wondered if she had forgotten to lock it and thought about how she wasn't herself the night before.

Then he remembered the warning and that Emmie had said she and her brother were in some sort of trouble and suddenly the open door seemed far more sinister.

Without thinking for his own safety Rex gently pushed the door and walked into the room.

He was unprepared for what he saw next.

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Emmie Keyes

I continued to speak with Frazier and March for a little while and was amazed by the technology that allowed TethTech to connect twins together. The implications were fascinating and although I didn't understand how it all worked, it seemed like the technology really could save lives.

Nothing they said made me believe they could be capable of Will's murder. The only explanation I had was that he could have been killed because they wanted to take credit for his invention of the DualCam and even that didn't make much sense. He worked for TethTech so they'd benefit from any product he created. There simply was no motive strong enough to justify his death.

Yet there was no denying the fact Will had been killed by two men with orange eyes and that TethTech had the technology to make such a thing possible. All roads led back to TethTech so I wasn't prepared to give up on my suspicions yet.

"Thank you for talking with us Frazier. I'll let you get cleaned up so you can meet the rest of the media outside," said March.

"Thanks March," said Frazier, "and thank you Ms Young. I hope you write a great article."

I smiled at Frazier and felt guilty that there would be no article. I needn't have worried. Every media outlet in the world was lined up outside to interview him and he would be the talk of the world for weeks. He would get fame and glory even if I was not the person to provide it.

"Ms Young, it's time for you to meet with Tobias," said March, dangling the carrot of answers in front of my face again.

I couldn't resist it. As afraid as I was of meeting Tobias, I had already crossed the threshold into this building and so far it hadn't given me the answers I sought. If anything it had raised more questions and had given me even more reason to wonder what had happened that night.

"Ok," I replied.

"Excellent," said March as he handed me a light blue sealed plastic folder. Inside here you'll find everything you need to meet with him. It has the signed NDA inside, which means he'll be able to answer any question you have. Within reason of course," he laughed and I found myself doing the same. I felt March found the corporate politics of NDA's as silly as I did but he was probably just doing his job.

"It is vital you keep the folder with you at all times. You'll need to go to the 56th floor and Tobias will meet you there," said March.

"Are you going with me?" I asked. March had made me feel safe so far. An unlikely ally in this big tower of science.

"I'll walk you to the elevator and then it's straight up to Tobias. Don't worry, as long as you have that folder you'll have everything you need."

I picked up the folder and we walked briskly together to the elevator. Walking in heels made my feet hurt but I was thankful for the quick pace if it meant getting past the heat filled corridor in half the time.

"So how are things at the BBC?" asked March.

"They're good; it's difficult to cover every piece of key news in one day," I lied.

"That's true. Especially with Tobias' attempted kidnapping."

I looked at March unsure if this was some kind of test. He seemed serious so I nodded along, curious as to who would want to kidnap Tobias and whether I wasn't the only one with a grudge against TethTech.

"It was awful really. The whole company was worried for him. Without Tobias I'm not entirely sure what we'd all do every day. He's pretty much the reason we work so hard," March seemed to have genuine feelings for the man.

As I boarded the elevator that thought gave me some sense of safety. If March liked Tobias then how scary could he be and yet if people wanted to kidnap him there was definitely something about him worth discovering.

As the pink elevator began to rise again March pointed to the folder I was holding as if the NDA was the most important piece of paper in the world. "Yes, I know. Keep the folder," I replied.

My next stop would be Tobias Zen.

NINETEEN

Emmie Keyes

The elevator doors opened with a 'ping' sound. 'Floor 56'. The top floor of TethTech and the office of Tobias Zen.

I stepped out of the elevator onto a walkway suspended in the air. The walkway itself was comprised of orange metal struts that zig-zagged in the same double helix pattern that I had seen on the side of the tower. Large grey metal poles went vertically upwards holding the walkway in place. It looked secure so I began to take tentative steps towards a pillar at the centre of the walkway.

As I walked forward I made the mistake of looking downwards and saw through the metal struts that the next floor was twenty feet or so below me. I wouldn't survive a fall if it came to that. The elevator behind me began to whir into life and start to descend; there was only one way to go now.

I took off my heels and left them by the elevator door as they looked like they would easily get stuck in the struts. Walking bare foot made me feel exposed and the cold feeling of metal on my feet sent a shiver all over my body. It was a refreshing feeling after the intense heat of the previously tight corridors of the last floor.

As I arrived at the central pillar the walkways radiated around it in a circle and the floor changed to a white hard plastic coating. It gave my feet a moment to recover from the hard steel helixes and I felt the blood rush back into my feet as they recovered from the cold.

The central pillar reached my waist and then stopped rather than continuing to the top of the building. Whilst I rubbed one of my feet I could see that the central pillar was wide open at the top and through it I could see a long fall down to the bottom of the building.

Intriguingly there were several thin slits in the side of it, no wider than the size of a chocolate bar. Letting curiosity get the better of me I leant forward towards one of the holes and could see that the pillar itself was lined with mirrors that looked like they snaked down the entire tower. Each mirror showed a vision of a different room in the building and I worked my way around the different holes taking in glimpses of the world of TethTech.

What I saw amazed me. I saw rooms filled with plant life that sprawled across every surface, their vibrant colours of green, purple and red creating an intense burst of colour. One room was covered in plastic sheeting and contained a giant tank of water with dolphins in it who playfully splashed around. Another room was nothing but white space with a single pillar in the middle that gave off sparks of electricity. In one room I'm sure I saw a man walk through one wall and emerge through another on the opposite site of the room.

This was truly a house of science and it was fascinating.

Yet one of the rooms was one that filled me with horror. This room was filled with cells that contained animals, probably for testing. Cats, dogs, monkeys, rabbits and so much more all sat on the floors of their cells waiting for their next experiment. I felt sick. It was the first sign that there was more to TethTech than I had first thought.

Then in the last cell I saw a person lying on the floor. He was wearing an army uniform that had been torn. His hands were bound and his mouth gagged. I could see his face and his dark black hair and stubble but I'd never seen this man before. I thought about crying out to him but he seemed to be located at the base of the tower in the lowest level I could see. He'd never hear me and I wasn't sure how I could reach him.

"Ms Young," came a booming voice from right behind me. It startled me forwards and I felt my feet slip, sending me heading towards the pillar. The owner of the voice grabbed my jacket and pulled me backwards.

I regained my footing and turned to face the voice.

"Careful Ms Young. I wouldn't want you to fall down there at least until we have had a little chat," he said.

"Thank you," I said not sure if falling down the pillar may have been a better option.

"I'm Tobias Zen. Thank you for coming today, we are always happy to hear from the BBC. This way please," he motioned towards a path at the end of the walkway which branched off in three directions. I felt the tingle of cold as my bare feet stepped off the plastic and touched the orange steel again. We continued to walk forwards towards an ornate dark brown door marked "The Tea Boy."

"That's a little joke we have around here. I like to feel that each employee here is the boss and that I make the tea for everyone. I simply allow them to realise their dreams and they deliver amazing products. It's key to the way we do things," said Tobias, clearly the captain of an efficient ship.

"And then you watch them through the pillar?" I asked.

"It's my little way of checking in on people. Frankly it's more curiosity on my part, than wanting to control my employees. I like to see what world changing things they are making and the pillar lets me get a constant stream of activity in minutes. Did you like what you saw?"

"Yes," I lied and then unable to contain my frustration I asked. "But why are you experimenting on animals?"

He seemed taken aback by this question. I wasn't sure if he was shocked by the question or the fact I had seen the basement room.

"Ah, yes. The bottom floor. We recently started a service where we allow employees to bring their animals to work. Some of our team are really attached to their pets and they don't like to

leave them alone for long hours whilst they are at work. So we let them bring them here. One of our trainers then walks them and looks after them during the day and employees can see them whenever they want.”

His reply was clever and calculated but it had to be a lie. Even if someone had a monkey for a pet, there’s no way a human would be a pet. The ‘haves’ had extravagant excesses but slavery was not one of them I hoped. There was something about the basement that I didn’t like and I vowed to find a way into there no matter what happened next.

I didn’t feel I could confront Tobias about it any further. He had all the power and this was his home. Talking about it wouldn’t change anything. I’d have to sneak into there later. For now we walked into his office as I took one look back at the pillar wondering what other secrets it held.

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Grace Wilkerson

There were three things that Grace hated. Marshmallows, Tobias Zen and waiting. For the past thirty minutes she had watched a display on her phone that showed a blue dot that symbolised Emmie move around the TethTech building and she was starting to become concerned. The waiting was getting to her. So much so that she’d be prepared to eat a marshmallow served by Tobias Zen, if the waiting would stop.

Grace’s mobile showed Emmie’s small blue dot move vertically up the tower. *Where is she going?* wondered Grace.

She had sworn to protect Emmie and each moment she stood outside felt like she wasn’t fulfilling this oath. As she watched Emmie’s dot head towards the top of the building she couldn’t wait any longer.

If anything happens to Emmie and I’m just stood here waiting I won’t be able to forgive myself, she thought.

Grace walked around the central dome towards the back of the tower, hoping she could somehow sneak in via a grate. As she made her way out of the view of the crowds she heard a loud crash come from directly in front of her.

“Emmie!” she thought as she dashed towards the source of the noise, entering a large transportation area filled with trucks and large gates that teased entry into the building.

The noise hadn’t come from Emmie but was one of the competition winners. *Tom?* thought Grace, remembering him from the earlier ceremony.

Tom was kicking crates that were stacked around the back of the building and shouting incoherently. “Bastards!” he shouted, as he started to remove boxes marked ‘Medical Waste, Do Not Touch’ from a large crate.

“Ok,” said Grace. “Put the box down crazy boy.”

“And who are you?” asked Tom. “Another of Tobias’ fanboys? Get out of here!” he held the box of medical waste over his head and threw it at Grace’s feet. Needles filled with mysterious chemicals and other people’s blood tumbled outwards, narrowly missing her.

“Woah. Calm down. I’m no fan of Tobias; I just want to help my friend,”

“I hate Tobias Zen. One day I will make him pay. He killed my Mum and Dad and I hate him,” Tom’s words suddenly intrigued Grace.

Grace was shocked. “How did he kill them?” she asked.

“They died on the last day of the 20 Day Siege. If he had been quicker creating a solution he could have saved them!”

“If you hate Tobias, I know someone you should talk to. Tell them Grace sent you,” she handed Tom a card that had a playing card back and a phone number on the front. “They’ll help you.”

Tom tossed the card on the ground. “Yeah, right. What are you, some sort of police officer? You’re gonna lock me up, as soon as I ring that number and say that I want to kill Tobias.”

“Look at the card again.”

Tom picked up the card and flipped it over. He saw the playing card back and when he turned around Grace took the Queen of Diamonds playing card from out of her top and showed it to him.

“You’re The Deck!” he said, as the reality sank in. The news reports had gone viral and it was well known that The Deck had tried to kidnap Tobias. “You do hate him as much as I do.”

“Exactly. Now are you going to help me get in the building or not?”

Tom looked back at the building and motioned to the perfect entry point. Grace dashed off and thanked Tom. “Call the number,” she said and she really hoped that he would. For his sake.

TWENTY

Tobias Zen

Tobias motioned to a plush chair, even fancier than the one I had sat on in first class on the train. His office was a giant room, with a curved glass top and wall that let him see the city skyline. From outside you could see the towers of the three richest families.

The room itself seemed like an extension of the lab I had seen downstairs and aside from a large mahogany desk, two seats and a glass cabinet that held drinks it seemed nothing like a typical office. The floor was a pristine white colour and hundreds of mathematical equations were written over it in an orange pen. It looked like the floor of a mad man and not a prestigious CEO.

In another corner there was a pile of hundreds of unboxed DualCam's stacked in a pile with one of them projecting a still image of a beautiful lake and a forest covered in trees on to the wall.

"Please take a seat Ms Young," said Tobias as he turned off the camera and I sat on a small wooden chair that seemed out of place with the rest of the room.

"Would you like a drink?" he asked. I refused, highly suspicious that he would be drugging me in some way. I really hoped my disguise was still working.

He sat down in his chair. It was slightly raised and angled towards me, giving the impression that he was higher up and looking down on me. This was amplified by the poor quality of my chair and the plushness of his. It felt like being in school again with a fearsome headmaster standing over me.

"You are very lucky. Ms Young. I've never invited a journalist into my office before."

"Then why me?" I asked. "You have thousands of journalists outside but why did you choose me?"

"Serendipity. I believe that you should grab any chance life throws at you. Don't you?"

"I guess."

"Exactly!" he said, not really caring what I said. "When I saw that a journalist had won our competition I knew it was meant to be. We've always wanted to show a journalist what we do here and yet can't afford to have everyone looking around at our secrets. Today you helped me break that privacy. You are a sign of things to come Jessica Young."

"Thank you?" I said, phrased more like a question than a statement. I wasn't entirely sure what to make of his words. "So exactly what is it you want to show me?"

“Actually I’d rather ask you. What did you think of our demonstration earlier?” he was clearly searching for compliments.

“Frankly, I was horrified. I thought you had killed that man.”

“Perfect, that’s exactly what I wanted people to think!” he exclaimed, clearly proud that I’d said exactly what he wanted me to say. “But, what about the technology? Can you see how it has the power to change the world?”

As much as I liked his technology, I’d already witnessed it do horrible things in the killing of Will. “It’s interesting... but doesn’t it promote the idea that our country should be at war? Isn’t peace more important?”

“Unfortunately, that’s not the way the world works,” said Tobias. “The world is broken and my technology will fix it. Our country is one of the richest in the world. It will be attacked and war is inevitable. I’m just trying to make the world better.”

“So you’re essentially waiting on a war before you can use the technology? Isn’t that pessimistic or downright sadistic?” I asked.

“It never hurts to be prepared. Showing off the technology now helps us get the investment we need to make the world better later.”

“And yet, if we do go to war, won’t TethTech profit massively?” I could see I was getting to him. He’d probably had this discussion a thousand times and each time would be another burden on him. However it also meant he was an expert at dodging questions.

“That’s why we’re using the technology in other ways. For example if someone got a life threatening disease, their twin could take over their body and help them live until we find a cure,” he said.

It was both a fascinating and horrific thought. That someone could live even when they had been sentenced to death by illness. *What kind of a life would that be?* I thought to myself. Being paraded around like a puppet. It sounded horrible and yet you couldn’t argue with the desire to save lives.

“Of course the body could also be held at rest,” said Tobias as if reading my thoughts. “The healthy twin could link to the ill twin and put them in a state of sleep. Like a coma but without any detrimental effects to the body in the meantime. The healthy twin then lives their life whilst we find a cure.”

“And if a cure isn’t found in the twin’s lifetime?”

“Then sadly that’s where the science ends, at least for today. Who knows what we’ll be able to achieve in fifty, thirty, maybe even ten years. We’re just dipping our toes into the pool of possibilities. There’s so much we don’t yet understand about Tethers but we will. In fact what we showed today was only a small part of the real discovery we have made. There’s a lot more secrets to be revealed very soon.”

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Rex T Jules

A tall muscular man stood in the corner of Emmie's room as Rex tried to plan his next move. The man hadn't seen him yet but he could clearly take Rex in a fight.

What worried Rex most of all, was the set of knives the man had attached to a leather belt around his waist. Some of them were definitely stained, with what, he did not want to know. Rex could also make out scarring on the side of the man's face. This was no houseguest that much he was sure of.

He pushed back the door leaving it slightly ajar and ran back to his own apartment. He grabbed two things from inside the room and headed back to Emmie's.

Rex spotted his opportunity when he saw the scarred man was distracted by a black device. He slowly crept forwards carefully watching where he stepped to avoid the creaky floorboard he had never got round to fixing. When he felt he had gone as far as he could without arousing suspicion Rex raised his arm upwards and swung it forwards. The scarred man was unprepared for the wrench that hit him square in the jaw.

He stumbled backwards, his eyes not quite believing what was happening. Before he had a chance to respond Rex swung the wrench again and hit the man in the legs forcing him to the floor. As the man landed he hit his head onto the floor which knocked him unconscious.

Rex remained poised over the man's body for five minutes, waiting for him to get up but he did not. He hoped he'd done the right thing and looking at the reddened knives around the man's waist confirmed it.

He prodded the man's stomach with his foot and nothing happened. This mysterious man was out cold.

Rex made his way to the table that had occupied the scarred man's view minutes ago. He could see a large black box that had been ripped open, its wires and circuitry exposed. The box was reflecting a single image onto the wall that flickered into and out of focus.

The image showed Emmie's face and another face next to it that didn't look at all like her. A message at the bottom of the image read "Skin transfer complete," which did nothing to help him understand what had happened.

Whatever the image meant, it was very important to the man with the knives. Rex bent down and started to empty the man's pockets hoping for clues. He didn't find much. A driver's licence identified the man as 'Vlad Givik', although that could easily be fake.

In the other pocket Rex found a mobile phone that showed an outgoing email in English. It simply read:

"Target has disguised herself. Photo attached."

The photo showed the image from the black box and the pieces fell into place for Rex. Emmie had somehow changed her identity and whoever was after her and Will now knew exactly who she really was.

Emmie was in serious danger.

TWENTY-ONE

Emmie Keyes

My phone would not stop ringing. Someone clearly wanted to speak to me. *Is it Grace?* I wondered, not wanting to shift my focus from Tobias too much. I assumed she was probably just worried about me but by the fourth separate phone call it seemed serious.

Eventually I felt the different vibration of a message being received. "I'm so sorry," I said. "My phone will not stop ringing, do you mind if I check it?" I asked, interrupting Tobias during another speech about how he wanted to restore balance to the world.

"Not at all," he replied.

I pulled the phone from my pocket and glanced down.

"4 missed calls: Rex. 1 new text message: Rex," read the alert on the screen. *Probably another fight with Rufus.* I thought as I loaded up the message.

I was wrong. So wrong.

"Emmie, whatever you are doing, wherever you are you have to stop right now. They know you are disguised. They know it's you!" The message was very clear.

There was no hiding any more.

As that thought entered my mind I felt the tight grip of a hand around my throat grabbing me. The hand belonged to Tobias who now stood tall at my side as I sat struggling for freedom in the chair.

"Hello. Emmie," he said, the truth revealed for all to see.

He released his grasp and I gasped for air. I instinctively held my face with my hands as my breathing returned to normal. As I did so, steam started to emerge from my face. "*What has he done to me?*" I panicked, as the steam engulfed me.

I could feel a transformation under my hands. My hair began to tingle and the skin on my face felt like it was burning.

"Well now. What is this?" asked Tobias, confusing me further. I daren't pull my hands away to see what had happened but Tobias grabbed my hands and forced them away.

"Now that is interesting," he walked over to his desk and retrieved a silver pair of rimmed glasses holding them in front of me. From the reflection I could see that my face had returned to

normal and my hair had gone back to its natural blonde colour. Jessica Young was no more and I no longer had a disguise to exit the city. This was bad.

“I knew today would be filled with serendipity but I didn’t imagine it would be quite so lucrative,” he didn’t take his eyes off me, his fist poised for another attack.

“Why did you kill Will?” I asked, hoping that if I was to die here today I’d at least have answers.

“Will? Oh you mean Will Keyes, the inventor of the DualCam? Yes, I was sad to hear what happened to him. He was a real asset to the team but sometimes you have to let people go,” he said.

“Let people go? You killed him! Your people cut him until he almost bled to death and then tortured him until he died!” I shouted.

“..and yet here you are Emmie,” he interrupted. “A miracle of science. By all rights you should be dead and yet you survived. You are very special Emmie and soon you will be thanking me for helping you realise your true potential.”

“My what?” I screamed “You killed my brother to help me? How does that help me! He’s the only person left who cared for me and now I have nothing! Nothing!”

“You have me. I will look after you now and one day you and I will change this world.”

I looked at Tobias. The mad man who had already changed my world forever. I had my answers and they cut just as deeply as any knife. My brother had lost his life and for what? So some crazy scientist could keep me as a pet? Lock me up like the animals in the basement?

I wondered if the man downstairs had also suffered the same loss. If he had lost a brother or sister, simply so Tobias could use him for some mysterious end. Now he was trapped in a cage and who knew what types of twisted experiments he was being subjected to. There’s no way I wanted that fate for me. No way I could trust someone who had destroyed everything I had left.

“I will never work for you. You are sick!” I shouted back at him.

“You will. You’re unique now. A bright white snowflake in a world filled with grey. I would never hurt you.”

“You hurt me more than anyone ever has!” the words propelled from my mouth, filled with rage. “I won’t be your next puppet for you to dance around the stage at a press conference.”

His tone changed, it was far more serious now. “Emmie, I’m not a man who begs. You see the power I have, the money, the influence. Do you think I achieved this by begging? I have asked you to stay and to be a part of this but be warned that I am not afraid to take what I want.”

“You will never take me!”

The room fell silent. I looked around for any means of escape. The door behind me had a keycard lock that was glowing a dark red. I was trapped in this room with a man who either wanted to kill me or torture me.

“Very well. I can see I’ll have to use force,” said Tobias, as he made his next move.

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Grace Wilkerson

Grace had entered a small walkway which allowed her to walk underneath the first floor of the building. It appeared to be a maintenance tunnel that ran under every floor in the tower and was just high enough for her to crawl through it on her knees.

As she looked around her she could see a ladder that would take her up to different floors but there was no elevator. She estimated it would take her around twenty minutes to climb to the top of the tower. Far too long to help Emmie any time soon.

Whatever was happening to Emmie on the top floor, she was on her own for now.

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Emmie Keyes

Tobias retrieved a key from his pocket and walked over to a large mahogany cabinet. He opened it and started to rummage around, clearly looking for something important.

I thought about standing up and escaping but the door looked locked and he turned back at me every few seconds to check I was still there.

“Ah here it is,” said Tobias as he pulled a large frayed cable from out of the cabinet. It was a very thick black cable similar to the ones I had seen connected to Frazier.

“I wanted you to choose to stay Emmie but now I see there is no other way. This cable will keep you in place, whilst I decide what to do with you,” he said.

He walked towards me, pulling the cable tightly so he could use it as a makeshift rope. As he reached me, I stood up from my chair and retrieved the gun I had kept under my shirt all this time.

He walked backwards, shocked that I had firepower. “Well aren’t you full of surprises,” he said. “You are getting more and more interesting every moment. First you disguise yourself, and then you have a concealed weapon. What else are you hiding?”

“Don’t push me and you won’t find out,” I said. “Now open the door and let me leave.”

“Do you really think you can escape? This may be a house of science but we aren’t without security. There are guards on every floor and cameras everywhere. Even if you escape this building I know who you are now. I will hunt you down. You will be a part of this.”

“Never!” As I walked towards him, he pushed the table into my stomach, knocking everything onto the floor. The forward force of the impact forced me to pull the trigger. A bullet fired towards Tobias and hit him in the chest.

The bullet bounced off his chest and fell to the floor, compressed by the impact. It had caused a hole in his orange tie but hadn't gone any further than that.

“That's the great thing about Science, with the right amount of time and money it can do anything,” said Tobias as he opened his shirt, to reveal a thin transparent layer wrapped around his torso. “It's a bullet proof membrane. Just another way we're saving soldiers' lives and there's a lot more you could see Emmie. Now give me the gun.”

I tucked my gun back inside the top of my trousers. It was useless on Tobias but I may still need it.

“I said, give me the gun!” roared Tobias. He seemed a man used to having things go his way.

“Sir?” came a voice over the intercom. “We heard a loud bang? Is everything ok?”

Tobias looked at me. “Well is it Emmie? Is everything ok?”

I considered my options. The door was still locked. Tobias was practically un-killable and he had the upper hand in every possible way. Yet my answer was still “No.”

There was one trump card I had left. Something Tobias didn't know. I stood up on my feet and walked towards the door.

“What are you hoping to do Emmie? You are trapped! It won't open,” he said.

I opened my hand to reveal an item I had concealed. When he had knocked everything on the floor earlier, the folder March had given me had fallen open to reveal a keycard.

Spotting the keycard in my hand Tobias shouted “I need help now!” to his colleague on the intercom.

I held the keycard against the lock, keeping both eyes on Tobias. The lock sprang to life, freeing me from his prison.

“How did you get that?” remarked Tobias.

I didn't want to implicate March. Whatever his motivations he had clearly provided me with an escape route and for that I was thankful. I simply turned my feet and ran out of the door.

Tobias dashed after me, shouting “If you want to honour your brother the only way is to stay. If you leave you will never have the answers you seek and his death was in vain.”

I kept running until I reached the walkway, my feet barely noticed the cold feeling of steel this time.

“Sir, we are sending someone to you in the elevator now,” said the voice over the intercom.

“Good,” replied Tobias. “So Emmie, there is nowhere to run, can you stop this now and come back to my office?”

The walkway was suspended high up in the air. I had no way of surviving a fall. Next to Tobias’ office was another door. *A staircase?* I wondered. Sensing I had no other option and hoping that the key March had given me would do the job I ran at Tobias aiming to slip past him in surprise.

It didn’t work.

He swung his arm towards me with perfect timing, knocking me back towards the narrow pillar that ran through the length of the tower. My back rested on the top of the pillar and my feet started to slip on the walkway.

I looked at Tobias and the quickly rising elevator and knew there was no other option. I’d rather die than be experimented on for the rest of time.

I let my feet lose their grip and fell backwards down into the pillar. My body began its descent towards the base of the tower and the end of my life.

I had answers. That would have to be enough.

TWENTY-TWO

Rex T Jules

Rex hoped more than anything that Emmie was safe and that she had got his messages in time. She hadn't replied to his phone calls or messages, which meant she either hadn't got them or that she was in serious trouble.

He didn't know who else to call. Emmie hadn't told him enough for him to know who he could trust or who would be a threat to her. All he knew was that she was in danger but he didn't know where or why.

He cursed Emmie for not telling him more and he vowed that if anything happened to her, he would get revenge.

So he vowed to get answers. If something had happened to Emmie or Will he wanted to help. He couldn't live with himself if he didn't. He looked at the black box on the floor that had previously given away Emmie's secret identity and he picked it up to carry it back to his workshop. He was no computer expert but he knew someone who was.

Now what should I do with this guy? thought Rex, looking back at the scarred man, whose knives continued to draw fear in his heart. He couldn't move the man himself and needed help.

By Emmie's bed he saw a walkie talkie she had received in readiness for her first day of police work. He wondered if it worked yet and hoped that it did.

Rex picked up the transmitter and pushed a button on the side. "Hello, can anyone hear me?" he asked.

The transmitter fizzed into life as a female voice came through. "Good afternoon officer. What seems to be the problem?"

"It's an emergency. You need to get to Room 12E, 112 Tine Tower, right away. There has been a break in and the suspect has been apprehended," said Rex doing his best to sound like an officer of the law.

"Is this a prank?" replied the officer.

"No!"

"Really? This radio is registered to a female officer and you don't sound anything like her."

"Yes. Her name is Emmie Keyes. I'm her friend and someone has broken into her flat and tried to attack her."

“And where is Ms Keyes right now? How do I know you didn’t attack her?”

“This is no time for jokes. I’m stood in her room right now,” said Rex.

“Sir it is a criminal offence to waste police time. Please get off this channel,” she stated.

“Fine if it’s a criminal offense then come and arrest me, I don’t care! Just send someone here right now.”

“Ok, I’m hanging up. If this is a real emergency, please call the Smyth West station.”

“You have to listen! There is a killer in this room with a belt of knives,” he turned around to point at the scarred man, only to find that he was no longer there. Before he could see where the man had gone, Rex felt the sharp edge of a knife as it cut into his back.

The knife was twisted in a clockwise motion to increase the size of the cut and to stop it from healing. Rex screamed in horror as the pain registered in his brain. His legs felt weak and he collapsed onto the floor.

The walkie talkie remained silent, the police officer long gone. Help was not coming.

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Grace Wilkerson

Grace had started to make her way up the tower and knew she still had a long way to go to reach the top.

She didn’t mind heights but even this was beginning to get to her. If she looked up or down all she could see was an endless stretch of ladder. She’d been able to use a harness to attach herself to the ladder but even with it, she felt powerless to the laws of gravity.

She was startled by a beeping noise that emerged from her pocket. The beeps started infrequently and got faster and faster. These beeps signified movement. More significantly that Emmie was moving and moving fast. Far too fast in fact.

Grace clipped one of the edges of the harness onto the wall behind her so she could rest in place for a moment. She retrieved her phone to see that the blue dot that represented Emmie was certainly moving.

The speed worried Grace but it was the direction that was even more horrific. Grace saw as the blue dot rushed down the tower, passing floor after floor as it darted towards the base of the tower and certain death.

I have failed her, thought Grace. She refused to cry but felt a sense of loss. She didn’t care that the world had lost a saviour but she did care that she had lost a friend today.

TWENTY-THREE

Emmie Keyes

“Will, I’m sorry,” I whispered, mirroring the words he had said to me in the last moments of his life. I hoped he had seen that I tried. That I had found his killers, even though I couldn’t stop them.

I wondered if Grace would take on the task and avenge myself and Will but then I changed my mind and hoped instead that she would stay well away and live her life. I now knew just how deadly a meeting with Tobias could be.

As my body rushed down the pillar I looked downwards. My vision was blurred by the speed and force but from what I could see it was clear I wouldn’t have a comfortable landing. Even a big pile of pillows would kill me at this speed.

I closed my eyes and was glad whatever sick plan Tobias had for me had failed. It felt like revenge and it felt good.

My body rushed closer and closer to the ground. I tried to count down the seconds to the end.

“3”

“2”

“1”

Somewhere along the way something changed. I no longer seemed to be traveling as fast. Rather than accelerating, it felt as though my body was slowing its descent. I could feel friction in the air, as though another force in the tube was slowing me down.

It was as if the gravity was lower at this point in the tube, although I could still breathe so this must have been a unique concoction the TethTech lab rats had cooked up.

Eventually my body came to a stop and I could see into the laboratory with the dolphin. I could see the scientists working inside but they seemed oblivious to my presence. I was still upside down so I rotated round to stop the blood rushing to my head. It felt like swimming and being suspended in a large jelly.

As I turned myself around I pushed my arms down to help and this moved my entire body up the tube slightly. It seemed that through pushing my arms down I could travel up the tube. I experimented by pushing my arms upwards and this allowed me to move down the tube.

With my new found motion, I slowly pushed my arms upwards to work my way down the tube. I was scared that too much motion would cause me to drop out of this low gravity area and once again plummet to my death so I edged downwards with caution.

It didn't take me long to reach the ground level, where I saw that the room had now been filled with TethTech guards. There didn't seem to be any police.

Nevertheless, TethTech was a base for military R&D so they seemed to have plenty of their own guards available. More than enough to stop me and the seven bullets I had remaining.

They were clad in black jump suits, with circles that showed similar transparent body armour to that which Tobias was wearing. On their heads, they wore helmets that covered their faces. They were holding guns that I knew from police training could fire fifty rounds in seconds. If Tobias had issued an order for me to be killed, then it would take these men no time at all to do so.

Next to the window that showed the guards I could see a control panel on my side of the tube. Suddenly it made sense. This was a private means of travel for Tobias. He could spy on his tower and then get to any room quickly by jumping in the tube.

I looked upwards to see if he was following me but he was not. *Perhaps the tube can only hold one person at a time?* I thought. However if this was Tobias' personal transport route, then one thing was certain. He knew I wasn't dead.

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Tobias Zen

Tobias looked down at the tube in shock. "You're a brave one Emmie Keyes," he said.

"Sir," said the guard, who had now reached the top floor. He had blonde hair that flowed over his head in two directions and stopped around his shoulders.

"Well done Jacobs. You finally made it to the top, whilst she's on her way to the bottom!" said Tobias.

"But how sir?" replied Jacobs.

"Look down there."

Jacobs looked into the tube but couldn't see Emmie. "Try it now," said Tobias, as he showed the guard one of the holes in the side of the tube. At this angle the guard could see Emmie floating down the tower.

"I think I can take a shot Sir, would you like me to proceed?" asked Jacobs.

"No!" shouted Tobias. "The chamber contains a special gas that allows me to travel safely. If you shoot it, it will explode and damage the structural integrity of the whole building."

The guard took off the visor and said. "Ok. The rest of the men are on the ground level. She won't be able to get out. I'll alert the authorities for their support as well."

"Are you mad? The world's media is assembled outside. If it looks like there is another attempt on my life, the stock price will nosedive. Getting kidnapped once was a great PR stunt. A second time would be career suicide. No, use the guards we have."

"Yes sir. I'll also position men at each of the floors so she can't exit the tube at any point."

"Your move Emmie. Escape at the bottom of the tower or at the top but I'll catch you either way," he smiled. "One more thing. Activate the Kull twins. I think it's time they gave an encore."

TWENTY-FOUR

Emmie Keyes

This was bad.

I couldn't escape on the ground level and I refused to go anywhere near Tobias again. Then I remembered the basement area. *Can I get down there?* I wondered.

I looked down but all I saw were mirrors. Although I'd seen the basement from above, it couldn't be accessed from the tube. The mirrors must help Tobias to see into the room but there had to be an entirely different way for him to get there.

My options were limited. I was trapped and to make matters worse I could see guards starting to walk towards my location. If Tobias had told them where I was, then there's a good chance they'd know how to open the base of the tube and catch me.

Then I heard a loud banging on the side of the tube.

The banging grew louder and I watched as a panel on the tunnel wall above me began to loosen. With a final loud thud, the panel was released and yet it didn't fall. It just hovered there thanks to the low gravity.

Unable to hide, I looked up to see the face of the man who would kill me.

"Grace?"

"Emmie?" asked Grace. "What happened to your disguise?"

"It's a long story and we have more important things to worry about," I motioned to the glass mirror and Grace saw the guards preparing to breach the door. They seemed more organised now and three of the men carried a battering ram.

"Get out of there now!" shouted Grace, as the men began to run towards the door with the battering ram raised in preparation.

I thrust my arms downwards which sent me rising back up the tube and towards Grace. As I reached her level she grabbed me and pulled me inside. The return to normal gravity hit me instantly and I could feel the extra weight on my body dragging me down. I almost pulled Grace from her ladder when I swung round and grabbed the rungs below her.

The door on the lower level was breached in one hit and sent the panel flying. If I had still been down there the door would probably have killed me from the force.

Before the guards could enter the tube Grace pulled the panel next to us back into place. "Are you ok?" she asked me. I looked down to see a twenty foot drop and wasn't sure how to answer.

"You'll be ok, Emmie. Here," said Grace, as she clipped my jeans onto her harness.

"Great, so if I fall at least my trousers will be safe."

"Those are good jeans. It'd be a shame for them to go to waste."

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Tobias Zen

A guard entered the tube and lifted up the broken door. He looked around but could find no one. "Sir, they are not in the tube," he stated into a headset.

"Impossible! I told you to guard every exit. Where have they gone?" boomed the voice of Tobias Zen.

"I don't know but we will find them," replied the guard.

Tobias turned his imposing figure towards Jacobs and asked him. "Is General Kull ready?"

"We're hooking him up to his twin right now. He'll be online in five minutes."

Without saying another word Tobias jumped into the tube and descended down to the base of the tower. He was far more skilled than Emmie and had a smooth journey down to the bottom.

His orange sneakers touched the floor without making a sound, so elegant was his landing. He walked out onto the ground floor and tightened his orange tie. "The media are waiting for me, don't screw this up."

As the guards looked on confused, trying to determine how he had suddenly appeared, he walked out into the roars of the crowd. As important as Emmie was, he needed the media and his investors even more right now, especially if he was to make the world right again.

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Emmie Keyes

We heard a whooshing noise as someone else descended the tube.

"It has to be Tobias," I said to Grace.

"Emmie, what happened?" she asked.

"He killed Will."

"No! He confessed?"

“Yes 100%. He killed Will to see if I would survive, like some crazy lab experiment. Now he wants to capture me.”

“We have to stop him,” said Grace. “He can’t be allowed to stand out there with all that praise and all that glory after what he did.”

“I know but what can we do? There are so many guards. It’s impossible.”

“You’re right,” said Grace, being surprisingly level headed. “Right now, all we need to think about is escaping.”

“No Grace, there’s something else. Something we have to do now. I couldn’t live with myself if we didn’t. I saw something in a basement level. A large room filled with animals in cages that were being experimented on.”

“That’s awful. You’re right. We have to save them.”

“It gets worse. In one of the cages I saw a man that was bound. His clothes were torn and he wore an army uniform.”

Grace gasped, “Gabe?”

TWENTY-FIVE

Gabe Treeth

Gabe Treeth had had a bad night. He'd been shot, kidnapped and had to live with the guilt of letting a mass murderer escape.

When it seemed like his day couldn't get any worse, he'd awoken in a cage in a room filled with animals. The noise was deafening. Every animal had a voice and they wanted to use it. He counted twenty or so animals all trying to be heard and the sound simply did not stop.

When one animal stopped, another one would spark them off again. It was an assault on his senses and combined with the smell and the dim light he wondered if this was the way Tobias dished out torture.

Yet that wasn't what worried Gabe. Mostly he was worried about The Deck. It was clear they'd be implicated in the failed attempt on Tobias' life. They'd originally planned to clear all the media footage but there had been no time for that when everyone had made their escape.

The Deck was a young team that had only existed for a handful of years. Everyone in the team was in their early twenties, apart from the boss who funded them and kept them fed whilst they tried to track down Tobias.

It was the age of the team that worried him. None of them had seen proper combat and they'd spent so long planning the kidnapping attempt that there wasn't much in the way of a contingency plan. The team looked to him for support and although he trusted them, he worried that they'd have to disband without him.

He knew the boss could help but he liked to stay private. Only Gabe knew who the boss really was and they wanted to keep it that way. Even if that meant The Deck would have to end, there's no way the boss would ever set foot inside the derelict shopping centre they called their base.

Gabe hoped no one was planning to help him escape. He assumed he was being held in a base owned by Tobias and The Deck had already scanned through files and files of research that showed a direct assault on one of his towers would be suicide. Which made it all the more likely that was where he was being held.

He knew The Deck simply were not experienced enough to save him. He accepted his fate and knew that when silence fell in this room and the animals stopped their cries he would probably be killed.

Gabe wasn't afraid of death but he was afraid of never seeing Grace again. Since the day he'd recruited her, he was taken aback by her headstrong attitude. No woman had ever spoken to him like Grace. She treated him like a school boy and told him what to do and he loved her for it. He'd never asked to be the leader but for most of The Deck that was how they saw him. Grace was different. She treated him as an equal, or possibly worse, and that made Gabe like her even more.

They vowed that when the economy was restored they would visit Europe and go travelling. When Tobias had been punished for his crimes, that's when they'd explore the world.

They both knew it would never happen. The economy was too far gone and tensions were too high between nations to allow easy travel. Stopping Tobias hadn't even been possible and Gabe started to wonder how they would achieve their dreams in such a broken world.

When Grace asked to leave midway through their mission he was angry but he knew that anything to do with Emmie came first. That's what the boss wanted after all. As he sat in his cell thinking about Grace he knew that had been the right thing to do. It meant he knew Grace was safe no matter what.

Then he remembered just how head strong Grace was and that if anyone would be stupid enough to try and rescue him it would be her. *"Stay safe Grace. Stay away."*

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Emmie Keyes

I'd heard the name Gabe before. Who was I kidding, Grace barely shut up about the guy. He worked with her at the film studio as a director, whom she'd fallen in love with shooting a film called "Zombie Pets Attack!"

It was a great story, almost too good to be true really. The one how they fell in love, not the movie story which surely had to be awful.

Grace had never really liked guys. She saw them as the weaker sex and nothing more than "dumb testosterone fuelled meat sacks," as she so often put it. I think it must have been all the time they spent together on the movie set but something changed her mind and the next time I saw her she would not stop talking about him.

Grace would never say anything as soppy as the word 'love' but if she loved anyone then it was Gabe.

"Gabe? What would they want with a movie director?" I asked.

"I don't know," said Grace. "Was he ok?"

"He looked hurt and his clothes were torn."

A fire started to build in Grace's eyes as she lightly bit her lip. There was no way we were leaving without him now. We both agreed that there was only one place to go now and we started to descend the ladder into the basement.

TWENTY-SIX

Emmie Keyes

The ladder took us down to below ground level and after we'd unhooked ourselves we took in our surroundings. We were enclosed in a wide grey maintenance tunnel and a bright ray of light shone towards us illuminating a pathway on my right hand side.

I crept forward towards it and could see that the light was emerging from a large room above the pathway with a curved sheet of hard glass separating us from the room. The glass was transparent and looking through it I could see guards circling around. It looked like the main lobby of the building and I dared not move forward too much in case of being spotted.

"Where now?" I asked Grace.

"Hang on. I'll ask my contact," she replied.

"Your contact?"

"We once filmed a movie at TethTech so I know someone who has schematics for the entire building. Hopefully they can find a way for us to get to the basement without being seen."

Her contact continued to be very useful and I was reminded that when this was over I would have some serious questions for Grace. There's no chance a movie studio would be given schematics for a building as secure as this. She picked up her phone and spoke quietly so as not to be detected.

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Grace Wilkerson

"Jill?" asked Grace.

"Hi Grace. What's up? How is Emmie?" replied Jill.

"She's fine. We're both in the tower."

"You what? We specifically told you not to go in..."

".. if I didn't go in she'd be dead right now!" interrupted Grace. "Now listen, we know that Tobias killed Will. If we don't make it out of here alive you have to stop him."

"You know we can't do that without Emmie. She has to survive, whatever happens."

"What about me?"

“You know Emmie is the top priority. If she dies it’s all over.”

Grace paused for a moment. She didn’t like being told her life was worthless.

“Fine,” replied Grace, unhappy but trying to think about the bigger picture for a moment. “We need your help.”

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Emmie Keyes

Within two minutes Grace had a full schematic of the building. Rather than proceeding through the well-lit walkway for fear of being caught we instead went through a dark passageway and used our phones to illuminate the way. We worked our way through twisted walkways and snuck under three floors until we reached a hole that led down into the basement.

We looked down and could see that the hole led to a ladder that would take us down. I climbed down it first and jumped off the last few rungs.

As I landed my feet made a loud ‘thudding’ noise and the room erupted to the sound of the animals. Dogs barked fiercely, a monkey screeched and it was clear they saw us as intruders.

The room was still quite dark, mainly lit by floodlights that swung in the air above each cage. It was just enough light to make out the faces of each animal and to see their distress. The conditions in the room were terrible. The floor was covered in dirt and the cages themselves were enclosed in rusted metal bars. It was a stark contrast to the pristine nature of the rest of the building and it was clear the contents of this room were far less important than the rest of the building.

In one of the cages a small dog lay on the floor. She wasn’t sleeping but she seemed to have no energy as if she had given up. Her fur had started to fall away around her neck and back and in the centre of these areas were round red dots that looked like they were from injections.

“Poor girl,” said Grace. “Perhaps they were trying to save her?”

“Look around. Does this seem like a room full of happy animals?” I said. “If you want help you go to a vet, you don’t bring an animal to a place like this.”

I looked at the dog’s eyes. Two big adorable eyes that just wanted to be loved. All of the animals were trapped into cages, around twenty of them.

“It’s really you!” exclaimed Grace, as she ran over to a corner cage.

A man lay on the floor. At the back of his head his hair has been shaved and he too had round red circular dots where he had been injected with a mixture of needles.

He heard Grace’s voice instantly and turned around. “Grace!” he said, as a smile filled his face.

Not wanting to wait another second longer they kissed through the bars. Their arms tried to reach each other but they could not.

"I'll save you," said Grace.

"How sweet," said a voice from behind us. We turned around to see General Kull. The man we had seen die that morning. He was back to life but worst of all his orange eyes were back too.

He pulled Grace's hair, causing her to scream out in pain and he dragged her away from the cell.

"No!" shouted Gabe.

I still had my gun and seven bullets to play with. I raised it upwards but hesitated for a second. Would this kill him? And kill Frazier, his twin? They were probably just following orders and didn't deserve to die and yet if I did nothing they would hurt Grace. I moved my target away from his head and shot at his torso hoping for a non-lethal shot.

I heard the 'thud' as the bullet impacted on his body but it did not proceed any further. It simply bounced to the floor in the same way it had done with Tobias. His skin was bulletproof as well. I spotted some exposed skin on his neck that didn't seem to have the reflective bulletproof gel and I took my second shot.

This time it made an impact. The bullet went right through his neck puncturing his wind pipe. Yet he did not gasp for air. It was as if he didn't need to breathe. The shot would have killed any other man very quickly, yet he stood tall as if the world around him hadn't changed one bit.

He threw Grace to the floor as Gabe screamed for him to stop. She hit the hard concrete and a cracking sound came from her back. She struggled to lift herself up again, her body reeling from the impact and a look of sheer pain all over her face. The animals barked and roared in a frenzy. *Are they enjoying this?* I hoped not.

The General had no interest in me. Despite my gun he didn't see me as a threat or even an inconvenience. It was as if I wasn't even there or I was firing rainbows at him.

He leant down, pushed Grace down on to her back with one arm held on her neck keeping her down. He then lay down on top of her entire body, pushed his face towards hers and whispered "There's no camera's in here. I could do whatever I want and your boyfriend and girlfriend over there will see the whole thing. Best of all they won't be able to do anything to stop me."

It horrified me that this voice was that of Frazier. That he was controlling everything that happened now. As he stroked Grace's hair and she struggled to get away I learnt the truth about the man and his motivations.

The ability to do anything he wanted through another body had clearly changed him. No responsibility, just easy pleasure and immortality. He was starting to become corrupted and I knew at that moment that there was no way anyone with orange eyes could ever act in a normal way.

If Tobias truly wanted to use this technology to build an army, it wouldn't be one built on morals and peace. It would be one built on seizing power and dominating opponents. That wasn't what our world needed.

He started to run his hand over her chest and I made one last attempt to take him down. I stood behind him and fired a bullet through the base of his skull. The bullet buried its way through his skull in milliseconds and emerged through the other side taking half of his jaw bone with it. Blood splattered back onto me and on to Grace and he finally fell down onto the floor.

“He’s not dead,” said Gabe. “I’ve seen this before. We shot an orange eyed man through the head and he survived.”

“What?” I asked. “You’ve seen people like this before?” Whilst I already knew there were more, it didn’t make any sense that Gabe could know. Movie producers don’t tend to get attacked by orange eyed monsters.

“I’ll explain everything when we get out of here but just trust me, he is not dead.”

“No but he will be,” a mysterious voice came from the walkway above us. I looked up to see March climbing down the ladder above us. He tossed a key at my feet and pointed to the cage that held Gabe. “Free him.”

Whoever March was, he had a habit of being at the right place at the right time. From the moment he greeted me in the lobby of TethTech he’d been able to help me see an orange eyed man, get an interview with Tobias, helped me escape from Tobias’ grasp and now he’d saved Gabe as well.

For a man who had earlier seemed like the number one fan of Tobias Zen, he clearly held a lot of secrets and some vested interest in me. For whatever reason he wanted to see me succeed but with what I had no idea.

March dropped down from the ladder with a thud. Unlike our earlier entrance this did not lead to noises from the animals. They did however come to the front of their cages, as he walked past them patting each of them on the head. They seemed fond of him. He reached the cage of the sick dog, who even managed a small burst of energy to reach the front of the cage for a tickle under her chin. “Hello Pixie,” said March as he stroked the dog.

Meanwhile I had released Gabe from his prison. He thanked me and dashed over to Grace, who still lay on the floor, she looked in severe pain from her back injury. She held one hand to her back and the other reached out to touch Gabe’s face.

“Gabe?” she asked weakly. “Is that you?”

“It’s me. Grace I’m so, so, sorry this happened to you. I never should have recruited you,” he replied.

“It was worth it to meet you,” her eyes closed as her arms became weak and fell to the floor.

Before Gabe could react, the orange eyed man awoke and went straight for him. He was startled but ready. He grabbed the orange eyed man’s arm and twisted it until he could hear a cracking sound. Despite what should have caused severe pain, the orange eyed man carried on undeterred.

His arm hung down from him bent backwards. He could no longer move it but he didn't seem to care. With his other fist he grabbed at Gabe again but he was far less effective with his left hand. Once again Gabe grabbed his fist and twisted it back, breaking his other arm. His days juggling on stage were over.

The orange eyed man stood there with two broken arms a bullet hole in his neck and a disconnected jaw. He looked like something out of a horror film.

"What do I have to do to stop you?!" screamed Gabe.

His question was answered by March, who walked over to the man and pressed a button on a small black box. As the signal from the box was emitted, the orange eyed man tried to reach his neck with his broken arms. The shock of my first gunshot hit him first as he tried to frantically refill his lungs with air. Before he had a chance, the bullet hole in his head registered with his brain and he collapsed on the floor. His eyes had returned to a brown colour.

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Frazier Kull

The Tether was severed and he felt the full impact of his injuries. In an upstairs room Frazier began to spasm uncontrollably. Doctors dashed to his side but it was no use. He too had felt the impact of the gunshots. He felt his arms break and felt his body be punctured by two gunshots. His eyes closed for the last time.

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Emmie Keyes

In the basement we couldn't believe our eyes. "Is he dead?" I asked.

"Yes, I turned off the machine that was allowing Frazier to control his twin. The link has been severed and both he and his twin have died," replied March.

I wanted to be sick. I'd never killed anyone before and now I had the blood of two people on my hands. No amount of police training could prepare me for taking a life. It just felt so wrong.

March saw the tears start to form in my eyes and he tried to comfort me. "It was a case of life and death Emmie. Without you Grace would have been abused or be dead right now. You've proven you don't have to be a victim any more. You can control your own fate."

His words seemed in direct contrast to those of Tobias, who seemed to think he owned me and that he controlled my life. When Tobias killed Will he had tried to take control of my life. Now March was giving me the tools to regain that control.

I couldn't look at the dead body on the floor any more. There was so much blood and even though his eyes had changed back to brown, they lacked life and they were almost more horrific than the orange eyes had been. I tried to focus my attention on Grace. "How is she?" I asked.

“Not good. She has severely damaged her spine. There is no way she is walking out of here,” replied Gabe.

“Actually there is one other way out of here,” said March. “But I need your help.”

TWENTY-SEVEN

Emmie Keyes

March had been gone for 10 minutes and during that time he'd given us a box full of needles that we injected into the animals to temporarily put them to sleep.

When I walked over to Pixie she cowered in the corner of her cage and started to whimper as soon as she saw the needle. "I'm so sorry," I said but I couldn't do it. Whether it was her big brown eyes or the look of sadness on her face I didn't want to subject her to another injection. I hid the needle in my jacket and told Gabe I'd finished with the animals.

We then loaded all the animal cages we could manually move onto a large platform at the end of the room. Grace remained on the floor. Every few minutes her back went into shock, sending her arms twisting around from the pain. She kept her eyes closed the entire time. It didn't look good.

There were two cages we couldn't move at all, which contained large monkeys. March said he had a plan for them so we left them not wanting to risk another broken back.

As we loaded the cage with Pixie the dog onto the platform, a large shutter in front of us lifted up and a bright light shone on our faces.

My initial thought was that the guards had finally found us but March said most of them didn't even know this room existed. It seemed Tobias thought his experiment would be enough to stop us so sent him alone rather than risk exposing this room. It was his biggest mistake.

As the light cleared we saw the back of a large lorry in front of us. March jumped out of the front of it and shouted "Come on then," as he grabbed a cage containing an animal and loaded it into the back of the vehicle, making sure it was secure.

He was going to help us save all of the animals. Another positive point for March.

Gabe and I grabbed cages and loaded them into the lorry. It was in plain view to anyone outside at the back of the building. We knew we'd have to act fast to not get noticed.

"What about them?" I asked, pointing to the monkeys. March headed to a control panel and pressed several buttons. The monkey's cages were then lifted into the air and carried along on two separate tracks which ran along the ceiling. I looked upwards and watched as the tracks took the monkeys directly into the lorry in a space March had cleared.

"You're amazing!" I said to March.

"You can thank Grace. I found the schematics on her phone. After that it was just a case of putting everything together. Gabe, look in the lorry."

Gabe found a stretcher in the lorry which he wheeled over to Grace. The three of us lifted her onto the stretcher and tied her down. Her eyes opened and she murmured "Gabe?" He smiled, happy to see some life in her again and he held her hand as we wheeled her into the lorry. We attached the side of her stretcher to a panel on the lorry's inside wall so she wouldn't move around as we travelled.

"Hey!" a loud shout came from in front of the lorry. It was one of the guards. Hearing the noise, March motioned for us to stay in place and he pressed a button that caused the back of the lorry to close. For better or worse, Gabe, Grace and I were trapped.

"Hello," said March. "Just a routine delivery."

"Documents please."

March handed over some fake paperwork. I'd heard Gabe speak to Grace's mystery contact and ask them to create it and March must have printed it off during his time away from the group. I wasn't surprised that Gabe also knew Grace's contact and it wouldn't be long before I could start asking them for the truth.

"Thank you. Have a safe journey," said the guard.

As the lorry moved forward Pixie started to growl. It was a quiet noise at first but suddenly she started yapping over and over.

"You didn't inject her!" said Gabe, knowing he would probably have done the same.

"I'm sorry, I couldn't do it," I replied as I handed Gabe the needle.

He went to inject her but the sight of the needle made her stop immediately.

The guard ran after our lorry and started banging on the side. "Wait!" he shouted. March stopped the vehicle and we stared at Pixie willing her to be quiet. We watched the guard through a slit at the side of the lorry.

"One more thing," said the guard. "We're looking for a missing journalist in the building, she had blonde hair, a short figure, blue eyes, around a C cup bra size," he motioned with his hands the bra size.

"The cheek!" I whispered to Gabe.

We quickly silenced ourselves and March confirmed he hadn't seen anyone matching that description.

"Thanks anyway. Can't be too careful," said the guard, as he waved our lorry through out of the main gate. As March drove us away from the building we could see large displays that showed Tobias talking to the press, clearly unaware that we had escaped. His love for the media had failed him this time but he'd found me so easily once before that I knew it was only a matter of time.

Tobias Zen

Tobias watched as a large lorry pulled away from the building. He knew there were no deliveries that day. It had to be them.

After he'd finished his speech a guard stood waiting for him and took Tobias away into the basement area.

"We found him like this Sir. A lorry left the premises earlier and when we checked the loading bay we found him," Jacobs motioned over to the dead body of the General. He had a hard time looking at it but Tobias did not.

Tobias looked at the corpse amazed by the handiwork. "She had help to do this, it seems like our little prisoner proved very helpful.

He'd already spotted that Gabe had escaped and that the animals had gone. *A shame, he* thought to himself. He was far beyond animal trials now and had planned to dispose of them this week now he no longer had a need for them. Tobias was far more interested in human trials now.

"I didn't ring the alarm as you requested," said Jacobs.

Quite right. thought Tobias. *We can't afford another PR disaster.*

"Thank you. You've done a good job. Tell the guards to return to their positions, the threat has been neutralised. And dispose of this body, as well as Frazier Kull."

Tobias knew Frazier wouldn't have survived if his twin was dead. Unlike his new obsession. Yes, there was something unique about Emmie Keyes.

TWENTY-EIGHT

Rex T Jules

"You are a very lucky man."

Rex awoke to a sharp pain as a knife slowly scratched away at him. He looked down at his arm and saw that a diamond symbol had been haphazardly carved into his skin.

"I very rarely miss and a cut like that so close to your spine? Not many people would survive that. Maybe I'm still in shock because someone HIT ME OVER THE HEAD WITH A BAT!" Vlad, the man with the knives, was not happy.

"What made you think it would be a good idea to attack someone with such a great collection of knives?" said Vlad. "I could cut holes in you so small that you would bleed out from a thousand places bit by bit. Perhaps you'd prefer a larger knife that I'd use to chop through your limbs, section by section until you were nothing more than a pile of meat? What will it be?"

Rex was tied to the bed with ropes connecting his arms and legs to the four bed posts forcing him to make a star like shape. The ropes had specks of blood on them as if they had been used before and he prayed they hadn't been used on Emmie or Will.

"You're a quiet one. Very well," he looked down at his belt deciding which knife to use.

He retrieved a thin knife from his belt; it was a long knife that had a blade which stuck out on the end. The knife was no more than two centimetres thick but the edge still looked razor sharp.

"Don't move or this will be even more painful than it has to be," he said, as he positioned the knife in front of Rex. With a direct thrust he plunged the knife diagonally through Rex's chest, past his rib cage and into his lungs.

The force jolted Rex upwards and he could feel his lung start to tighten as it registered the shock.

"Right now, you can still breathe but if I move the knife out of you then your lung will deflate and you'll slowly and agonisingly drown. Your lung will collapse in on itself and you will spend your last few hours in horrific pain," teased Vlad.

Rex grimaced from the thought. *What have I gotten in to?* he asked himself.

"However, if you tell me where Emmie is then I'll leave the knife in and walk away. You'll be able to call an ambulance and if they're very careful you may just survive. If you tell me nothing then I'll pull the knife out and sit here until you die. Your choice," said Vlad.

"I don't know, I swear!" Rex wasn't lying, he really had no idea.

Vlad teased the knife to the left ever so slightly. It was enough to allow air to seep from Rex's lung, which caused him to panic and force his mouth open in a mad fight for air. Vlad saw this and held his hand over Rex's face and nose, forcing the lung on his right side to fight harder, applying more pressure to the knife wound.

Rex's human instinct to survive was killing him. Every breath took him a bit closer to death.

Vlad removed his hand and Rex gasped for air, his lung continuing to cause its own destruction. "If you lie to me again I will collapse your lung and we'll start on the other side. After that it's game over."

Even if Rex knew where Emmie was he'd never tell this madman. He didn't want another person to endure what he was going through. If his death would save Emmie, then so be it.

"Go to hell!" shouted Rex, trying to kick his legs in a desperate attempt to hit his attacker. The rope held them down tightly and he was unable to fight back.

"Fine!" screamed Vlad as he removed the knife.

Rex's body went into shock. He felt a sharp, tight pain on one side of his chest and he leaned forward on the right side of his body trying to force his lung back to life. Every intake of breath made the pain worse and the agony started to spread all around one side of his chest. Breathing became laboured and a constant torture.

"One down. One to go. If you don't get medical care soon you'll lose the lung forever, that's years off your life expectancy gone like that," taunted Vlad. "If you tell me now you'll live but you've seen how easily I can end your life forever. "

"Ok, fine I'll tell you," Rex didn't know what to say so he lied hoping it would save his life. "She's gone to London. She heard that someone was after her and her brother and so she went where no-one would ever look for her."

"Interesting," he leaned in and placed his hand around Rex's face. "London is a big place. I need more."

"Yes... well ... she said if I needed to find her she would be living by the old London Eye, although I can't promise she will still be there," said Rex.

Vlad let go of Rex's face and walked away. He dialled a number on his phone and shouted orders to someone else. When he had finished he said "London it is. My brother is on his way there now so it's waiting time for you. I'll give him four hours and if we don't have Emmie by then I'll kill you."

Rex groaned from the pain. "Here let me help you with that," said Vlad, as he punched Rex in his chest forcing him to cough up blood. He retrieved a knife from his belt and ripped Rex's jeans.

He carved a line into Rex's leg, causing him to groan in pain. The groan made him exhale air quickly, forcing his lung into further shock. He fought the pain through gritted teeth as his leg and his chest cried out for help.

“For every ten minutes we have to wait I will cut you again. If you are lying then all you’ve done is bought yourself four hours of agony along with a slow death and believe me, if we can’t find her, then I’ll show you even more depraved levels of pain. Tick tock.”

He pulled a chair in front of Rex and sat down. For the next nine minutes he played with the knife sweeping it through the air and taunting Rex with it. When the tenth minute arose, he made another cut with the knife. “Three Hours and fifty minutes to go,” he repeated his earlier taunt. “Tick Tock.”

TWENTY-NINE

Emmie Keyes

March had arranged for us to meet with a contact of his called Bryony Jones, who worked for Kind Creatures, a charity that looked after injured and sick animals. Bryony had spoken to local animal shelters and zoo's and had arranged for the animals we saved to be transported off in small numbers to each sanctuary. There they would live with the owners until they were adopted and these shelters never put an animal down so we knew they would be safe.

Before handing the animals over, March checked each of them for trackers and removed anything that would allow Tobias to find them. "He's unlikely to want them back," said March. "Animal trials ended long ago but that doesn't mean that we are safe."

He was right. I couldn't shake the feeling that Tobias knew everything we were doing and was simply waiting for the right moment to strike. We were after all driving around in a big lorry with the words 'TethTech' on the side. I doubted we would be that hard to track.

So we kept our guard up as we handed over the animals. The last one to be saved was Pixie. I stroked her one last time and handed her to Bryony. "Oh, the poor thing," she saw the injections all over Pixie and how she had bitten herself so badly.

"Here you go little one," she placed a cone over Pixie's head to stop her biting herself and she rubbed some ointment onto her injection burns. "She's looks like she's been through hell but we'll do the best for her we can. I hope you catch the bastard who did this."

"We will," said Gabe. We had all felt the wrath of Tobias Zen now. I'd lost a brother and Gabe and Grace had almost lost each other. As for March, whatever his motivations, he was one of us now. There was no way he could go back to TethTech. The guard had seen him drive a lorry out of there and once they discovered we were gone it was only a matter of time before he got the blame.

Bryony had brought a doctor along with her who turned up in an ambulance. She tried to help Grace and gave her drugs to cope with the pain. While Grace was looked after, Gabe, March and I sat in the back of the lorry and drank tea.

"Why did you do it?" I asked March.

"What? Save you? Boss's orders," he looked at Gabe and they shook hands.

"You did great in there March. Sorry you couldn't keep your cover for a little longer," replied Gabe.

"That's ok. I discovered a lot about TethTech and I was able to save the animals plus the three of you all in the same day. Not bad for a day's work," he replied.

“Wait,” I interrupted. “You work for TethTech and for Gabe? I want answers and I want them now.”

Gabe shut the back of the lorry door trapping us inside. He turned the torch on his phone on and placed it in front of us. “I am going to say two words now Emmie and I do not want you to be alarmed,” My brain was filled with curiosity.

“The Deck,” said Gabe as I gasped in shock.

“You’re terrorists?” I shouted. Everyone knew about The Deck. In the last year their terrorist group had been responsible for the bombing of medical facilities across the UK, leading to the loss of countless lives and putting back some scientific research by decades. “Let me out. Now!” I stood up and headed for the door.

“Emmie, sit down,” said Gabe. “Yes, to some we are known as terrorists and not everything you have seen on TV is a lie. As you have probably seen we did try to kidnap Tobias Zen yesterday and you no doubt now know some of the reasons why.”

“What about the people you killed at all those factories?”

“Everything we have ever done has been to stop Tobias. This year we did destroy several of his factories, yes but we ensured there were no people in a single building when we did so. The technology that Tobias is building is far too powerful and we are trying to stop him. You’re in the middle of something far bigger than any one person.”

By one person I was sure he meant Will. “So what did you do March? Tell them the places to bomb and when?”

March answered. “I’ve been working for TethTech for five years and have been a part of some amazing projects. As a team we each build a part of a project and we only really see the end results when it all comes together. Recently I was working on a project that allows messages to be transported from mobile phones directly into people’s brains. It is designed to allow soldiers to be given orders without having to reach for a headset. Nothing malicious about the project in any way.”

He continued. “However. One day I received a coded message from an anonymous contact that sent me files showing what other employees were building. By themselves no project was dangerous but I analysed the files over many weeks and spotted a pattern. When all of the projects were combined it looked like Tobias would be unstoppable and that’s when my mystery contact invited me to a meeting. Shortly after that I agreed to work as a double agent for The Deck and report to them on any developments from TethTech.”

“But how can you trust The Deck?” I asked. “How do you know they aren’t just using you to leak the technology to them so they can take control?”

“They couldn’t. Every piece of technology I have given to The Deck has to be activated by me. If anyone else tried to activate it then it simply wouldn’t work. I’ll admit I had trust issues like you Emmie but over time I kept the need for my authorisation in place as an insurance policy.”

It seemed even March didn't have complete trust in The Deck and nor did I. It was hard to shake what I had heard on the news the last few years. Propaganda or not, I could still see every news report vividly. The shots of burned bodies, destroyed buildings and ruined lives were hard to ignore.

Yet, what choice did I have? Tobias wanted to capture me and these people were prepared to protect me. They seemed like the lesser of two evils so an uneasy alliance was my best option.

"I need some time," I said, as I opened the lorry door.

"Emmie?" said Grace, her voice crackly. I ran over to her.

"Grace, how are you feeling?"

"Amazing," she lied. I could see in her face the story was different. The pain she was in was still etched all over her. I hoped the pain killers would kick in soon. "I assume they have told you the truth? Don't be scared, I am part of The Deck too."

"No!" I gasped. "But why? Please tell me the news reports weren't true? Please tell me you didn't kill all those people."

"How long have you known me Emmie?"

"Eighteen years."

"You mean eighteen amazing years," she clarified. "In all that time, do you honestly believe I would do that?" she asked. I was unsure. There certainly was a lot I didn't know about Grace. Like mysterious boxes that changed people's faces or anonymous contacts who would create fake documents and alliances with known terrorists.

"I don't believe it but I do trust you," It was all I could offer right now.

March, Gabe and Grace. Each three of them had saved my life in some way. They had earned my trust for now. Not that I didn't feel suspicious of all of them.

"She'll need rest," said the Doctor.

"So we can't take her out of the city?" asked March.

"I would advise against moving her for at least twenty four hours. Grace is very badly injured and it'll take months for her spine to heal. She may never be able to walk again."

"But you can help her? You will help her?" said Gabe.

"Yes. I will do my best."

"I'll help too," said March. "I originally trained as a Doctor so should be able to lend a hand."

"Ok, it's agreed," said Gabe. "In twenty four hours we will leave the city. Until then we need to lie low."

"I'm sorry but I can't do that," I replied. "There's one place I have to go before we leave. One more person I have to see."

I knew they wouldn't want to let me go but I had to speak to her. I had to find Faye. I had to know why she betrayed my brother.

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Rex T Jules

"Tick tock," said Vlad, as he carved the fifth line into Rex's leg, crossing through the other four lines he had drawn. "Forty minutes gone. You had better start hoping my brother finds Emmie soon."

He never would. Rex had told Vlad a fake location so that Emmie could get away. In three hours and twenty minutes time it would all be over. Vlad's brother would report that he couldn't find her and then that would be the end of it.

At least I'll be free of this torture, thought Rex. His only regret being that he'd never told Emmie how he really felt about her. His chest continued to burn as one of his lungs slowly collapsed in on itself. Through loss of blood and loss of air, he was dying in more than one way.

"You see this?" said Vlad, holding his knife in the air and letting the blood drip down. "This knife is the greatest weapon ever created. I could use a gun but where would be the fun? It's too quick. Too messy. Too easy. But with a knife I am in control. Every slice I make into you is engineered by me. There's nothing more satisfying than complete control of a life."

Rex let out a deep breath, his damaged lung getting smaller every minute.

"You see that?" said Vlad. "I made you gasp for air. I control your life now. People talk about Tethers and the power of experiencing shared events but there is nothing better than doing something for yourself. Being free to control the world as you see fit. That's something you will never understand. While you work in your hell hole of a town you'll never have control. You're the victim of this society but not me. With this knife I control my own destiny and yours."

Rex wanted to hold his leg. He wanted to do something to stop the bleeding but he was bound so tightly he couldn't move. Vlad was right, he was completely helpless. He couldn't help himself or Emmie.

"For the last part of your life I'm going to give you a gift," continued Vlad. "When people are low on Oxygen they experience visions and delusions on a wonderful scale. It's magnificent. So I'm going to take you to that place."

He picked up the small knife again. "Once your other lung is punctured your body will no longer be able to take in new air. You'll experience the barrier between life and death and float there until I let you die. That's my gift to you, proof of my control over you."

"Control this."

A frying pan hit Vlad around the head, causing him to drop the knife. He looked around for his attacker but another hit sent him heading face down towards the floor. The third hit knocked him out for the second time that day.

The mystery attacker set Rex free and together they tied Vlad to the bed.

"You took your time," said Rex.

"Always ungrateful aren't you brother?" said Rufus. "At least tell me you are happy to see me."

"Very."

"When I saw you get tied to the bed I thought it was some kinky sex game, and then the cutting started. I started to wonder what sick things you were into and then I didn't see anything after that. Why?"

"I grabbed an Innocent Blocking Device from my room when I went to get the wrench. I'd set it to a timer and that's why it kicked in when it did. That's what blocked the signal."

"God bless that device. There's so many things you've done I'm thankful I've never seen," said Rufus.

"You too brother. You too," joked Rex.

"So what do we do about him?"

When he awoke Vlad found himself being walked through the Smyth West police station where he was thrown into a holding cell. His belt of knives was gone but he had a surprise they wouldn't be expecting. He would be free within the hour; he just had to wait for the signal.

THIRTY

Emmie Keyes

I hadn't wanted to leave Grace behind but she seemed in safe hands and I still had some trust left for March. With her back damaged there was no way she would be able to help us.

Us, I thought as I looked at Gabe. I'd heard so much about this man from Grace, yet I hardly knew him. Not really. Yet he had agreed to help me catch Faye and right now I needed an ally, even one labelled as a terrorist.

"So what do you do for a living Emmie?" asked Gabe as we walked through the backstreets of the city. The train was too risky now Tobias knew who he was.

"Don't you already know everything about me?" I replied.

"True. But I was just making conversation."

"That's not fair. I know nothing about you."

"What would you like to know?"

"Why was The Deck started? Did you always know Tobias was dodgy?"

"That I don't know. I got recruited just like everyone else."

"But, aren't you the boss?"

"I was the second employee after the boss. There's someone else funding us, although he likes to remain private."

"Who is he?"

"Are you listening? He's a private investor," he explained. "Rich enough to fund us but also rich enough that if anyone knew he was associated with us it would destroy his career and land him in jail. We operate outside of the law but he can't do both. So he never meets us in person, only emails us instructions."

"Have you ever met him?" I asked.

"Once, at the start. But I can't tell you who he is. All I can tell you is he has hated Tobias long before he recruited me. He promised to pay me handsomely if I did some research on Tobias and that's what led us to grow the team and, once we learned what he was up too, to target his factories." he explained.

"What's his end game though? What does he want?"

“Destruction.”

When I heard Tobias speak about his company I had felt the same way. The man seemed obsessed with war and even in his pursuit to save lives, underneath that there seemed to be a hidden layer which hinted at something far far deeper.

I sensed Gabe no longer wanted to be asked questions and we walked the rest of the way in silence. As we walked I thought back to the events of that night. How Faye had caused Will’s death and how she could now hold answers that would help me stop the men who had killed him.

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Faye Galveston

Faye Galveston awoke in an abandoned building on the outskirts of Birmingham. The building had been left long ago, no doubt due to the wealthy moving into the heart of the city.

This had once been a small village, not divided by wealth but a normal, functional hub of commerce and community. As the boundaries of Birmingham expanded over time, they had eaten up small towns such as these and the wealthy had abandoned them while the outer edges of the city were reclaimed as homes for the poor.

Faye had slept on hay next to ten people she had never met before in a large wooden barn. They had been kind enough to take her in and feed her when she arrived in tears last night. They didn’t know what she had done and she wanted to keep it that way.

The Tippet family were kind. There were three generations of them cramped into the barn, which when everyone has a twin it leads to a shortage of space. She could see they didn’t have much but they still looked after her. If she wanted to, they had said she could stay indefinitely so long as she helped on their farm during the day.

Faye was tempted. She couldn’t go back to her old life now. People would be looking for her and if she returned then the one person she wanted to protect most of all would be in danger. Last night she had saved a loved one but lost another in return.

Will.

She looked at the engagement ring on her finger and felt ashamed to wear it. Her eyes started to well up but she held back the tears. She didn’t want the Tippet’s to see her cry. It would lead to questions that she could not answer right now. Maybe never.

She took the ring off and hid it in her purse. She felt deceitful in doing it but compared to her betrayal of Will last night, this was but a small act in comparison.

Faye looked out of the window at the farm land in front of the barn. She saw cows, chickens and pigs and so much green grass. Green. That was a colour she rarely saw in the city and it felt nice and calming.

She was ready for her new life. She didn’t deserve it but she hoped her sister was thankful for what she had done.

“A brand new life. A new me,” as Faye picked up her ID so she could destroy it, a Tether event took over her. With control no longer her own she dropped to her knees and placed her hands in the air.

Her sister was in trouble and that meant last night had been for nothing. She had helped kill the man she loved for nothing.

THIRTY-ONE

Emmie Keyes

"This is it," I said, looking up at the stylish flats where Faye lived. I'd never been here before but it was easy to piece together where she lived from the times I had seen Will visit her. It was a million miles away from my flat, covered in fancy grey and blue panelling with giant windows for each room.

"Are you sure she'll be here and not at Will's?" asked Gabe.

"No idea but there's no chance it will be safe to go to Will's place. Tobias will definitely be guarding it with some of his employees."

I entered the building code "88692" that I had seen Will enter many times. He got so excited whenever he visited Faye that moments as mundane as typing in a keypad code would get passed onto me as Tether events.

We walked into the building. "It's room B02 that we want," I was relieved Faye lived so close to the ground floor. After my fall earlier I felt a lifelong fear of heights coming on so walking up only one flight of stairs was perfect.

I was surprised to see that the door to room B02 was closed. Part of me expected Tobias to already be here waiting, holding a leash that he could put round my neck and a lead to carry me away to his lab. *I will never be your pet*, I thought to myself.

Gabe removed his gun and aimed it at the door. "What are you doing I asked?"

"Protecting you," he replied. "Anything could be through that door."

I placed my hand on his gun and pushed it lightly downwards. "Faye may be deceitful but she is no killer. If we run in with guns exposed word will get out pretty fast that we are here."

"Fine," Gabe put his gun back into its holster. "But I'm keeping one hand on the gun."

I knocked on the door. There was no answer. I knocked again. "Come on Faye, it's Emmie, I need to talk to you."

The door opened and it was Yuna, Faye's sister. They were almost identical in appearance and when Faye dyed her hair purple Yuna did the same to keep the similarity going. They both had beautiful smiles and the main difference was that Yuna's eyes were slightly thinner and her nose was raised up slightly at the end. Were it not for these characteristics I would have sworn I was speaking to Faye.

"Oh, hi," I said. "We were looking for Faye?"

"Come in," Yuna replied. Gabe held his hand on his weapon but kept it concealed as we walked through the door and entered apartment B02. I'd seen in many times before through Tether events shared with Will but the sheer contrast to my own home was startling. There was no random assortment of furniture. Everything was colour coordinated with light brown wooden furniture that complemented each other, which was offset by purple vases and decorative pieces.

Yuna and Faye were not rich by 'haves' standards but they had far more than your average 'have-not'. Their home was clean, their neighbourhood looked safe and most of all the word I'd use to describe their lifestyle was 'comfortable'. A long way away from the constant struggle to survive we faced in Smyth West. It was no wonder Will had wanted this lifestyle so badly and I had to admit I secretly craved it as well.

"Can I get you some tea?" asked Yuna. "Faye isn't here right now. I'd have thought you would have checked Will's place, she pretty much lives there."

There was no chance Faye would be at Will's place. Returning to the scene of the crime didn't seem safe right now. She would have to be crazy to go there.

"Yes, we checked but she wasn't there," I lied. "We were actually hoping you'd have seen her?"

"Not for weeks sorry. I can give her a call if you like and see where she is?"

"Fantastic."

As Yuna placed the phone to her ear Gabe walked over and smacked the phone away from her onto the floor where it shattered on impact. He pushed Yuna backwards on to a purple leather sofa and pulled the gun from his pocket aiming it at her head.

"What the hell are you doing?" I screamed.

"Be quiet Emmie, this is for the best," replied Gabe. I had made the wrong choice in trusting him.

Yuna sat on her knees on the floor and held her hands into the air. "Please don't shoot," she said as she sobbed. "I don't know where she is."

"It's not you I want to talk to, it's Faye," said Gabe. "I know you're experiencing this Faye and I know that you can hear every word I am saying so listen carefully."

He was right. Yuna was dearly in shock and that meant a Tether event between her and her sister would be happening. It was a clever idea, although one carried out with far more aggression that I would have liked.

Then Gabe amplified the threat; "If you aren't at your sister's house by sundown I will kill her."

"No!" I wanted to scream but I couldn't. If I stopped Gabe there was chance Faye would never come. I hated Gabe for putting me in this position.

“Yuna. It’s ok, I need you to calm down,” said Gabe. “Your sister will come and I promise I won’t harm you if that happens.”

“Why me?” shouted Yuna. “What do you want with me?”

“I don’t want you,” said Gabe in the coldest way possible. “I want your sister. Now I need you to calm down so she can come here.”

Yuna started to hyperventilate but Gabe continued to hold the gun on her. “Are you insane?” I asked, emerging from cover to find a bag for Yuna to breathe in to.

I handed her a bag and started to calm her nerves. “Put the gun away!” I shouted to Gabe and this time he listened. “You need her to calm down right? Then sit down, now!” he sat down, proving that he hadn’t completely lost control.

“It’s ok, it’s ok,” I said to Yuna, who kept her eyes fixed on Gabe. “The weapon is gone now and you’re safe. Faye will come, she has to.”

As much as I wanted to help her relax in order to calm the situation I also knew that until she stopped panicking the link between her and Faye would not be severed.

I didn’t want to spend a minute longer here than we had to so I took Yuna into one of the rooms and tried to calm her down. With Faye free from her Tether I hoped she would come but most of all I feared what Gabe would do if she didn’t.

THIRTY-TWO

Mr King

Mr King stared at his incoming bank balance, stunned. Every single penny he had lost on the TethTech shares was now back in his company account, with a tidy little profit on top.

His job and life were saved and the board would never know of his mistake but at the same time he had now allied himself with a man he hated. He knew only one man would have the resources and the guile to bail him out and that the cost of doing so would be a steep one.

After the new balance arrived Mr King received an email. The sender was anonymous but he knew who it would be.

“I hope you enjoy your winnings Mr King. All I ask in return is that one month from now you give me a meeting and hear me out. If you don't like what I have to say then I will walk away and you can keep the money. Consider it the cost of our little business meeting. Until then. Your secret donor.”

Mr King had expected a threat or an urgent demand in return for the money but it seemed he had misjudged his industrialist rival. He knew there had to be a cost and that no one gives that kind of money away without one.

Attached to the email was a meeting request, which he accepted.

He knew it had to be Tobias Zen. It had been a long time since he had met with him and for £16 billion he was prepared to stomach a meeting with the man.

Mr King sat back in his chair and poured himself a Whiskey. He felt like he had just made a deal with the devil and that he had one month until he would lose his soul. *Better make the most of it, he thought* as he knocked back his drink.

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Faye Galveston

Faye knew she had no choice. It was time to answer for her crimes. She hadn't expected Emmie to find her, let alone to pull off something as horrible as interrogating her sister but whomever the man was that was with her; he seemed to be the one pulling the strings.

She stood outside in the expanse of farmland owned by the Tippet family and sighed. *It was a nice dream, she thought.* As the rain hit her face she walked out of the village and towards a train into the city.

Faye used her real ID to get the train. Emmie had already found her so there was no sense in hiding now, if she could find her then anyone could.

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Emmie Keyes

Gabe banged on the door to Yuna's room. "Emmie," he shouted. "Get out here now!"

"It'll be ok," I said to Yuna, hoping she wouldn't panic attack herself back into another Tether event.

As I opened the door Gabe grabbed me by my top and pulled me into the hallway, slamming the door behind me.

"Where the hell is she, Emmie?" he screamed. "We need to get the information and go. If Faye won't come here, then we'll just have to get Yuna to talk."

"What is wrong with you?" I asked, batting his hand off me. "She doesn't know anything about this and you are only making things worse."

"Don't you talk to me like that," Gabe picked me up from the floor and shook me violently. I didn't understand how Grace could ever fall for this thug. He dropped me and my legs gave way sending me tumbling onto the floor.

I looked at his eyes expecting to see an orange hint but they remained a brown colour.

"Fine!" he shouted. "I'll get the information out of her myself," he pulled his gun from its holster and approached the door.

"No!" shouted a voice from the front of the apartment. I turned around to see Faye stood in the doorway. I never thought I'd be so happy to see her.

"Excellent, you are here. No one has to die yet," said Gabe.

As I replayed the events of Will's death in my mind it was clear Faye had known exactly what she was doing. When the two orange eyed men came to the door downstairs she buzzed them in and told Will they had an engagement present for him.

When they walked to the apartment door, Faye let them in and directed them to Will.

Yet that wasn't the biggest betrayal. What hurt the most was that she was the one who had drugged Will. I was sure of it. She poured him a drink and then the next thing he knew he'd woken up tied to a chair with Faye tying one of the ropes into a knot.

She tried to explain how sorry she was to him and that everything would be ok but whatever she thought would happen, Will was dead and she had played a part in it.

Now I was going to find out why.

"Where is my sister?" shouted Faye.

"She's safe," replied Gabe. "Now sit down, answer our questions and she'll stay safe."

"Let her see her sister," I said. "This isn't an interrogation."

Gabe shot me a sideways glance. This *was* an interrogation for him and he intended to keep it that way.

"Ask your questions Emmie," said Gabe.

"Why did you help kill Will?" I asked.

"The same reason I'm here right now. They threatened my sister," she replied.

"Who did?" asked Gabe. "I'll know if you are lying."

"I didn't get their names. They said if I didn't let them in and help them tie up Will then they would kill Yuna and I couldn't let that happen."

"How could you sell out your own fiancée? My brother!" My whole body felt like it had heated up as the blood raced around and the rage built up inside me. She was just like Tobias and her hands were as bloody as his.

I ran towards her with my fist held out but Gabe stopped me by grabbing my hand.

"But you wanted to kill her sister and I can't even slap her?" I screamed.

"It's not her fault," replied Gabe.

"What the hell! Don't you dare tell me she didn't do it. She knew exactly what would happen and that he would die."

"Die?" asked Faye. "But the fact you are here means he can't be dead."

"Didn't you see what they did to him? They carved up his body and left him for dead and now I don't feel connected to him anymore. Trust me. Will is gone and I'm only alive because some scientist wanted me to be alive."

"I won't believe it. They promised they wouldn't kill him," replied Faye. "I was only told to tie him up; they said he'd be ok."

"Well you screwed up!" I shouted. "Your fiancée is dead and you have to live with that forever. How can you justify one life for another?"

"Two lives," said Gabe. "If Faye's sister died then she would have died too. By keeping her sister alive she ensured she would survive as well. What could she have done?"

I looked at Faye, who was now in floods of tears, the reality of Will's death hitting her hard. "They said he wouldn't die. I don't understand. This wasn't meant to happen," she said.

Then I did something I hadn't expected. I sympathised with her. We'd seen just hours before, that the best way to get someone to do something unwanted was to kidnap their twin and

Faye was a victim of that. If Will and I had been in the same situation I can't say how far I would have gone. I was already surprised just how far I had gone to get revenge for him.

"I only loosely tied the ropes, I hoped he'd get free but he didn't," explained Faye. That explained how Will had been able to free himself and make one last desperate attack. "Please don't kill Yuna."

"Faye, you have to tell us everything about the people who threatened your sister. How did they contact you and who were they?" asked Gabe.

"They called me but it was an unknown number. All they said is that they worked for something called 'The Deck'."

"That's impossible," said Gabe, almost giving away his alliances. To me it certainly seemed possible. Gabe had already known exactly how to force Faye into action. My trust for The Deck was becoming ever weaker.

"Faye," I said. "Did they say why they wanted Will?"

"They told me they wanted to ask him some questions about a project he was working on. That it was a national security issue and that Will could be involved in a terrorist plot. I didn't know what to think. You just don't expect someone you know to be a terrorist, right?"

Of course not. Well apart from Grace and Gabe and March and who knows how many others, I thought to myself.

"I knew Will could never do anything like that so I refused to help but they kept calling and eventually when they threatened Yuna it felt like I had no choice. The harassment had to stop and it seemed like the only way it would stop was either if my sister and I died or we did what they said. So I gave into The Deck."

Gabe's face remained expressionless throughout the conversation, not giving anything away about his so called involvement in this incident. He was a loose cannon and I sensed now that I knew too much, that perhaps none of us would make it out of this building alive.

"Faye, I understand," I said. "I can never forgive you for what you did but I do understand it and that's something. You need to stay here and protect your sister and we will catch the people responsible," I looked directly at Gabe to show him that I meant the words. If he was behind everything that happened then I would have revenge.

"There's something else," she said, as she walked over to her kitchen. Gabe placed his hand on his gun in case she attempted an attack. She reached down into a kitchen cabinet and retrieved a small brown parcel that was labelled with my address. "This is for you Emmie, for your Birthday."

I opened the package and inside was a DualCam just like the one I had at home.

"But how did you..." I asked.

"Will gave it to me a week before his death. He said that I needed to send it to you on today's date. Yuna was due to post it. I've no idea what it does," she explained.

“Me either,” I lied. This room contained too many people for me to risk playing the footage in front of everyone. Whatever was on this box was a message for me and I intended to be the only one to watch it. If it was the same as my camera then it would have a fingerprint scanner, which I hoped Will had programmed just for me.

Gabe began to walk towards me with one arm held out. *You can't take the box*, I thought. Before he reached the box he turned and opened the door behind me, releasing Yuna from her room.

“Faye!” said Yuna as she dashed into the room and hugged her sister. “Thank you, I know you did it for me. I’m so sorry you had to do that.”

It was time to leave. We had more than we came for and I felt a sense of relief in knowing that Faye was not the ‘heartless bitch’ I had labelled her to be. However I had no idea what to do with Gabe and no idea what would happen as soon as I left the room.

“Ok Emmie. It’s time,” he said as he grabbed the box from me.

None of us expected the gunshot.

The bullet forced itself through Faye’s skull instantly. Yuna felt it at the same moment and the two of them collapsed onto each other. They lay on the floor in a coma, living together in a shared Tether event that would probably only end with their death. For the rest of their life they would be together.

I looked at Gabe, hoping to at least look at the man as he killed me but he was looking and firing at the door to the room.

A grenade landed on the floor in front of me and before we could react it exploded sending a burst of gas across the room. The gas filled my lungs and I fell to the floor.

I saw four pairs of rugged boots walk into the room. “We have them,” said one of their owners onto their radio.

The last pair of shoes was the one that brought fear into my heart. Two orange sneakers. I looked up and saw the face of Tobias Zen. *“He’s found me.”*

THIRTY-THREE

Emmie Keyes

The light stung my eyes as I peered out into the room that was now my prison. It was illuminated by large overhead lights that flooded the room with a crystal clear clarity.

The room itself was mostly exposed bricks with hard white clay covering up cracks in the walls. This was not a futuristic lab like the ones in TethTech; it seemed more like a crack den in an abandoned building. An anomaly in a city that prided itself on perfection.

Inside the room was a wheelchair and a few white tables with medical equipment, scalpels, cutting tools, drills and a heart monitor that I was hooked up to. A female doctor, dressed in a white and orange lab coat like the ones at TethTech, stood next to my bed and was looking down at the table of operating tools.

I felt an intense pain in my stomach. I tried to see what was causing this pain and forced myself to fight through the agony and lift my head up slightly.

As I looked down at my stomach I saw a metal vice prising the skin apart. There was a hole where my skin had separated and I could see the raw flesh underneath. What horrified me the most was the silver lining that had been applied to the skin around my stomach. It was just like in the video.

I felt sick and turned my head over the side of the bed to throw up.

“She’s awake!” shouted a female doctor, turning around to face me.

She forced my head back onto the bed and jabbed a needle into my neck. Another doctor ran into the room and held down my legs as the drug kicked in.

I drifted off to sleep unaware of what horrors they were doing to me.

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Emmie Keyes

“Wakey wakey,” a hand slapped my face and I awoke to the horrible reality again. “We’ve given you a lot of painkillers so you won’t feel anything for at least a day.”

The man who was mocking me was Tobias Zen. He finally had me.

I tried to sit upright and the muscles in my stomach felt weak and torn. My belly had now been stitched up again.

"You gave us quite a scare there. Next time we'll give you more drugs to ensure you stay asleep," said Tobias.

"Next time?" I feebly replied.

"Yes. There are a lot of experiments I want to run on you Emmie and I don't want to risk hurting you so don't worry we'll look after you."

"Where am I?"

"You're still in Birmingham in a lab we created just for you. It's not much but we've kitted it out with everything we need to keep treating you and allow you to harness your power."

"I don't have a power."

"Sure you do," he replied. "No one has ever survived the death of a twin before. That makes you the greatest find in Science right now and I love finding new things and playing with them."

"I am not your pet. Let me go."

"You aren't going anywhere. Just like your friend Grace. Frazier did some serious damage on her spine and she won't be walking for quite some time. Once we've taken care of our traitor and the military man then no one will be able to save you."

"The Deck will come," as much as I was sceptical of them it sounded like The Deck had many more members and if I was important to Gabe and their boss then I hoped they'd send a rescue party. It was the only hope I had.

"The Deck?" replied Tobias. "Don't you watch the news? They are all wanted criminals. Their faces have been seen by half of the country. They wouldn't even make it through the gates into the city and they'll never find this building. No, Emmie. You are mine now. Any minute now we will catch Gabe and the rest of them."

Gabe? I wondered. If Gabe had somehow gotten away from the attack then there was a chance that he'd be able to help The Deck to find me. I just had to hope this place wasn't guarded with an army. But, if anyone could find an army it was Tobias. "What will you do to me?" I asked.

"Experiments mostly. There's a lot we can discover from you. Your DNA is different. Special. Magical. I want to harness that power."

"Will I survive these, 'experiments'?"

"Your body won't but your achievement will," he replied. "You'll be remembered in history as the girl who changed the world. The girl who helped make every Tether in the world stronger and better."

His phone started to buzz. "Excuse me one minute," he said.

Tobias left the room and I tried to rise to my feet. My stomach still hurt, despite all of the medication, and I could just about sit up. I was alone in the room but there wasn't a lot I could do in

my current state. I could barely walk and could probably crawl to the wheelchair in the corner of the room but there's no way I'd get out of the room. There was no secret keycard in a folder this time.

As I weighed up my options I heard gunfire from outside the room. Over the next few seconds I heard screams as bones were broken and gunshots were fired. In amongst the chaos I heard a familiar voice. "Cover me," shouted Gabe. I began to wonder if this was the hero Grace had told me he could be.

Soon the noise fell to silence and the only sound was a "stomp, stomp, stomp," as feet hit the floor in quick succession while Gabe and his team made his way to my room. Yet it wasn't Gabe who I saw first, it was the kind eyes of March who opened the door and ran to my side.

"Are you ok?" he asked. "What did they do to you?"

I pointed to my stomach and let out a weak "I don't know."

His expression changed to one of anger and it was clear he cared for me. He asked if I could move and I said I wasn't sure.

He held out both of his arms and said "It's ok I'll be gentle I promise."

He scooped his arms under me and lifted me up slowly and carefully. I bit my lip to hide the fact I was in pain but he saw what I was doing and walked even slower to try and help. After walking a few steps he bent down slowly and angled my feet so they touched the floor. He then moved my body down until I was seated in the wheelchair.

I smiled at March as I felt the softness of the wheelchair and I thanked him for saving me. Gabe entered the room and said "We have to move now!"

He didn't once ask if I was ok or make any eye contact with me other than checking that we were following behind him. March wheeled me down the derelict corridors and for a second the sense of decay in the building made me feel like I was back in Smyth West.

It knew it was a sad thought that a destroyed building and broken rooms reminded me of home but with March by my side I felt safer here than I did in the perfectly clean and orderly streets that were waiting for us outside.

As we left the building I didn't see Tobias but we passed a room with five lab staff locked within it. "You didn't kill anyone did you?" I asked.

"No," said March, "and neither did Gabe. We're not the terrorists you think we are Emmie. Even in self-defence we will try and go for a non-lethal take down. Those doctors will escape later but for now we just have to get you safe."

"What about the guards?"

"This isn't an official TethTech facility. They just took over an abandoned building so officially this experiment doesn't exist. There were two guards at the entrance, which we subdued and other than these scientists that was the lot. Whatever Tobias did to you, it seems he didn't want a lot of people to know about it."

The Deck had earned themselves some positive points, I had to admit and I hoped they were not the terrorists the media portrayed them as. We escaped the building and hit the streets.

THIRTY-FOUR

Unknown

"I told you not to call me," said a dark figure who looked out of a window at the city skyline.

"I know," said Gabe "but it's an emergency. It's Emmie. She is hurt and we need safe passage from the city."

"How did this happen?"

"She was attacked and operated on. We need to get her as far away from Tobias as we can and safely back to base."

"How many of you are there?"

"Myself, Emmie, March and Grace, who also needs medical help."

"Are you making a fool of me Gabe? How many casualties will we suffer trying to stop Tobias?"

"Emmie is fine, alright. I know everyone else is just an acceptable casualty. So can you get us out of the city or not?"

"It's a huge risk," the dark figure paused for a moment. "But yes, I can," he continued to tell Gabe a meeting point and time.

Gabe couldn't wait to get out of this city and didn't want to ever return. Tobias Zen had already taken so much from him and now Gabe hated his home town as well.

The dark figure hung up and looked out on the skyline. He admired the other towers and knew one day they would come crashing into the ground.

The revolution is coming, he mused.

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Emmie Keyes

"Ok, let's go," said Gabe, as he looked at me. I shrugged my shoulders. I could barely walk and wasn't going anywhere without March pushing me.

"Wait," I said. "What about the black box from Faye's? Wasn't it at the base?"

"I grabbed it when I escaped. Once the grenade landed I dropped to the floor and covered my face with my jacket. When I saw you'd dropped the box, I picked it up and dove out of the window. I hung from the window ledge and gently dropped down on the floor."

"Thank God Faye only lived on the second floor," although Gabe admitted he had left me there to die, I was relieved he had the box. He'd saved me in the end so that made up for it, I suppose. "But how did you find me?" I asked.

"Grace slipped you a drink at your house with a tracking liquid. That's how she tracked you in the TethTech tower and how I found you now." he explained.

Another deception by Grace.

March pushed me the whole way back to our earlier location where Grace was waiting with the doctor. I felt tense the entire time and with every street we turned down I was apprehensive that something would happen.

When we finally arrived I was wheeled next to Grace who was laying on her stretcher.

"Emmie, what happened?" Grace asked.

"Tobias found me," I replied.

"If they did anything to you, we'll fix it Emmie," said March. "We have a great lab set up back at the base and it won't be long until you're safely there. You too Grace. We can continue to treat you both there."

"I've got an escape planned from the city but we need to go now," said Gabe. "How are you doing?" he asked Grace.

"Better now you're here," they kissed and Gabe was back to the happy person I had seen earlier, unlike the brute he had become when he attacked me. It was like he had two personalities.

March and Gabe gathered supplies that Bryony had prepared whilst Grace and I talked. For those ten minutes we didn't talk about terrorist plots or conspiracy theories. We just caught up and chatted like good friends. It was a nice moment of calm amongst the chaos of the day.

Sadly the moment had to end and we were escorted away by the boys, who now emerged in the same dark green uniforms worn by Ambulance staff. They thanked Bryony for finding the uniforms.

"That's nothing," she said as she pointed to an ambulance parked on the side of the road. "You can thank my doctor friend here for that one," March pushed my wheelchair and Gabe pushed Grace's trolley into the back of the ambulance.

Tobias had already found me once so I wasn't getting my hopes up for a smooth escape. We drove to the edges of Birmingham and found an abandoned strip of land that had previously been a football club in a town called Wolverhampton. Whatever team they had been, their glory days were behind them. The pitch remained a damaged testament to their past.

We waited on the edges of the football pitch until a small dot appeared in the sky. "There's our ride," said Gabe.

A helicopter made its descent towards us and I began to feel hope that we'd escape. Once it landed we were loaded onto the chopper and greeted by a pilot called, Saloma. She was wearing a leather pilot's uniform and had auburn hair which flowed out from under her helmet and spiralled out into thick curls over her shoulders.

"Everyone be quick," she said. "This is an uncharted flight on a very windy day and that means we're going to be in for some serious turbulence," I hoped she was wrong.

THIRTY-FIVE

Vlad Givik

Vlad stomped around his cell impatiently. *Where is the signal?* he thought. By now that idiot Rex was probably at a hospital all patched up again.

Vlad didn't care. He knew he still had control. No matter how many injuries were fixed Rex would spend the rest of his life afraid that Vlad would return. *That's real control*, thought Vlad as he felt a tingling sensation in his brain. *Now to prove just how far real control can go.*

He grabbed his jacket and tore off one of the sleeves with all his strength. This created a long thick strip that he placed around his eyes and tied behind his head like a blindfold.

"What are you doing!" shouted the police officer on duty. "Stop that."

Vlad knew it couldn't be stopped now. His eyes turned to orange, hidden by the blindfold, as he gave control over to another force.

Although he no longer had his knives he had one trick up his sleeve. On the way in to the station he had palmed a pen from the desk of an officer. He now held that pen in his hands and rammed it into his own throat.

Vlad removed the pen and continued to jab it along his throat in different places with no real care for where he stabbed. All that seemed to matter to him was creating the most damage possible.

A male police officer panicked and dashed into the cell, hoping to retrieve the pen and save this man. His kindness was the end of him. Although Vlad couldn't see, he could still hear and it was hard to miss the shouts from the officer as he charged into the cell.

Vlad timed his forward motion perfectly and raised his handcuffed arms over the officer's head and grabbed him around his neck. He twisted his arms over each other and pushed them outwards. The force broke the officer's neck and ten miles away the officer's brother, oblivious to the attack, grabbed for his neck and fell down dead.

Hearing the officer hit the floor Vlad removed the blindfold and looked over his freshly defeated foe. Vlad searched the man's clothing and found a pair of sunglasses which he placed over his orange eyes, hiding them from view. Anything that could be traced back to Tobias had to be hidden.

He took his blindfold and wrapped it around his neck like a cravat to hide his wounds. To passers-by he would look just like another civilian and as long as the Tether held he wouldn't bleed to death.

The Smyth West police station was poorly guarded. A common problem in small have-nots towns where resources were scarce.

A new set of orders was given to him. Emmie was still the target but his immediate concern was getting medical attention and for that he'd have to head back home.

As he left the station he broke into the evidence locker and retrieved his belt of knives. He spied a few extra knives that had been used by unsavoury characters in Smyth West's history but he refused to use a blade that he hadn't made himself.

After one final stop to the infirmary – which was nothing more than a small drugs cabinet – he patched up his stab wounds and applied an antiseptic gel to stop infection. Even though he couldn't die, he wasn't immortal and walking around with holes in his neck was asking for trouble. He wrapped the blindfold around his neck one more time and broke the neck of another officer at the entrance to the station.

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Tobias Zen

Tobias Zen sat in a blacked out room at the top of his tower. There were no windows and the only light came from the blinking orange glows of the machines around him.

As he sat there he smiled at what he had achieved that day. A multi billion pound launch of his stock, a huge PR success, and a meeting with Emmie. That last achievement was the one that thrilled him the most.

Her brother's death was unfortunate but it was the only way to test the data. He had spent years trying to find someone who could survive the death of their twin. He had run every data sequence he could think of to pin down a candidate but had come up empty.

In the end it was Will who had helped him make his breakthrough. He had tasked Will with making a camera that would allow Tether events to be recorded between siblings. Officially the project was designed so the company could understand the link between twins but Tobias had a much darker plan.

He collected the data daily from the Dualcams and watched every piece of footage he could. Prototypes were given to every member of the TethTech team and Tobias saw the experiences of every one of them. He saw wonderful moments including an employee seeing their first born son and the first dance at a wedding. He also saw the darkest excesses of his employees; he watched violence, abuse and experienced an employee's suicide.

Yet Tobias was unfazed by what he had seen; good and bad. He didn't care about the footage. Which is why when he saw his employee Yun Tao take two bottles of pills, he did nothing. It's why when he saw Yun start to convulse on the floor as the pills overwhelmed his body, he sat back with his feet up. Even when Yun let out his last breath of life Tobias didn't notify his family and no one even knew he had died until two weeks later.

Tobias was far more interested in the data in front of him. He had watched countless videos and had seen a green line maintain a consistent motion over and over again. Yet there was one sequence of videos that stood out for him. Whenever he observed a Tether event between Will and Emmie the green line became erratic. It darted across the screen with a much faster pace.

The results were consistent and unlike any other videos. The bond between Emmie and Will was different. He couldn't understand why but he started to become obsessed with it. Like all obsessions of his, the first thing he wanted to do was test it.

He gathered Will's DNA from a routine employee blood trial and found nothing. This led him to wonder if Emmie was the key so he stole some blood of hers from a donation she made and the results were the same. There was nothing in their body chemistry to indicate a difference.

For nine months he studied their data and found no way to determine what he needed. He had collected every piece of data he could from their DNA. So he decided to take drastic action. If the Tether between truly was as strong and pervasive as he suspected then there was one last test he could perform. He knew it would mean getting his hands bloody but if he was to have his revenge then he knew it was necessary.

It wasn't long before Will was gone and days later Emmie had sat in his office completely healthy. The very second he had seen her, his obsession had grown stronger. His suspicions had been confirmed.

At long last he had found someone else who could survive the death of their twin and he was never going to let her go.

THIRTY-SIX

Emmie Keyes

As our helicopter rose into the sky I looked out of the window constantly. I wanted to at least see the weapon that would shoot us down from the sky.

We were in a small helicopter so we felt the wind outside as it battered against the sides. The force shook the helicopter and it made my stomach ache.

March saw me as I gritted my teeth in pain and he administered another shot of morphine. I felt the warmth wash over my body almost instantly and the edges of my vision started to blur. I'd never done hard drugs before but I imagined this must be what it felt like. A mixture of curious pleasure with an edge of fear.

A voice crackled over the radio. "This is the Birmingham control tower. Please confirm your destination and your airspace code."

"Ok everyone. This is where it gets tricky," said Saloma as she increased our speed.

"I repeat," said the voice on the radio. "Please confirm your destination and your airspace code or we will be forced to take extreme measures."

"Don't we have one?" I asked, starting to feel hazy from the drug kicking in.

"No," replied Gabe, "but Saloma is the best pilot I know. She'll get us out of this."

I hoped that was true, because getting into the city hadn't been easy. I imagined getting out as fugitives would be even harder.

"You have thirty seconds to confirm or we will take action," said the voice on the radio.

"Thirty seconds!?" shouted Saloma. "That's not right. They usually allow longer. This helicopter is fast enough to reach the city limits in two minutes but not thirty seconds. We're in trouble."

"What!?" shouted Gabe. "Can't you try?"

"This is all I can do now," Saloma increased her acceleration and tilted the helicopter down slightly to give us an extra bit of speed. I started to roll forward in my wheelchair but the supports I'd been tied to helped keep me in place.

"Emergency," a computerised voice could be heard inside the helicopter. "Emergency," it repeated.

The dashboard in front of Saloma lit up in a dark red and the words “Emergency,” appeared on the screen. She watched the radar as a small red dot closed in on us.

“What is that?” asked March.

“It’s a surface-to-air missile. We’re out of the main part of the city now. If we crash land in the poorer areas no one will bat an eyelid. The people who fired on us will be called heroes. I’m sorry everyone but we can’t outrun it. We have to grab parachutes and go.”

“I have two wounded. There’s no way they can make it out in time,” said Gabe.

“Then I’m very sorry. I’ll try everything I can to dodge the missile but it will hit us.”

A solemn air filled the helicopter. We’d gotten so far but couldn’t survive a missile. To try and calm the situation I spoke to Grace about our favourite TV show and tried to remember what life had been like before all of this.

I heard a beeping sound as a message appeared on Gabe’s phone.

“Saloma. Get on the radio now!” shouted Gabe.

She flicked the radio on and repeated a code as Gabe read it to her. “887-6359-271, Newcastle. Do you copy? Over. I repeat 887-6359-271, Newcastle. Over.”

The computerised “Emergency,” voice continued to shout over the radio and the red dot got ever closer to our position.

“Confirmed,” said the voice on the radio as the missile behind us rose up higher and higher into the air until it exploded far above us. Debris rained down around us, small chunks of metal from the explosion just missing the sides of the helicopter. “Don’t leave it so late next time.”

We breathed a sigh of relief. Gabe would later ring his mystery texter back, who explained to us all she had seen our position rise by ten thousand feet and she figured we might need an airspace code. It seemed even Gabe was surprised by just how good a hacker she was.

We flew over the main train station and the large gates that led into the city. Somewhere down there my motorbike sat in a giant garage unlikely to be seen again. A remnant of my old life. Just another thing that I’d lost.

As I looked around the helicopter at my new allies I hoped I wouldn’t have to lose them too.

THIRTY-SEVEN

Emmie Keyes

As the helicopter started to descend I wondered where we could be. Newcastle perhaps? That had been the destination Jill had given us. Although it seemed unlikely she would have said our real destination, in case Tobias found out about our flight later.

The wheels hit solid ground and I felt relieved. I'd definitely developed a fear of heights recently. One near death fall and a helicopter escape had put me off heights for life.

Gabe wheeled me out of the helicopter and I looked around. The first thing I saw was the food stand I had helped give power to earlier. The owner looked stunned that a helicopter had arrived in such a remote place and I was too. I tried to guess why we were back here, there surely couldn't be anything of use in such a damaged place.

I wondered if we were just making a quick stop off to meet Grace's contact for more fake documents but Gabe's statement of "Home sweet home," put an end to that theory.

As March pushed Grace out of the helicopter, Gabe spoke to me. "Emmie. This location is secret, ok? If you tell anyone about this place you are risking the lives of a lot of people."

I nodded, unsure exactly who I would tell. My best friend already worked for The Deck so there weren't many people I could run around screaming this too. Yet I still wasn't exactly sure what I'd be telling them about. A dodgy burger stand and a burnt out shopping centre? None of it seemed particularly worth protecting.

Saloma was handed another airspace code so she could get back into the city and we all thanked her for getting us here safely. "Wow. I wish my other passengers were so grateful," she said, as if saving the lives of fugitives was something she did every day. She flew off into the distance, probably hoping for her sake that she would never see us again.

Gabe pushed my chair towards the shopping centre and we had a good conversation. I put his earlier outbursts down to the extremity of the situation. He hadn't shot anyone, nor had he injured me so I was willing to write off his violence as that of a man affected by a war I had yet to see.

However when Grace and I were alone I would speak to her about it. If he was violent to her in any way then I would not be so forgiving.

We headed towards the shopping centre and the smell hit me. A damp smell, coupled with the sight of ash and debris made me feel sick again. "Are we going in there?" I asked, looking up at the triangular windows that hung perilously to the outside wall.

Gabe didn't reply; he simply pushed me inside, probably as that was the easiest way to answer my question. The centre itself was the most destroyed building I had ever been inside, and that was quite a challenge considering some of the locations in Smyth West. Every step Gabe took I felt like something could kill me.

Metal shutters hung down from the store fronts, their rusted metal spiralling outwards and waiting to cut visitors who strayed close to them. Shards of glass were loosely clinging to the ceiling and grains of metal flaked down on to our heads from their fixtures, taunting us that they could fall at any moment.

In amongst the decay was a glistening pillar of shiny metal unaffected by the fire of the elements that had destroyed this centre. Gabe entered a code on a keypad next to the large metal panel and the doors opened revealing an elevator that was every bit as pristine as the door that housed it.

"It can only fit two. You first Emmie," said Gabe. March took my chair from Gabe and pushed me into the elevator. I looked at Grace. Her smile said it was safe and I didn't resist.

As the door closed I realised I was probably about to enter the den of a terrorist group. Did this officially make me a terrorist now? Was I already one? The word 'terrorist' had taken on so many different meanings today that I didn't know what to believe any more. Maybe it was worth being seen as a 'terrorist' if it meant I could help stop something horrible from happening.

"It's ok Emmie. I trust these people with my life. They are good people," said March and I realised I trusted him too. He'd done so much for me today it was hard not to.

The door opened and I was greeted by an extremely tall man. "Hi I'm Chris and you must be Emmie."

He was wearing a grey army uniform with a Jack of Clubs playing card around his neck that was held in place by a metal chain. He reached out his palm and opened it to reveal a playing card with the back facing me. The back of the card was a green colour, with diamonds, hearts, spades and clubs interlocking to form a 'D' symbol.

I turned the card over, to find it was a 'King of Clubs' card. "That's your profile in the group," said Chris. "If we need to communicate with you in private then we will contact you as the King of Clubs. It means we can operate in secret so all emails are safe."

"Does that mean I'm your boss?" I joked, knowing that a King was far more important than a Jack.

"Kind of," he replied. "Cards indicate how important someone is to the group and who we need to protect. A King card is the most important of all and anyone of a lower rank should do everything they can to protect you."

It all seemed overwhelming but strangely comforting to know I would be protected.

Behind Chris I could see The Deck's base. It was a concrete structure with white panels inside it that had been spray painted with the different suits of a deck of cards. Aside from the spray paint, decorations were sparse and interior design was clearly not a concern of theirs.

What was clear was that the base itself was huge, easily the size of the centre I had walked through and I could see the room went far back and then spiralled off into other rooms that were divided by white temporary walls and red or black doors.

Before I could assess the room any further I felt an intense pain in my stomach and screamed out in agony.

"I need the medical room now!" shouted March.

"Ok I'll get a support team ready," replied Chris.

"No. I have no idea what they did to Emmie and I don't want to risk anyone else. I'll operate on her alone."

His courage was impressive. I couldn't tell if he cared for me or simply for the rest of The Deck but the sentiment was nice all the same.

The medical room looked like something out of a murder scene. It was a completely concrete room on all sides apart from a single temporary wall. The floor was covered in plastic sheeting, presumably for easier cleaning and the bed was nothing more than a slab of metal with four legs and three thick green towels placed on top of each other.

The medical equipment looked no better than the machines we had in Smyth West and they were mostly hand me downs that we'd found abandoned from other towns. There was a heart rate monitor that was upside down apart from the digital display which appeared to be the right way up. March moved a glass light over my head, which had a large crack in it and which made a horrible creaking sound as he moved it around. The Deck was not a state of the art operation.

Despite these problems this was the safest I had felt all day. As March administered the anaesthetic and I fell to sleep I knew he'd take good care of me. The last image I saw was March's smiling face.

THIRTY-EIGHT

Emmie Keyes

I don't know if it was the mixture of anaesthetic and morphine or simply the longing I'd felt that day for family to talk to but the dreams I remembered from my time asleep were all about my mother.

We had never met her but Will and I had kept pictures of her with us for as long as I could remember. She had died in childbirth, on one of the worst days in history. On that day over one hundred and twenty five million people had died and that was but a small part of the final death toll in the 20 Day Siege.

My mother was one of the last people to die on the last day of the Siege, an event that would take over a billion lives.

It felt so wrong that an event I had no control over had taken my mother from me. The people who had caused her death had been sent to jail or hunted down by the public. Justice had been served but it wasn't enough for my father. He blamed himself for her death and never really got over it.

He moved us from London out to the small town of Smyth West. It was his way of protecting us from what the other large cities would become; sprawling masses of reallocated population and stark contrasts of wealth and poverty. For him Smyth West represented a fresh start and a chance to get away from his past.

Yet it wasn't enough. We lived with my father until our sixteenth Birthday but by then it was clear that he would not be able to come to terms with what had happened to his wife and our mother. On the day he left he told Will to look after me and explained that he could no longer live with what he had done. He simply could not forgive himself for what had happened. It wasn't his fault but her death changed him.

Although we were saddened and it took us years to get over it, we knew he had changed long before the day he left. My earliest memory of him was at five years old watching him in his study with newspaper cuttings all over the walls. They told the events of the 20 Day Siege. One word was prominent across all of the cuttings and was circled in red by my father.

The Separationists.

In school or at least the large church hall in the centre of Smyth West where people shared knowledge, we had learnt about the deaths that occurred over those grim three weeks.

The first death was accidental. Despite the carnage they would unleash, the Separationists were not terrorists. They were scientists who believed that breaking the Tethers between twins

would reduce casualties. It didn't seem fair to them for someone to die if their twin died of an illness. They hoped that in cases where a twin was critically ill they could find a way to keep the healthy twin alive.

It was a noble idea and having survived the death of a twin I could now relate to what they wanted to achieve. Their research had ceased twenty one years ago but I did wonder if they played a role in my current unique situation.

On the third of June the Separationists made their breakthrough. They were able to isolate the frequency that Tether events used to transfer the emotions and sensations between twins. Their plan was a simple one. If they could replace the frequency with a different sound, it could break the Tether whilst allowing both subjects to live and die independently.

They aimed to test the theory on a small sample of people and not wanting to harm the core population they gained permission to run the study in Javon Prison, which was located in the heart of London.

The World Health Group reviewed their preliminary study and approved the experiment. Ten Government officials poured through their pre study data and gave them the go ahead. This was not the work of mad scientists operating on the edges of the law. This was a fully sanctioned study with good intentions.

Yet it was not meant to be.

They isolated the frequency used by Tethers and added a small noise on the same wavelength designed to block it out. They tested it by using just enough noise to affect the participant in the room with them. Yet as soon as the quiet noise reached the same frequency as Tether events it drastically increased in volume and the researchers were killed instantly by the sound.

Scientists analysed these events over many years and found that the sound did break the Tether between people but it did not replace it as intended, therefore killing them instantly.

Prison guards tried to enter the room to stop the frequency but as soon as they approached the room the sound killed them too. Whilst power was stopped to the entire prison, effectively disabling the device, the signal was already out there and now it had started there was no one to stop it.

Even a desperate effort to contain the signal via a controlled explosion did nothing to stop it. Half of the prison was destroyed, crashing around the device but the signal was out there in the ether growing all on its own.

It was a crisis of epic proportions. The sound wave should have stopped itself instantly but it continued to grow louder and spread. There was no way to block the waves from travelling. Within two hours the prison was evacuated, with those who were not quick enough dying in the process.

Within eight hours the centre of London had to be evacuated as the sound grew in force.

It continued to grow, pulsing outwards and for every person it killed their twin would also die. Within four days the entire City of London had been evacuated. People stayed with family in other cities and hoped they could return home. At this point, the death toll stood at fifteen thousand but it was nothing compared to what was to come next.

The sound wave splintered as it emerged from London and travelled out across the globe, piggybacking its way through telecommunications networks. With no warning people started dying in every city of the world. Every scientist tried to find a solution and ultimately it was a team led by Tobias Zen who would save everyone.

He was only thirty but he had worked with Tethers for years and had a good understanding of how they worked. He and his team built a prototype that could block the wave and tested it in Birmingham. For the next day no one in Birmingham died, whilst other cities continued to feel the force of the sound wave.

It was enough to convince the Governments of the world to proceed. Tobias built a larger scale prototype and successfully blocked the wave. This prototype would turn into the large circular towers that were built around London. They emitted a high frequency noise to trap the signal in the city and pull back the waves that had escaped. The UK's greatest city was cordoned off from the world and it remains that way today with a weak signal still lingering on trapped behind the barrier. The only people who live there now are those who don't fear death and who have nothing else to live for.

The remaining population of London relocated and the city of Birmingham grew to the behemoth it is now.

Sadly for my mother the solution came too late. She died two months before she was due to give birth to us, minutes before the solution was turned on. If she'd been able to survive a few moments more then she'd be alive now.

My father had been part of the team that worked on the solution with Tobias, which is why he could never escape her death. Had he worked faster and harder he felt he could have saved her. The truth was she was just unlucky. Will and I only survived because she was in the hospital for scan when she died. Despite all of the chaos in the world a doctor had saved us. A wonderful, kind doctor.

As I lay there reminiscing I knew that another kind doctor would save me now. March.

THIRTY-NINE

Mr King

“Sir your nine o’clock meeting is here.”

Mr King usually liked hearing from his secretary. She had a sweet voice and it reminded him of girls he had dominated in his youth. Today however was not a day he liked hearing her voice. It had been one month since he had been saved from financial ruin and now his financial backer wanted to collect.

“Ok. Send him up,” said Mr King.

He’d heard nothing from his backer for a month. Beyond an initial meeting request, he didn’t know what to expect. All he could rely on was his history with the man and that didn’t bode well.

Tobias Zen stood in the lift as it ascended to the top floor. He knew Mr King was a showman like himself and what head of a large company wouldn’t want the top floor office? *All the better to spy on your rivals, he thought.*

He had planned this meeting for a long time and knew that Mr King would never meet with him under different circumstances. He had encouraged the board of directors to invest and he knew that his little ‘death stunt’ would cause the share price to fall and Mr King to panic. He had known Mr King for a long time and this was exactly the reaction he expected. It was all going to plan.

Their meeting started rather formally whilst the two men hid their true intentions. Discussions were had about the growth of Birmingham, the economy and Government policy. The conversation was dull and mundane but was merely a chance for the men to understand each other. The words were not important, instead they watched body language for tells and tried to determine what the other person wanted.

Tobias knew exactly what he wanted but he enjoyed watching Mr King sweat. He enjoyed toying with the man and was more than happy to wait before he unveiled his request.

For Mr King this proved frustrating and tore away at him like a young boy eager for it to get to Christmas day.

“Look Tobias, let’s cut the bullshit,” said Mr King as he slammed his hands on the table midway through a discussion about resuming trade with Europe.

“I know you are here for a specific request. Your invitation said all I had to do was listen to your request and then you would go,” Mr King knew that invitation well. He had read it over and over again every day since it arrived. “So tell me.”

Tobias waited for a second. "Ok," he said. "But I'd rather show you," he opened his briefcase to reveal a large map. On the map were the locations of every single one of Mr King's telecommunications stations. Every receiver and distributor in the world was located in blue dots.

He was stunned. "How did you get this? I demand to know!" Mr King was shocked to find even stations he had never publicly dedared were listed on the map.

"Please. This was child's play. You aren't the most secretive man. Although I especially like how you have receivers located near to every embassy in the world. It's almost as if you wanted to spy on the Government. I'm fairly sure that is treason."

"If it's blackmail you want then...."

"Blackmail?" Tobias laughed. "We all know that I have had more than enough to blackmail you for over twenty years. The world never did find out who funded the Separationists experiments did they?"

Mr King looked at Tobias and wondered how much longer he would have to live under the shadow of his past. Tobias had held this information over him for so long. He had used it before to manipulate Mr King to fund his early experiments and to start TethTech and now he was using it again for another purpose.

"I refuse. Whatever you want, I refuse. You can't manipulate me with that information forever," said Mr King.

"Why not?" replied Tobias. "It's as true today as it was back then. You funded the experiments that killed a billion people. Why can't I hold that over you forever? It will never cease to be true."

"It was an accident! No one expected the experiment to go that way."

"You tried to play God! You tried to separate the Tethers that bind the world together. What did you expect to happen? If I hadn't been there to clean up your mess. If I hadn't made so many sacrifices that day then what? Every single human being on the planet would have died. Because of you. So yes, I do feel that you owe me, and I'm here to collect."

Mr King knew Tobias would never forgive him. He had made a lot of enemies over the 20 Day Siege and it was something he couldn't move past. "Fine. Turn the evidence in. Tell the Government that I funded the whole thing. Tell them that I've been spying on Government officials for years. Tell them everything. But I won't be your slave for the rest of my life."

"Are you sure?" asked Tobias. "If I do that then your company will fall. Everything your family has worked decades for will be destroyed and your company will go bankrupt."

"It hasn't been my company for a long time," Mr King thought back to how the directors had bullied him into buying shares and how they treated him like their puppet. "The second I'm tarnished in the scandal the board will disown me and the company will continue under another puppet. We are too big to fail. We have a hand in all of the world's telecommunications. Do you really think the Government will be prepared to lose that? I refuse."

Tobias smiled. This was exactly the response he had expected. Exactly the response he had hoped for. "Very well. I hope you like prison and becoming a public hate figure. I will go public with this information. Not today, not even this week but one day when you aren't expecting it I will reveal your secrets to the world and they will see you for what you really are. "

"You know I could expose you too!"

"For what? Being a hero? Saving the world? You'll only implicate yourself if you expose what really happened that day," Tobias removed a small grey device from his pocket that emitted a high pitched screeching sound. "And just in case you were recording this conversation, I've just destroyed any listening devices. Have a good life Glenn."

Glenn King ripped the tape recorder from under his desk. Sure enough the footage was gone. He tossed it to the floor and put his head in his hands. He had hoped Tobias was bluffing.

Tobias Zen strolled out of Mr King's office knowing that he had got the right result. The blueprints were just showmanship. What he really wanted was for Glenn to panic and that is exactly what had happened.

He had never planned to have an alliance with Mr King. His real plan was about to begin. Tobias stepped into an elevator and retrieved a small nail sized object from his briefcase. He slipped the object onto the elevator control panel and watched as it whizzed into life.

"Sir," a voice came through on the intercom to Mr King. "We have received word that Tobias Zen's elevator has gotten stuck. We are sending engineers to the floor now."

Mr King didn't want Tobias to spend a second longer in his tower than he had to.

Tobias shared that wish but he had work to do. His elevator continued to descend whilst the nail sized device gave out a fake signal so it looked like he was stuck.

He quickly reached the twelfth floor; the mainframe room for Mr King's telecommunications empire. A 9pm meeting was no coincidence. He knew security would be lighter at this time and that the engineer manning the mainframes would now be trying to fix a broken lift.

Tobias slipped inside and removed a USB stick from his pocket. He inserted it into one of the computers on the mainframe and downloaded two gigs of data onto the server. When Tobias was finished he walked back into the elevator and went back to the floor he had been 'stuck' on.

He had to wait fifteen minutes for the maintenance man to eventually free him. During that time he thought about how his little virus would change the world and how Mr King had already given him everything he needed. He would still expose the man but not quite yet.

"We are so sorry Mr Zen," said the maintenance man.

"That's quite alright," replied Tobias. He took another elevator down to the ground floor with the maintenance man and left the building.

Tobias looked up into the sky at the satellite dishes that surrounded Mr King's tower. "Soon you will work for me," he said silently to them.

FORTY

Emmie Keyes

Three months had passed since I'd arrived at The Deck headquarters and my recovery had been slow. The TethTech team who operated on me had damaged my internal organs and it took time for me to regain my strength and for my stomach to heal.

Grace had an even worse time than me. Although her back wasn't broken it was badly bruised and she had to have physiotherapy several times a week. It was over a month before she could stand up on her own and even longer before she could walk.

Today was the first day in three months we had felt alright. We'd both been through hell but it felt like we had so much more to do. One thing was clear, both of us wanted to stop Tobias. I wanted to get vengeance for Will - and for the operation - and Grace wanted to get payback for Gabe. We joked we were the Vengeance Girls.

Despite our hatred for the man, I had no intention of killing Tobias, at least not the next time I met him. There were so many questions I had to ask him. Most of all I wanted to know why he had operated on me. All March had found inside me was a tracking chip but that was smaller than my finger. It certainly didn't justify my belly being cut open.

At The Deck base I'd been subjected to several tests to check my blood levels and body chemistry and everything came back normal. Either he hadn't had chance to finish his experiment or there was something lurking deeper in me that I had yet to discover.

I shook off that thought. I trusted March had done all he could and it was his visits during my recovery that helped bring me back to full strength. He had checked on me every day. His support had been amazing and he had brought me back to full health.

On the day he told me nothing was wrong and that Tobias hadn't hurt me long-term I was so overwhelmed with gratitude that I kissed him. At the time I wondered if it was just the drugs and the emotion of the moment but over the next few weeks I felt my feelings for him grow stronger as he stayed for me by my side.

It was the first kiss of many that we would share. What started out as just a spontaneous kiss evolved into a relationship and he was my rock throughout my recovery.

On the one month anniversary of our first kiss he travelled to Birmingham using the Skin 2.0 and brought me back my motorbike and another present. It was Pixie the dog. She had completely healed and her fur had grown back. She was the nicest present I had ever been given. Pixie slept on my bed with me every night and kept me company when the pain was at its worst.

There had been one more vital event during my three months of recovery. When I finally had the strength to sit up I had watched the tape on my brother's DualCam. Gabe had tried to make me watch it sooner but I refused. It was the last memories I had of my brother and I wanted to be the first one to see them on my own terms.

I rested the DualCam on the side of the bed and turned it on. The two orange lights on it turned into dual rainbows that cascaded across the screen creating a clear image. As I flicked through the footage I saw events that had occurred in the last year of my life. Almost all of the footage was time I had spent with Rex. I hadn't realised it at the time but whenever I spent a long time with Rex it must have been creating a Tether event for Will.

It was no surprise I felt a lot of love for Rex and Rufus. When my father had left they had been the most supportive people in my life. My father had given me some money and I used it to buy my apartment which is where I met the two brothers. I'd been a wreck when I arrived but they had been there to make me laugh and cheer me up along the way. I owed them a lot and it dawned on me as I watched the footage that I hadn't spoken to them in over three months. I hoped they hadn't presumed the worst had happened to me.

Other key events whizzed by as I fast forwarded through the footage. Day after day of my life moved by in a blur but there was nothing I hadn't seen. Nothing I hadn't known before. As I reached the last significant event, passing my police officer's exam, the camera showed only minutes of footage remained. The clock reached zero and that was the story of a year of my life finished.

There was nothing useful. I wondered why my brother had wanted me to have the camera. Perhaps it had been nothing more than a kind gesture to help me remember who I really was. Now Will was dead he could have simply wanted me to try and move forward with my life. Although that would mean Will knew I would survive. Which was equally confusing.

I set the footage to rewind at the highest speed. A year of my life went by in reverse and as the blurs grew faster the screen turned to nothing but static. Once the highest speed was reached green lines started to appear and the background static turned to black.

Will had left me a message.

The lines formed hundreds of numbers. Far more than I could remember. Before I could write them all down the camera stopped rewinding and was back to the start. I forwarded and rewound the footage over and over until I had written down the entire sequence.

The numbers meant nothing to me. I scrolled through my phone but I'd never called anyone with those digits. The code itself was too long to be a phone number anyway. I considered other possibilities such as map references, book numbers and barcodes but I didn't have the resources to even look at those ideas.

So I decided to be honest with The Deck and tell them what I had seen. If Will had intended for me to understand the numbers then he must have known I'd need help. Perhaps he had always intended for me to meet with The Deck.

They disappeared with the box for days as I continued to rest and recuperate. Two weeks later I met Jill for the first time.

“Hi Emmie. I’m Jill or you can call me the Seven of Diamonds.”

“Hi. I’ll stick with Jill,” I replied.

“Haha, no problem. Most people do.”

“It’s nice to meet you. Thanks for saving my life ... three times,” I said.

“I think it was four times. But who’s counting?” she replied. “We’ve finally figured out the code on the DualCam. If you amplify the numbers out across wavelength, frequency and amplitude they produce a sequence of notes that creates a sound. Yet we’ve seen that sound before and that’s what worries me.”

“What sound is it?” I asked.

“Well it’s the total opposite to the sound wave that killed a billion people,” replied Jill. “During the 20 Day Siege, a sound was played that broke Tethers and killed people instantly but this noise is different. It’s the exact opposite in terms of structure and sound. Whatever its purpose is, it’s certainly not designed to kill. At least that’s what we hope.”

“So can we play it?” I wondered out loud.

“Sadly not. The boss doesn’t want to risk it. The last time a sound wave was played like this it did far too much damage. However, we’ve tapped into every listening device on the planet thanks to our backer. If anyone uses the sound or even tests it then we will know and we’ll be able to stop them.”

“How?”

“That I don’t know yet but we’ll be ready when the time comes.”

Since that day Jill had worked nonstop to find answers, while Grace and I had recovered and we hoped we were ready.

FORTY-ONE

Tobias Zen

Tobias knew it was time. He had waited for this day for years and now he could lay his past to rest whilst taking control of his future.

He stared at the glow of his computer screen. Fifty seven documents were open. They connected Mr King to the Separationists and proved he had funded their experiments. It was enough to destroy him and Tobias was ready to push the button.

Tobias checked everything was in place. He had bank records and private emails. It would be plenty. He zipped up the files and added them to an email which was sent out to every major news journalist in the world. It was 6:00AM and the sun rose on what Tobias knew would be a new world.

Mr King had known this day would come. Not just since his meeting with Tobias five months prior but even since the 20 Day Siege. He had done his best to hide the truth but Tobias had too much information on him. As he stepped into the office he wondered if today would be his last day as a free man.

Mr King looked out of his top floor window at the TethTech building. "I gave you everything," he said.

"I'm sorry sir but there are men downstairs to see you," one of his guards stood in the doorway to his office.

"Tell them to wait."

"I don't think that will be possible. There are journalists, police and the Board of Directors."

Mr King froze at the last part. It was the Board of Directors he feared the most. If they were here with the police then they must know the truth. He opened up a search engine and typed in his name. As he saw the top results he knew that it was over.

"Glenn King Funded The Biggest Terrorist Attack In History," read the top story.

He would be lucky to make it out of the building alive. An angry mob circled around the base of his tower. His staff were evacuated through the back exit and were allowed to leave after checks had been made to ensure Mr King was not amongst them.

There was no escape. "Send them up," said Mr King, as he prepared to face his fate. All he wanted was another week of freedom. Another day of denial. But that wasn't to be.

Tobias read the news stories with glee. He received an alert on his monitor every time a news story was posted with Mr King's name and he read every one of them with a big grin.

Mr King had been removed from his position of power and the company had been shut down for the day whilst the board appointed a new leader. The plan had gone perfectly and Tobias was ready to make his next move.

He sat down in a large leather seat and placed a headset on. Two clamps moved in around his chest and he closed his eyes. When he opened them two orange pools had formed in his eyes and he was now truly ready for change.

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Emmie Keyes

The alarm rang out through The Deck's hideout.

"It's the sound. We have the sound," said Jill running from room to room and waking each of us up.

"What?" I asked.

"The frequency we found on the DualCam. It's been detected and we're running a trace on the location now."

If she had found the signal then that meant that another Siege could be about to happen. Only this time it was an entirely new sound wave. Its effects were not known and that worried us even more.

"Ok everyone," said Gabe "It's time to do what we prepared you for. Grace is the Skin 2.0 ready for our disguises?"

Grace nodded as Jill dashed back to the computer panel. "Ok. Let's see where you are you sneaky sound."

She rapidly tapped a pencil against the desk as she watched the computer zoom in. When the location was revealed she dropped the pencil to the floor and raised a hand to her mouth.

"Grace!" she shouted. "Turn off the Skin 2.0."

"But don't we need disguises?" I asked.

"No," replied Jill. "It's located in a place no-one sane would ever go."

"You mean?" asked Gabe.

"Yep. London."

FORTY-TWO

Emmie Keyes

I had never seen the original capital city before, no one my age had. For twenty one years the city had been sealed off and a quarantine had been issued. Since the 20 Day Siege, London had been a place no one dared visit.

Rumours said that the sound wave which killed all those people still echoed throughout the air in the city. It was only through the technology Tobias had created that the sound wave continued to be held in place successfully. In all this time scientists had yet to find a way to block the signal completely or perhaps they had given up, aware that the capital city could never be the same.

This meant travelling to London was very dangerous. If anyone were exposed to the signal for a long time, it would start to eat away at their Tether and both they and their twin would die. If a new sound wave had been created that was similar, then it's likely it would have the same effects.

"Now I know why you need me," I said. "It's so you can disable the sound wave. Anyone else would die if they went to London for a long time. As I don't have a Tether I can't be killed that way."

"That's correct," replied Gabe. "However there's something we haven't told you about The Deck."

I looked at him with anxious fear.

"We were all born without twins and without Tethers."

"But, that's impossible," I replied.

"In theory, yes," said Gabe. "We were all born on the same day during the 20 Day Siege and our twins died before we had chance to bond with them. Somehow we were able to survive without them."

"That's not right. I've met Grace's twin," I said.

"You mean Kenan?" asked Grace. "He's right over there."

A slim short man came over. It was someone I had seen countless times before. "Kenan?"

"It's me Emmie. Grace and I never had twins so we pretended for each other,"

"But why?"

“When we were children it was because we were afraid of being different,” said Grace. “As we grew older we realised how different we were and that there was a risk we would be experimented on. So we kept the secret hidden and kept the lie going.”

“That’s why The Deck was started,” said Gabe. “To keep those of us without twins safe and to get revenge on the man who took our twins away.”

“That’s also why I joined,” said Grace. “I didn’t want to be a victim of something I couldn’t control.”

“So how many of you are there?” I asked.

“In the UK we’ve only ever found the twenty of us without a twin, although people don’t exactly advertise the fact that they’re freaks. Around the world? Who knows,” said Gabe.

“Am I like you? Is that how I survived?”

“Honestly? We have no idea. Everyone in The Deck was born without a twin but you had one you were connected to. There’s something about you that exists in no-one else Emmie.”

“How do you even know all this? You only met me a few months ago.”

“The data that March provided us with from TethTech gave us everything we needed to know. Tobias had been tracking the brainwaves of everyone during Tether events using DualCam’s given to all his employees.”

I prayed Will had not been involved in this.

“Your brain has a unique signature,” he continued. “Your brainwaves are twice as strong as any other human, including all of us. It is as if you have a Tether inside yourself, as well as the one you have to Will. When Grace told me you had survived Will’s death then I knew it had to be true. You can survive any signal, even this new one.”

“And you knew all of this, yet did nothing?” I looked at Gabe disgusted.

“We did everything! We have always tried to keep you safe.”

“And my brother?” I screamed.

“I’m sorry. He was never the priority. You were the one we needed.”

It was the last straw. I’d known The Deck had secrets but knowing they could have saved Will. Knowing they had been watching me. It was all too much. Gabe tried to stand in my way but I dashed past him. I don’t think anyone expected me to leave but I wasn’t going to stay here. I needed time to think.

“Don’t be stupid,” shouted Gabe. “How long do you think you can survive out there without us? Tobias will find you in a matter of hours.”

“Then I’d better make the most of them,” I ran towards the exit doors, darting past Grace’s chambers. All I could focus on was running.

I reached the double doors with my shoulder held out and tried to knock them open. They didn't budge. I looked to my side and saw a control panel. It was locked and looked like the only way out of the building. There was no help from March this time. He wanted me to stay and had no intention of letting me go.

Gabe caught up to me and raised a gun at my head. "You can't leave," It was the second time he had threatened me with a weapon.

"Let me out of here. I won't be anyone's puppet," I replied. "You won't shoot, I'm too important."

"Don't be so sure," he said as he continued to aim at me.

Will he really fire on me? I wondered. I was trapped. The door wouldn't open and there was no escape. Whether it was Tobias or Gabe, they both wanted to manipulate me to their own end.

"Fine. Do it," I taunted. He wouldn't shoot. I couldn't stop the signal if I was dead.

We stared at each other as other members of The Deck looked on. We were both too far gone now. He couldn't back down and seem weak in front of his team and I didn't want to submit.

"If that's what you want," said Gabe as he released the safety from his gun. "It's a real shame. You had so much potential."

He started to pull the trigger and before he could finish Grace dived from behind him knocking him to the floor. "What the hell are you doing to my friend!?" she shouted "I thought you were on my side!"

Grace tossed me her keycard. "Run Emmie. Run!"

I grabbed it and swiped it through the keycard panel, opening the door. No one else tried to stop me. As the door closed I could hear Gabe and Grace fighting. Their romance was clearly over.

I dashed out of the shopping centre and found my bike parked in the storage room in a women's clothing store. Just where March had told me it would be. I started to wonder if this was another one of his small favours and if he was still loyal to me.

Whatever the case it was clear lines were being drawn within The Deck and that they were not the perfect team they had been made out as.

I checked my phone before mounting my bike to find over one hundred and sixty missed calls. They were mostly from Rex. He had called me every day since I had disappeared, some days more than once. It seemed that he hadn't given up hope. Even when he hadn't heard from me for three months.

I jumped on my bike to ride back to him and sent him a text message; "Hide and seek?"

FORTY-THREE

Grace Wilkerson

“What were you thinking?” shouted Grace, as she forced her knee into Gabe’s crotch.

“I couldn’t lose her,” replied Gabe through gritted teeth.

March emerged from his lab. “What the hell is going on?” he prised Grace from Gabe. Chris came over, grabbing Gabe and holding his arms.

“He tried to shoot Emmie,” shouted Grace. She looked disgusted by what he had done.

“I wouldn’t have fired! I couldn’t allow her to leave!” said Gabe.

“So you thought pulling a gun would be the best option?”

“Three years of research and planning will be ruined if we can’t get her back. If Tobias finds her first things will be even worse. What else could I do?” replied Gabe as he clenched his fist in frustration.

“It’s all ruined now anyway,” said Jill. “Emmie was our only hope for stopping that signal. Unless you know of another person like her?”

Everyone looked at Gabe for an answer. He looked back at his team and realised that no one, not Grace, March, Jill, Chris or anyone else could help. Everything relied on Emmie and he had allowed anger to ruin their chances.

“What happened to you?” asked Grace. “You know violence is only necessary in extreme scenarios. You taught us that. Yet Emmie told me that you tried to shoot Faye and now this is the second time you have threatened Emmie.”

“Violence is necessary now. I’ve seen what Tobias can do and I’ve seen the cruel human nature we have to stop by any force necessary,” said Gabe.

“What did they do to you in that cage?”

He stayed silent and refused to explain anything that had happened.

“Then fine. I’m going to get Emmie back but I need you to get yourself together. We can’t afford for you to lose it again. She is my friend first and I will protect her,” said Grace.

Gabe nodded and waved his arms at the rest of his team as they got back to work. Grace grabbed another keycard from March who handed her a new phone “You’ll need this,” he said.

Grace didn't feel right leaving Gabe after what had happened. There was definitely something not right with him but right now she had a duty to her friend and to everyone in the world.

Grace knew that no matter what Emmie wanted, she would have to trust The Deck. For the good of everyone.

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Rex T Jules

Rex stared at his phone in disbelief. *"Emmie?"*

He hadn't heard from her for months and he was starting to think he never would again. When he heard that Vlad had escaped from the Smyth West jail, he knew Emmie would be under threat again and he had been in no position to help her.

The doctors had managed to save one of his lungs but the other one had been too badly damaged and had completely shut down.

Medical care in Smyth West wasn't as good as the rich could afford but the doctors did what they could for him. They removed his damaged lung and made sure he'd be able to live with the other. So long as he didn't subject himself to a high amount of physical activity he'd be fine and could still live a good life. Admittedly a shorter one than he would have otherwise.

Where his lung had been removed he had a scar, as well as several marks across his chest from the knife Vlad had struck him with. Those marks were a reminder of what he had done for Emmie and how he had tried to save her. He hoped she had used the extra time wisely.

He smiled at the thought that she could still be alive but dreaded that it could be a trap, especially given recent events.

After three weeks in hospital a tall man dressed in a long black leather jacket had come to visit Rex. When Rex saw the man he reached for the emergency call button but his hand was stopped.

The tall man was the spitting image of Vlad but his face was different. He had none of the scars that clouded Vlad's face but the rest of his features were almost identical. He wore sunglasses so Rex was unsure if he had orange eyes.

"I just want to talk," said the tall man, as he released Rex's hand. Rex pulled his hand back to his chest and stared at the man with fear. He looked at the man's waist to see if he had a concealed belt of knives but there were no obvious places it could be. Whatever this man's weapon was it was well hidden.

"Ok," replied Rex. "Talk."

"Three weeks ago you wasted my time. You told my brother that Emmie was in London and yet I searched and searched for hours and found nothing. Do you know how valuable my time is?"

You wasted four hours of my life. That's 240 minutes I will never, ever, ever get back. Time is a valuable commodity Rex and you took it from me."

Rex stared at the tall man. *Great, another psychopath, he thought.*

"You took time from me and it would only be fair if I took it back," said the tall man as he moved in closer to Rex.

"Yet I see you have already paid the price. A very, very, high price, for your deception," the tall man opened Rex's shirt, to reveal his scar. "One lung left. If you live a healthy life then in a best case scenario you'll have only lost ten years from your life. That's 3,653 days. 67,672 hours. 5,260,320 minutes and many, many, more seconds you have lost. I'd say that's more than fair isn't it?"

"It was worth it," replied Rex, without really thinking.

"How so? The way I see it you have lost far, far more time than I. What could you possibly have gained to make such a sacrifice worthwhile?"

"I saved someone I love. That is worth any amount of time," replied Rex, thinking about what he had done for Emmie.

The tall man laughed. "Really? You think you have saved her? She may be very, very far away but we are so, so close to catching her. When we do then all that time you gave will have been oh, so, so wasted. " he backed away from Rex and stood tall once again.

"I hope you will remember this lesson and remember it well," he said. "If you waste my time or my brother's time again then we will make you pay it back in kind. Remember, it will be a very, very hefty price."

He left Rex alone to ponder his warning and to live in fear for the next few months. He now had two psychopaths watching him. *What did you do Emmie?* he wondered.

Now Rex looked at his phone wondering if this was a test from Vlad and his twin. He couldn't take the chance that it wasn't. If Emmie was alive he had to see her. It was worth the risk. He called Rufus to explain what had happened. They knew exactly what her cryptic message meant and the two of them travelled to meet her.

FORTY-FOUR

Vlad Givik

Two shadowy figures sat in a blue saloon car outside of Rex's house. They had been watching him for weeks knowing that he would lead them to Emmie. Vlad and the tall man watched as Rex and Rufus hopped on a motorbike and rode away from his home. They followed behind making sure not to be seen.

One hundred miles away Tobias Zen said to himself "Time to check in."

He sat back in the chair and placed a head set on. Around him were lines of computers and row upon row of turned out lights. He closed his eyes and two lights turned on from one of the computers. Two LED's pulsed like a heartbeat, each one at a slightly different pace.

Vlad and the tall man's eyes turned to orange as Tobias took over their bodies. They could still think for themselves but he was in control of them now. The transition was seamless and they continued to drive now under the control of Tobias.

"Hello boss," replied Vlad, showing a small element of control. "You could have killed us you know."

Tobias used his connection to tweak a nerve in Vlad's brain. The pain was enough for him to get the message very quickly.

As Tobias sat in his chair he controlled the two of them separately. His thoughts were interpreted via one of the computers which separated them and gave Vlad and the tall man a separate set of tasks. To make things easier for him Tobias had left them with some self-control so they could do mundane tasks like driving for themselves but if he wanted to he could completely control their every action.

For the two twins who loved to be in control, this was an interesting trade off. They were immortal whilst under Tobias' control but were less in control of their own life. It was a conflict that they talked about often when their thoughts were their own.

For now the arrangement served them well. Tobias had promised them that in a week's time he wouldn't need to take them over anymore but that he would keep the link alive. It would allow the twins to live forever. They would be invincible and free to control their own fate. It was something they both had dreamed of. Serving Tobias in the short term was a small price to pay for immortality.

Tobias watched through their eyes as they saw Rex and Rufus leave through the city boundary and head towards a large stone building. *A military base? What business would they have there?* he wondered.

Tobias ripped control from the tall man and stepped his foot on the brake pedal. The car stopped sharply and Rex disappeared in the distance. "What did you do that for?" asked Vlad. "We'll never catch them now."

Vlad heard a voice in his head. A thought that wasn't his own. "Leave."

"No! We have to stop them. I will kill them," replied Vlad, unwilling to give up his prey. He looked over at his brother and saw that he was not in control. His head hung downwards as he waited his next instruction.

"Leave or I will make you leave," stated Tobias in Vlad's head. Vlad was powerless and not happy.

The tall man sat upwards again and fixed his gaze on the road ahead.

"No Brother!" shouted Vlad. He tried to grab his brother's arms and stop him from turning around but Tobias amplified the pressure in his brain and took over his mind. He sat back in his seat and put his arms on his lap. Tobias had complete control of him now.

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Rex T Jules

"Did you have to bring that?" asked Rex, as he pointed to the frying pan in Rufus' hand.

"Oh yeah," replied Rufus. "This baby saved my life. There's no way I'm letting it go. It saved your life too bro. Never did get a thank you for that."

"I'm pretty sure I said thank you."

"Whatever. As long as you save my life one day then we can call it even," playfully teased Rufus.

"I'll try to remember that."

"So this is a trap right? The stabby twin and the time loving twin back to finish what they didn't do last time?"

"Probably but if it's really Emmie then we have to know if she is still alive. We still don't know what she's caught up in."

"That girl always was good at keeping secrets. What makes you think she'll need us? We're not soldiers. We're just one amazingly attractive guy, me and one slightly chubby brother, you. What can we do?"

"If she sent us a message then she needs us, that's more than enough for me," replied Rex as he parked the car.

“Then it’s enough for me too,” said Rufus as he looked out at the military base in front of them. It was a large stone bunker comprised of snaking walkways that had once housed tanks and jeeps. The army had used it as a large storage facility years ago but they no longer had a need for it. All military vehicles now patrolled the large cities and coasts twenty four hours a day on rotating shifts.

It made the country feel safer but really it was just a power play to stop other nations from invading the UK and taking our remaining wealth. Soldiers didn’t receive a salary but they got their food and living expenses paid for so for any of the have-nots it was an appealing prospect and many people applied. Most of them assumed war would never happen so their lives were fairly well looked after with minimal risk. Yet, they dreaded the day that war would eventually arise.

For Rex and Rufus this base was the perfect hiding place. When they had been growing up the two of them along with Grace and Emmie had come to this base to play hide and seek. It was only two hours walk from Smyth West and it provided a lot of entertainment for free.

So when Emmie had simply texted Rex the words “Hide and seek?” he had known exactly where to go. He hoped the message had been cryptic enough that no one else would find them either.

They entered the base through two large metal double doors which automatically turned on hundreds of overhead lights revealing several stone pathways that curved around the building in spiral patterns. They had learnt the path to the centre of the base over many years. Right, left, left, second right, over the walkway and then one more right.

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Emmie Keyes

As I saw them turn the last right they shouted to me. “Emmie!” Rufus was carrying a frying pan which seemed odd even for him.

I hugged them both and was happy to see familiar faces that I could trust. “I missed you both.”

“We thought you had died Emmie. What happened to you?” asked Rex.

“It’s a long story.”

“Well it’s a good thing we bought tea, a kettle and some marshmallows!” replied Rufus.

“Grace would hate you right now.”

“Well she’s not here is she?”

Whilst we made a small fire from some logs and boiled the tea, I told them what had happened with Will, Tobias and The Deck. I left out my relationship with March as I really wasn’t sure what I thought of him now but I told them about Grace’s deception with her fake twin.

“But you’ve always been able to trust Grace. She’s one of the good one’s surely?” asked Rufus, tucking it to a rapidly melting marshmallow.

“I did. I mean I do, I still do trust her. I just don’t know enough about The Deck and what they want from me. No matter what I do it seems like Tobias and The Deck want something from me.”

“Well duh! Everyone wants something from everyone. That’s life. All you can do is decide who you want to give yourself to. It sounds like The Deck want to save the world and Tobias wants to bring it to war. It’s a pretty easy choice Emmie.”

“He’s right.” said Rex, causing Rufus to let out a gasp in shock. “As much as I hate to say it my brother makes a good point. Whatever The Deck want, it sounds like if you do nothing then a lot of innocent people will die. There’s no way Grace would let anything bad happen to you.”

R&R had always spoken a lot of sense and I regretted not confiding in them earlier. They had proven to be the most truthful people of all and I should have trusted them in the first place.

“Loverboy here is right,” said Rufus. “Besides he practically died to save you.”

“What?” I asked, shocked.

Rex opened his shirt to reveal a large scar on one side of his chest. “I was attacked. The man you said attacked Will, the one with all of the knives, he attacked me. He wanted to know where you were so I lied to him so he wouldn’t find you.

It made sense. The men who had killed Will had the same orange eyes as Tobias’ experiments. If he knew I was alive, he would probably have sent them to look for me. Yet something didn’t add up about them. In all of his experiments that Tobias had shown, one of the twins sat stationary whilst he controlled the other. Yet when Will was attacked both men moved independently, despite presumably being related and having orange eyes. It was as if a third force was controlling them but I didn’t know how that could be possible.

“You didn’t have to do that,” I didn’t want anyone else to be hurt because of me. That’s why I’d never told R&R about the orange eyed men in the first place. Although I wanted to protect them they’d been hurt anyway. I felt horrible.

“It’s ok. I may have lost a lung but as long as I don’t put too much pressure on my body I’ll be ok,” said Rex. I couldn’t believe he would endure so much pain for me. We’d known each other a long time but his sacrifice touched me.

I hugged him and said I was sorry. He told me not to blame myself and that he’d do it again.

“How many lungs do you think you have?” Teased Rufus. “I doubt you could do it again. Anyway you missed the best bit,” Rufus started swinging the frying pan he had been carrying since I saw him. “I saved my bro and possibly the world.”

“I doubt you saved the world,” said Rex.

“Always so ungrateful!” replied Rufus and it was just like old times.

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Rex T Jules

In the town of Birmingham, on the twelfth floor of Mr King's tower a server turned on by itself. The virus Tobias had installed started to work its way into the system. No one was there to stop it. Mr King was being interviewed by the police and his staff were either at home or being subjected to questions. The virus was free to do whatever Tobias wanted it to do.

The server sent out a command deep into space where it was received by a satellite. The satellite tilted its angle slightly and pointed towards the south of the UK. A signal was beamed down back to the Earth, where it landed in the town on Smyth West.

In an army base.

On Rex's phone.

His phone emitted a small buzzing sound, which raised in volume until it was so loud Emmie, Rex and Rufus had to cover their ears. When the sound had passed Emmie looked at Rex and saw that he had changed. His eyes now pulsed a dark orange colour. She looked at Rufus and his eyes did the same.

"Hello Emmie," said Rex. "I knew I'd find you again."

"Tobias?"

Two more orange lights had been activated on the computers around Tobias. One for Rex and one for Rufus. Tobias looked out through the eyes of Rex at the girl he had let escape. He saw the fear in her eyes and it made him smile. It made him feel powerful.

FORTY-FIVE

Emmie Keyes

“Rex, if you can hear me you need to turn back,” I said. “Whatever is happening you can fight it.”

I hoped Rex had heard every word but if he had then he certainly wasn't reacting to them.

He dashed towards me and I ran into the twisting stone structure of the base. Rufus didn't follow us. The last I saw of him he was fiddling with a broken control panel.

“You can't do this Rex!” I shouted back at him. He'd always been faster than me and this was a race I knew I couldn't win. The stone corridors twisted around me as I dashed left and then right trying to find the exit.

As I worked my way around the maze he caught me and grabbed my shoulder yanking me backwards. I instinctively threw my other arm back to try and hit him but the pain was too much and my punch was not strong enough, causing him to barely flinch.

Still holding my shoulder he curled his other arm around my neck and squeezed tightly, cutting off my airflow and holding me in a headlock. “You are coming with me,” he shouted as he tried to drag me to the exit of the base. “I've got her,” he shouted to Rufus who did not reply.

Fearing for my safety I jabbed my arm back into Rex's chest. It hit him on the scarred side where he had lost a lung and he instinctively hunched over. When we'd attacked Kull earlier he hadn't felt our attacks so I was surprised to see a response but used the opportunity to run away.

I started to gain distance. Rex should have been able to catch me but I couldn't hear his footsteps. Something wasn't right. I started to wonder if I'd really hurt him and I slowed down my pace slightly to see if he would catch up but I could no longer see him. I stood still to try and hear him and it was only then I could hear his panting for breath.

I ran backwards towards Rex to check if he was ok. I didn't want to be responsible for another injury. As I turned a corner I saw him lying on the floor coughing up blood. His body had been pushed too hard. With one lung this had been a chase he couldn't win.

As I took another step closer to him the lights in the base flickered out. I suddenly realised that was what Rufus had been doing. He'd been trying to turn off the lights! There were no windows around the base and the stone walls blocked any outside light. We were sealed in complete darkness. All I could see were the orange glows in Rex's eyes. Somewhere in the darkness Rufus lurked as well, his orange eyes glowing just as fiercely.

“You can’t do this Rufus!” I shouted. “Your brother needs medical aid and I can’t help him in the dark,” I looked around to try and see a light source but there was none. I needed to escape to get help for Rex.

Ok Emmie. Lets’ see how well you’ve memorised the route, I thought to myself. When trying to escape earlier I had taken a few wrong turns so I tried to picture the route in my head. I couldn’t run fast or I’d run straight into a wall, so I quickly felt my way along the wall step-by-step.

A light flickered in front of me illuminating the corner ahead. *An exit?* I wondered but it was not. Rufus turned the corner holding a log that was on fire. He must have taken it from the fire we had made earlier for our tea. He and Rex now had the upper hand. They knew this base as well as I did and now they had the advantage of sight.

I turned backwards from Rufus and tried to find another way. I walked slowly along the side of the wall. I was scared to make any noise for fear that it would help them find me. My heartbeat grew faster as the terror set in. My two best friends wanted to kill me and I was powerless to stop them.

My best bet was to escape and hope that Tobias released them from his control. I didn’t know what to do after that. The Deck was starting to seem like my only option.

“Emmie!” shouted Rex.

“Emmie!” shouted Rufus.

Their voices then became one in unison. “Surrender now or I will destroy these bodies.”

He had to be bluffing. R&R meant nothing to him. Killing them wouldn’t help him. I hoped that The Deck could help me turn them back to normal. That was the only solution.

I turned a corner and then I saw him. Rex stood in front of me with a burning log. The fire was tickling his arm and lightly burning away at his wrist but he didn’t react to the pain in any way. The light from the fire made his orange eyes flicker menacingly. He was standing in front of the exit. There was no way around. I turned back to see a further glow of light approaching me. Rufus was closing in on me.

“It’s over,” They both spoke together. “Surrender and your friends won’t die.”

As I looked at Rex I could see he was straining. Chasing after me must have hurt his body. With only one lung he wouldn’t do well in another chase. I couldn’t keep putting this pressure on him.

“Ok,” I said. Rex threw his log to the floor and grabbed my arms behind my back. They walked me through the double doors and out into the light.

A dark blue saloon car was waiting for us with the engine running. Inside the car I saw two faces I hoped never to see again. Two orange eyed men sat in the car. Both of them had large and muscular frames with one of them sporting scars on his face.

I knew it was them instantly, the same men who had killed Will.

Rufus opened the door so suddenly that I felt like the hinges might break. Rex sat down in the back of the car and Rufus threw me inside where my head hit the cream leather seats with a dull thudding sound. Rex grabbed a clump of my hair in his fist and pulled me upwards. The stinging sensation from the pain made me start to cry.

Rufus sat next to me and he and Rex held my arms so tightly that I couldn't fight them. As the car drove away and I began to realise that no one was coming to help me the tears started to flow down my face.

FORTY-SIX

Grace Wilkerson

As Grace rode her motorbike towards the town of Smyth West she tried to think of places Emmie would go. She checked her home, the police station where Emmie had trained and some of her favourite shops. There were no clues.

In desperation she knocked on the door to Rex and Rufus' home in the hope they might know something. No-one answered. She tried both of their places of work and didn't find them there either.

It was as if Rex, Rufus and Emmie had disappeared. As she was about to give up her phone rang.

"Grace?" asked Jill.

"Yes it's me," she replied.

"We've managed to hack into Emmie's phone and we've found something that might help. The last message she sent was 'Hide and Seek?' Does that mean anything to you?"

"It does," replied Grace, knowing that there were only three other people who would know what the message meant. The same three people who were missing. She jumped on her bike and rode towards the abandoned army base hoping she would make it in time.

She reached the base and saw Emmie's bike waiting outside with another bike next to it. *I'm not too late*, she thought.

Dashing inside the large concrete structure she saw that the lights had been disabled and that the room was pitch black. Grace called out to Emmie, Rex, and Rufus but heard no reply. She removed her phone and turned on its torch. Grace dashed through the stone corridors looking for Emmie and hoped she wouldn't find a body.

She looked down every pathway and saw a glowing control panel in the middle of the base. In all her years of coming here she had never seen the panel activated before. On the screen glowed a view from outside of the base. Someone had activated a camera.

Grace pressed redial. "Jill?"

"There's no one here. I've found a control panel with recorded footage. Any chance you can hack it from there?" asked Grace.

"Sure can!" Jill replied, eager for the opportunity. "Get back to the base and I should have the footage by the time you get here."

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Emmie Keyes

The motorway drive felt like it took forever. As we passed other cars I hoped they would see me and help but they were oblivious. The orange eyed men now wore sunglasses to hide their true allegiance. For anyone looking in, we were just another car on the road.

I tried to break free but their arms were so strong. R&R were not muscular but it was like they had an extra force giving them more power. Wherever we were going I wouldn't be able to escape.

On the horizon I saw an unmistakable sight. Large metallic pillars loomed ahead of us. Their orange circular tops and the humming sound that grew ever louder as we drove forwards could only mean one thing. We were going to London.

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Grace Wilkerson

Grace arrived back at The Deck's base and dashed inside. "Do you have anything?" she shouted to Jill.

"Oh yes," she replied. "Emmie was escorted into a car and then driven away. I'm passing you the footage."

Grace looked at the screen and saw the recognisable figures of Rex and Rufus. Yet something wasn't right. She saw their eyes had an orange glow. "No! But how?"

"We don't know. It looks like the TethTech demonstration from earlier but that's impossible. Tobias said it can allow one twin to control the other but someone else is clearly controlling them. There are more of them too," Jill rewound the footage to show the dark blue saloon car driving up. Grace saw another two orange eyed men in the front of the car.

"There's four of them then!?"

"That we know of. It's hard to tell just how strong the technology is. Being able to control four twins is unheard of. There's nothing like that in the documents March provided us with."

"That's because Tobias didn't want us to know," replied March. "Everything we were building was just a piece in something larger. Only he knew how they fitted together."

"Can't you guess? You've seen all the files," asked Grace.

"I have tried but Tobias has been working with Tethers for over twenty years and planning this for a long time. He's got far more experience than I have. I'm sorry."

"Just tell me we can stop him?"

“It’s possible. The blue light we used on the crowd at Tobias’ press conference forces a Tether event to occur, that’s why it stopped them from moving. It’s possible we could recalibrate the light to disrupt a Tether event instead.”

“Meaning?”

“If we could find where Tobias has his base and then apply a large quantity of the light it could be enough to break whatever machine he has built. But we don’t know where he is.”

“Actually we do,” Jill pointed to a screen that showed Emmie getting out of a car. “I tracked the car on hundreds of other cameras and it’s just stopped here. This camera is recording fifteen miles away from the general area of the sound wave we intercepted earlier. It’s too close to not be a connection. If we find the sound wave then we’ll find Tobias.”

“And Emmie,” interrupted Grace.

“And Emmie,” confirmed March. I’ll contact Gabe and we’ll get a team together.

“What about the blue light, won’t it take weeks to build what we need?”

“It won’t be an issue. We still have the light box from the helicopter. Jill and I have been modifying it for weeks. It should be perfect. If it isn’t then I’ll fix it when we’re there. We don’t have time to lose.”

Grace hoped it was enough. If the light didn’t work then she’d find a way to kill Tobias herself.

FORTY-SEVEN

Gabe Treeth

“Everyone ready?” asked Gabe. He was ready to take charge again. It was his fault Emmie was in this situation and he was damned if he wasn’t going to save her.

They nodded. Grace, March and Chris all wore army uniforms and were ready. They wore their dog tag playing cards with pride. They stood alongside twelve other members of The Deck who also nodded in agreement.

Almost each member of the team was holding a gun with a blue disk on top. March was carrying a large backpack with the blue light from the helicopter.

“Remember,” said Gabe. “We are entering a civilian zone. You are not to use lethal force unless instructed by me. Is that understood?”

“Yes sir,” replied the team. They clicked a switch at the back of their guns which moved the blue disk into their weapon. “Using the latest data from March we’ve redesigned the blue light to stop anyone with orange eyes momentarily.”

“You each have a single clip of ammunition in case of an emergency. That’s thirty five bullets. If you are under threat from a hostile force you have my authorization, then you may switch to them but not before. Is that understood?”

“Yes sir.”

“Jill?” said Gabe. “You’re in charge until I get back.”

Jill stood next to the remaining support staff of The Deck. They would provide technical aid throughout the mission. “Yes, sir,” she replied.

Gabe was ready to redeem himself. This was what he had trained for. What everyone had trained for. He knew it was a gamble but Emmie was far too important for him not to roll the dice and if the only way to ensure her safety was to risk the lives of every single one of his team then that was a risk he had to take.

“Good luck,” said Jill to everyone.

Gabe led them to a sealed door at the back of the base. He swiped a keycard and the double doors opened. Lights flickered on and revealed four large four-wheel-drive cars called Verro’s. “You can thank the boss for these,” said Gabe, thankful for his backer.

The members of the Deck looked on in disbelief. Verro’s were one of the many excesses of the ‘haves’ and a symbol of power and wealth. Their heavy weight and high top speed meant they

consumed fuel faster than any other vehicle on the road, and made them extremely expensive to buy, due to heavy taxes, with high running costs.

Yet these cars had been modified with solar panels for The Deck, no doubt at great expense. Their large size also meant they completely took up a single lane on the road, and their wide wheels made them excellent all-terrain vehicles.

“You didn’t fancy something subtle?” asked Grace.

“We need strong vehicles that travel fast. You won’t find anything better,” replied Gabe, proud of each and every car.

Everyone loaded into a Verro. Gabe and Grace sat in one together, whilst Chris and March sat in separate vehicles. The four cars lined up in a row and slowly travelled up a ramp which emerged at the back of the shopping centre. They made their way around debris as the burger stand owner looked on in amazement.

Gabe drove his car at the front of the pack and the others followed behind him in a line. Each driver pressed a button on the dashboard which activated sirens. Gabe and his team put their feet down and headed towards London.

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Emmie Keyes

“Welcome to London,” said Rex.

I looked around at the once glorious capital city to see a very different world to the one I’d seen in pictures. We stood on the bank of the River Thames where hundreds of boats had drifted on to one side and smashed into each other. The river itself was filled with rubbish and debris that was piled so high it seeped onto the streets.

The streets themselves were covered in litter and abandoned goods from the looting and rioting that had occurred during the 20 Day Siege. Many buildings were burned to the ground whilst others were unaffected such as the London Eye which stood looming in the sky, its white glistening pods a strange sight in a city that no longer had any wonders you’d want to see.

What surprised me most wasn’t the decay but the people we passed into the city. There was a community living in London just like the one in Smyth West. They had worked their way into abandoned buildings and created a shanty town of makeshift homes from any materials they could find. In this disaster zone it didn’t feel right.

Although London had been abandoned, people had returned here when they had nowhere else to go. The number of have-nots was growing and it seemed London was the only city that would have them.

“They won’t last long,” said Rex, noticing me looking at the people. “The 20 Day Siege ruined the city and it won’t change. The signal still exists in small quantities, it is building up inside them and they will die. They’re either so stupid they don’t know what is happening or just completely lost.”

I assumed it was the latter. The stories about London were well known. You'd have to be very desperate to return to this place. Everyone knew that death was inevitable here.

"Come on," said Rex as he dragged me into the abandoned Houses of Parliament. "I want to show you something," whatever it was I knew it was Tobias who really wanted me to see it.

We walked into the building. The four orange eyed men and I. Their eyes were still obscured by sunglasses. We entered a large hallway that was filled with fantastic works of art that ranged from picturesque scenes of royalty to horrific Dante inspired scenes of devilry that had been spray painted with messages from those who had been near death.

The hallway was filled with light from stained glass windows that showed images of Gods from religions that hadn't saved this city when it needed them. We walked along a black and white marble floor that had become chipped and uneven. At the end of the corridor was a central room that had previously been used for parliamentary debates.

The room was an oaky brown colour with a dark green carpet that ran the length of it. Hundreds of seats lined the room with a central chair for a speaker to sit in a large gallery area that loomed behind them with large archways and further seating.

This room that had once helped decide many of the fates of the world was now filled not with politicians and political figures but with real people. The same people who had been left behind to die when the world changed, whilst the politicians had left this city to find new cities to dictate.

There was no debate occurring here, everyone agreed on one thing. They were all dying. You could see it in their bloodshot eyes, the paleness of their faces and the never ending coughs.

"Can't you help them?" I asked.

"How? They chose to live here and the warnings were clear. You go into London and you die. It's their own fault," replied Rex with a coldness that he would never normally use.

Over fifty people sat in the room it was clear this was a quarantine zone. Their friends and families had abandoned them to save themselves. They were waiting for death now. The Separationists had done so much damage with their experiment those years ago and the on-going repercussions plagued this place.

I couldn't stomach it any more. I saw a small brown eyed child, dressed in rags on the chair closest to me. He was crying and there was nothing I could do to save him. "Why are you showing this to me?" I asked.

"To show you what *they* are capable of. This can all happen again. I stopped it once and I can stop it again but I need your help."

"Liar! The Deck told me you caused all of this," I shouted. "I won't help you." I threw a hand towards Rex's face and reached my other hand into his pocket. I removed an Innocent blocking device that I'd felt there in the car and activated it. A quiet sound emitted outwards and Rex and Rufus' eyes turned back to normal.

The other two men stayed the same. "Why isn't it working?" I asked.

The man with the knives replied. "We're hard wired to the boss. There's no way of stopping the connection now," he ran towards me but Rufus stood in the way swinging his frying pan to keep him back. I couldn't believe he'd kept it all this time. "Run!" he shouted.

Rex and I dashed to an ornate door at the end of the central chamber. It wasn't the way we had entered but it was further away from our attackers. Rufus swung the pan hitting Vlad in the face. He grabbed his jaw and as looked back Rufus had begun fleeing away from him.

We reached the next room and slammed the door shut, pulling across a deadbolt to lock it behind us. Vlad hammered on the door and his brother then did the same. We walked backwards and saw a large knife pierce its way through the wooden door. The knife continued to chip away at the rapidly expanding void. We knew the door wouldn't hold for long.

"Run," shouted Rex and he ran as fast as his one lung would let him. We followed behind him hoping each new turn we took would lead us to safety.

FORTY-EIGHT

Grace Wilkerson

“How long now?” asked Grace.

“We’re only ten miles away from London so we’ll be there soon,” replied Gabe.

It was taking too long for Grace. Despite them doing 140 miles per hour she didn’t feel it was quick enough to save Emmie or stop the sound wave. “Drive faster,” she said. Gabe obliged.

As Grace watched the speedometer rise ever higher she heard the ear piercing sound of metal scraping across metal. She looked backwards towards the sound and saw a lorry smash into the side of one of their cars.

The driver tried to swerve to escape the lorry but the lorry driver did the same, matching his every move. This was a deliberate attack. Someone was trying to stop them.

“No!” shouted Gabe as he looked backwards just in time to see the last car in their convoy get flipped on its side. The lorry didn’t stop its attack. It continued to plough into the flipped over car driving it into the large metal bollards in the middle of the road. Two of the team jumped out of the back of the car to try and escape but the back of the lorry swung round and hit them, crushing their bodies under its weight.

Chris, who was located in the car in front, changed the mode on his gun and aimed it at the driver of the lorry to try and stop him. His bullets missed and the lorry continued to push the last car into the metal bollards.

The metal bollard drove itself through the front half of the car stopping just before it reached the driver. The impact of the bollard and the continual crushing of the lorry caused the sides of the car to wrap around it, whilst the driver came face to face with his team mate in the back seat and knew he would not survive.

The bollard was ripped from the ground as the front and back parts of the car smashed into each other crunching their metal framework together until it was an unrecognisable mass of metal. The bodies of the driver and his friend were forever trapped inside, their bones crushed in amongst the wreckage.

Four of the team had died that day and Chris had seen the whole thing.

Chris grabbed the wheel and turned it to perform a U-turn until he was facing the lorry. “We need to get revenge. If you aren’t happy with this then get out now,” he looked at the other team members in his car. They knew this was necessary so they could have closure for their friends. Their

driver put his foot down and drove towards the lorry which had started a new journey towards them. They raced towards it at a frightening pace.

“What is he doing?” asked Gabe. The rest of The Deck had stopped their cars to try and help but they could only watch. They’d never reach them in time.

“Faster,” shouted Chris to the driver. The driver obliged and the other two men in the car readied their weapons. “We’ve only got one chance at this.”

As they reached the lorry they saw the driver. “Orange eyes,” shouted Chris on the radio. This was a deliberate attack by Tobias. He knew they were coming. Silence fell in the other cars. They were trying to attack an immortal man.

“Ready,” said Chris. They aimed their weapons towards the driver. “Fire!” he shouted. The three men pulled their triggers, sending blue light streaming out towards the lorry driver.

He could no longer move but his lorry continued forwards on a collision course towards the edge of the road. Chris’ driver steered the car out of the way to avoid a collision and the team kept their aim on the lorry as it veered off the edge of the motorway.

The lorry hit a tree and the drivers’ compartment was crushed. Tobias tried to regain control of the orange eyed man but he had lost an arm which was crushed between the tree and the lorry. This body was no longer of any use to him. He relinquished control of the body and allowed the man to die. Seconds later his twin did the same.

An orange light went off in Tobias’ base and he sought out a new body to control.

“Is everyone ok?” said Gabe on the radio.

“Yes. I think he’s gone,” replied Chris. “We’re coming back to you now.”

They began their convoy again with the remaining cars. As they passed other drivers they kept an eye out for anything suspicious. They hoped they had escaped.

In Tobias’ base four more orange lights turned on. He was ready for them.

“What’s that up ahead?” asked Grace. She could see two large shapes on the horizon at the end of the motorway. “It looks like they are blocking the road.”

Gabe tried to make out the silhouettes but couldn’t. Suddenly they could see a third shape that was coming towards them. It sped up rapidly in speed and made its way towards the first car.

“Everybody move!” he shouted on the radio, as he drove their car to the side of the road.

The car behind them didn’t see the projectile until it was too late. It jammed itself firmly into the engine, ripping through the front of the car and sending it flipping over. Before it had hit the ground the projectile exploded killing the innocent driver.

The debris exploded outwards and sparks of metal splintered forward into the car in front. The steering wheel column from the exploded car drove itself forward and into one of The Deck's drivers' throats and he immediately lost control.

March reached over from the passenger's seat for the steering wheel to try and steady the car. The driver had removed his foot from the gas pedal but the car still had the accumulated acceleration of 100 miles per hour pushing it along. March tried to swerve to avoid the debris but another piece of metal pierced through one of the tyres.

The car skidded with March doing his best to keep it in a straight line. With his other free hand he reached for the handbrake and applied it lightly to try and lose some speed. The car started to screech as the brakes kicked in and slowed it down.

On the horizon March saw the cause of the attack. There were two tanks blocking the road. They wouldn't be getting into London that way. From one of the tanks he saw a burst of sparks emerge as another missile headed towards them.

"Everybody out!" he shouted.

March and two team mates dove out of the car and rolled on to the motorway, bruising their bodies in the fall. As March looked up he saw as the driver remained pinned into his seat and watched as the car sped up in a desperate attempt to save them.

The driver's last view was of the missile smashing through the windshield and bursting through his body in a wave of fire and smoke. Debris flew out across the road and a sheet of metal shot out towards one of The Deck. It cut through his neck bone like a knife to butter and sent his head spiralling to the floor.

As March saw the horrific decapitation he dropped to the floor and curled up into a ball to try and make himself as small as possible and minimise the possibility of being hit. As he looked up he saw a car door arching across the sky and heading directly towards him. He rolled out of the way, narrowly missing another car, as the door crashed into the ground next to him.

Chris' car hung back and March and his team mate jumped in the back. "Go!" shouted March, not wanting to be part of another attack.

Meanwhile Gabe's car had driven off the side of the motorway and across a field. He was thankful they had purchased off road cars. The tank followed after them.

"You can do it," Grace encouraged Gabe.

"Ok," he replied. "You let me know if they fire on us. We just have to make it to those trees."

The tank headed across the field undeterred by the harsh terrain with the driver knowing he had a clear shot in such an open expanse of land. One of The Deck in the back of the car pulled out his weapon and shone blue light onto the tank. It did nothing. The driver was shielded from the rays by the tank's outer casing.

"How can we stop them?" he asked.

“We can’t,” replied Gabe. “We just have to keep moving.”

Tobias watched as the blue light was shone on the tank. “You’re next,” he said. He took control of the tank’s driver and aimed the gun turret towards Gabe’s car.

He told the gunner to fire a missile but nothing happened. Two orange lights disappeared on Tobias’ control panel. He had lost control of the driver as well. “*But how?*”

“What was that?” shouted Gabe. “Someone saved us.”

Grace looked back at the tank which was now a burning pile of metal. “Someone hit it with a missile.”

“That was us,” replied Chris, his voice coming through the radio. “While the tanks were distracted with you we charged at one of them and broke inside. We threw the driver and gunner out and left them on the motorway. If they’re smart then they’ll leave.”

Two more lights on Tobias’ panel turned off. The tank drivers who survived were no more use to him so he abandoned them on the motorway.

“Come back to us,” said Chris. “The road is clear now and I doubt Tobias will try anything now we have a tank.”

The team regrouped on the motorway and drove the last few miles to London. They spent the rest of the journey in silence as a sign of respect to the six friends they had lost on the road.

FORTY-NINE

Emmie Keyes

I ran down the hallways with Rex and Rufus by my side. For now they were free of Tobias' mind control, the blocking device in my pocket keeping them at bay.

From behind us we heard a crash as the double doors were smashed open by Vlad and his brother. They were coming for us.

"Where can we go?" I asked Rex.

"No idea. Just find an exit," he coughed in exhaustion from the running. "You should leave me behind. I can't do this with one lung."

"No," said Rufus. "I'm not leaving you bro."

I agreed. We reached the end of a corridor with a large spiral staircase. "Up or down?" I asked.

We started heading upwards but were forced to stop due to a high locked gate. There was no way around it. We dashed back down the stairs and now we could see them again, Vlad and his twin closing in on us. The only option was to head downwards.

The stairs took us underneath the building into a dimly lit sub-basement area that stank of musk and was riddled with mould and decay. Hundreds of rows of books were stacked around us onto large shelves that were held in place by glass doors, many of which had been shattered leaving many more books strewn across the floor, their spines broken and their pages torn and covered in mud.

Suddenly Rex stopped running. He lent over holding his chest in agony. Through gritted teeth he let out a scream, unable to contain the pain any more. "Run!" he shouted to us, knowing that the orange eye twins were right behind us.

I ran back to Rex. I wasn't ready to let him go. Rufus and I tried to carry him by placing ourselves under his arms but we weren't strong enough. The three of us collapsed to the side head first into a large bookcase.

The bookcase had become weak over the years and it started to give way, and then fell over tumbling in the opposite direction to us.

As the bookcase fell we helped Rex to his feet and ran away from the falling books, huddling close together in order to protect him. My face was pressed in close to Rex and I thought about how much he had helped me. I kissed him on his cheek and told him to carry on.

Then came the screams as one of the falling bookcases landed on Vlad and his twin, trapping them to the floor. This was our opportunity.

“No!” screamed Tobias. The last two lights in his room started to flicker and he could feel himself losing control. “I will never let you go! You will always be my greatest experiment.”

He tried to force Vlad upwards again but it was no use. The orange eyed men were trapped.

We were free to escape.

The fallen bookcases had exposed something else as well. At the far end of the room was a large doorway. It looked like it headed in the direction of the building entrance. If we were lucky there would be a staircase that could lead us right back outside.

“Let’s go,” I said.

Rex found his footing again and walked slowly to the exit. We did our best to help him but it was clear he’d done some damage to himself in the escape.

“We’re almost there,” I tried to reassure him, although I had no idea what we’d do once we got outside.

We pulled the two doors open and saw the two steel doors of an elevator. Looking behind me I could see Vlad starting to rise up from under the rubble.

“There’s no other way,” I said, pushing the elevator button. The doors opened instantly, like it had been waiting for us, and we stepped inside. I rapidly pushed the close button in a panic whilst we could see Vlad running towards us.

The door finally started to close with Vlad mere footsteps away. Just as we thought we had escaped and the doors were centimetres away from each other they were stopped by a knife which stuck between them. I instinctively kicked the knife away and the door thankfully closed.

Vlad banged on the door in anger and we could hear him screaming as the elevator moved.

It was that movement that told me something wasn’t right. It felt like we were going downwards not up. I looked at the panel and saw a button had been pressed for the lowest level; B6.

I turned around to ask Rex why he’d pushed the button but the answer quickly became apparent.

His eyes had returned to a dark orange. I looked at Rufus and his eyes had done the same. I could no longer hear the soothing hum of the blocking device. R&R were back under the control of Tobias.

I backed up towards the door as Rex walked towards me. I frantically pressed a button for the Innocent blocking device to come on again but it did not. It was out of power.

Rex grabbed me and held his arm around my body, forcing my body to rest against him. Rufus snatched the blocking device from my hand. He threw it onto the floor and smashed it under his foot. He then found the one in his own pocket and smashed that too.

“You can’t escape,” said Rex, as the elevator made its way down to level B6.

FIFTY

Grace Wilkerson

The Deck drove into London through the city streets. Their convoy now consisted of a tank and two cars. Ten of them remained. It had to be enough.

They approached London from the south west side. A garden had once been located in this area and had housed some of the most beautiful flowers in the world. Now it served as a makeshift graveyard, with thousands of bodies from the 20 Day Siege filling the ground.

The remaining people had done their best to ensure respect was paid to the dead. When the city was abandoned bodies were originally left rotting in the streets. The people who returned had found those bodies and given them peace. It reminded Grace of how she and Gabe had cleaned the shopping centre above The Deck HQ of bodies.

Despite seeing so much death the garden had been brought back to life and flowers grew around the giant tombstones that marked the dead. As so many bodies had gone undaunted – most families never came back to London – they had marked unnamed people with a single X. One tombstone was filled with nothing more than a thousand little X symbols. It was a bittersweet testament to what had happened.

“I can’t believe Tobias caused all of this,” said Grace.

“Don’t worry. He will be stopped and the world will know what he did,” said Gabe.

“How?” asked Grace. “We can’t even prove it! In fact the only reason we know he was to blame is because of your boss. A man I’ve never even met,” she hated being kept out of the loop and the boss’ secret identity was one of the things that wound her up the most.

Gabe didn’t reply. He simply walked towards the tombstones and knelt down to pay his respects. He removed the car keys from his pocket and carved an X on to a tombstone. “For my twin who never got the chance to live.”

“We all lost someone that day,” said Grace, as she took the keys from him and marked an X on to the tombstone as well.

The other members of The Deck walked into the garden and paid their respects to the fallen people. They may not have all known someone who died here but such a senseless loss of life made them feel for the families affected.

This was just one mass grave of many. The world wasn’t prepared for so much death. Mass cremations had been carried out worldwide, regardless of the wishes of the dead. Many of the

bodies that weren't burnt were those that were lost in areas people dared not visit. Areas where the signal had been at its most concentrated.

"We have to keep moving," said Chris. "There is nothing we can do for the dead now. If we don't continue on then there will be a lot more bodies to pay our respects to."

"You're right," said Grace. She dialed a number on her phone and put it on speakerphone. "So where do we go Jill?"

"Why don't you ever say Hello?" asked Jill.

"Because I'm a super cool action star. We never say hello. That's the rules."

"Hmm," replied Jill. "I noticed something odd whilst you were driving to London. When you were attacked by orange eyed people the new signal could be detected in the area. It was faint but it was unmistakable. I went back and looked at the footage from when Emmie was taken and the same signal occurred."

"So the signal has something to do with the orange eyed people?"

"It has everything to do with them. I think whoever is taking control of these people is doing it via the new sound wave. Which means there's good news and bad news."

"Good news first please. Always good news first," replied Grace. Gabe looked at her with raised eyebrows; she knew he would have preferred the bad news first.

"Well, the good news is we can now track the people who took Emmie. I've scanned for any faint instances of the signal and there's only one. It's coming from the old Houses of Parliament. If Emmie is still with the people who took her then it's a good sign she is there."

"That's great news!" said Grace. "And the bad news?"

"If someone is controlling other people via sound waves then they could control any one at any time. Which means every person you meet could be a threat."

"Will they still have orange eyes?"

"I think so," replied Jill.

"Great so we can still stop them," said March. "I've fitted our guns to target the frequency of those who are being controlled. It'll stop them temporarily. It momentarily stunned one of the drivers earlier so at least we can defend ourselves."

"That's good. Remember they are innocent people. If someone is controlling them then they do not deserve to die," said Jill.

"So do we know where the sound wave is coming from?" asked Gabe.

"I'm still trying to pin it down exactly but there's something else," said Jill. "The small bursts of sound wave that I've detected are not coming from the Houses of Parliament. They are passing

through somewhere first and being broadcast out via a relay. If I can find the source of that I should be able to shut down the signal.”

“Great work,” said Grace and she hung up.

“Wow, not even a goodbye,” said Jill. “She is a super cool action star.”

FIFTY-ONE

Emmie Keyes

As the doors opened on level B6 we were faced with a white panelled corridor. What looked like it had once been a state of the art lab was now decayed and mostly destroyed. Panels were falling off the walls exposing the raw wires behind them and rust had started to work its way across the walls and into the cracks.

Something bad had happened here.

Tobias continued to control Rex and Rufus and speak through them. "I want to show you where it all began," said Tobias, through Rex.

"On the second day of the Siege, when the world knew they could no longer contain the problem, they built this lab. Located deep underground, it was designed to withstand the attack," said Rex.

He walked me through another set of doors into a central chamber. The walls were covered with a soft, squishy, padded material that looked more like it was designed for a mental asylum cell than a laboratory.

"1,000 square feet of sound insulation," said Rex. "Designed to block out the signal whilst scientists worked to stop the effects of the attack. Only ten people ever saw the inside of this room and I was one of them. I saw more of it than most."

He pointed to a corner of the room. I hadn't seen it at first but the padded wall gave way to a door. Rex pushed open the door to reveal a small enclosed space. The room was no bigger than the single bed that occupied it, which now lay there broken, the springs of the mattress exposed and the metal bed frame rusted and bent out of shape. The walls were padded in even thicker insulation than the main chamber.

Rusted chains lay broken on the bed. "Was someone kept in here?" I asked.

"I was," replied Rex, echoing Tobias. "For nineteen days this was my prison."

"But you stopped the Siege? You led the team that found a way to save everyone."

"Yes, I did save the world but I didn't lead the team. I was just an unlucky candidate. The one man on the planet who had the best chance of stopping the signal. That's why I was chosen, why I was held captive."

"So what is this place? A prison?"

"It was a lab," he replied. "Designed just for me."

And now for me? I wondered.

In the central chamber we walked towards another door. It was hanging from its hinges and had been badly damaged. As the room inside got closer I started to see things I recognised.

It was a room full of pipes which wove their way towards a single chair. Wires surrounded the chair and I knew the setup instantly. This was the same room I had seen in the DualCam video. Will had wanted me to see this room but I had no idea why. Now Tobias wanted me to see it as well.

An open harness hung down from the side of the chair. "That's where they held me," said Tobias, through Rex.

Was Tobias the man in the video? I asked myself. It couldn't be. If the video had been Will's memory then it would have happened recently.

"When did this happen?" I asked.

"They took me to that chair every day for nineteen days," he said. "Each time they tried a different experiment. A different way to use me to stop the signal from killing everyone. One day they cut off part of my face and attached electrodes to my skull. It was the worst pain I have ever endured."

The man in the video had part of his face exposed. It could have been Tobias.

"Why are you telling me all of this?" I asked.

"Telling you? I've done more than that Emmie. I've shown you. I know you remember the video?"

I gasped. "You put the video on my camera?"

"Indeed. I hacked your DualCam to show you exactly what they did to me."

"So why delete the footage?"

"I couldn't very well have footage of me being experimented on doing the rounds," he replied. "Someone could do a lot of damage with that tape."

"Why show it to me at all?"

"Because this is what is waiting for you. If you don't help me then you'll be the next person to be experimented on."

"Is that a threat?"

"I don't make threats Ms Keyes," he replied. "I am merely warning you and trying to stop you being the next victim. We're the same you and I."

"I am nothing like you. Whatever happened to you all those years ago you've still hurt people now. You killed my brother!" I shouted.

“To show you who you really are. We may not have the same desires but deep down we are the same. I survived the death of my brother, just like you.”

“But how?” I asked, shocked.

“I’ve spent over twenty years trying to find that answer. You are the only other person in the world who is wired the same way as me. If the people who did this to me ever find you then they will operate on you too. All this time I’ve been trying to save you.”

“You didn’t stop them?”

“I killed many of them over the years that followed and made two of them my slaves,” he laughed. “You already know Vlad, the man with the knives. He was the one who carved into my face with so much glee. Now I control him.”

“But to what end? Revenge?”

“There’s only one way to get revenge on them for what they did to me. Today I start that revenge and you will help me. Or you’ll be next.”

It was a threat that worried me. The video of Tobias had shown him enduring horrible torture. It was something I knew I wouldn’t be able to face. Whoever had hurt him had changed him and everything he’d done since then had been because of them.

“So what do you need me to do?” I asked.

FIFTY-TWO

Grace Wilkerson

“We’re approaching the Houses of Parliament,” said Grace to Jill.

“Perfect,” she replied.

“Have you detected any more sound waves?”

“Nothing yet. Hopefully the next one will help us determine the source. Then we should be able to stop everything. The main sound wave is still going strong but doesn’t seem to be causing any deaths at the moment. It’s as if the goal is something else.”

“Any idea?”

“Control?” pondered Jill. “Whoever did this loves being in control. The sound wave is designed to take over people’s bodies. As for their end goal, I have no idea.”

“That makes two of us,” said Grace. She hung up.

Jill looked at the phone. “One day she’ll end a phone call by saying Goodbye to me.”

The Houses of Parliament entrance loomed up ahead. The Deck walked past hundreds of people hoping that they wouldn’t change. Knowing that someone could attack them at a moment’s notice.

Gabe kicked open the door and pointed his gun inside. “Everyone switch to non-lethal weaponry,” he motioned for them to follow him.

Grace walked behind Gabe covering him with her gun. The team moved as a single unit, breaching each room and checking the corners for people.

When they reached the large chamber that housed the sick they swept their guns around them. The blue light did nothing. Everyone here was human or at least as human as they could be. “This is horrible,” said Grace. “We can’t let this happen again.”

“We won’t,” replied Gabe.

Tobias watched them through a monitor. “How long will you chase me?” he said. “Time for me to chase back.”

The servers around Tobias flickered on and orange lights activated one by one. His body struggled as he attempted to control so many people at once. Fifty separate voices filled his head and he started to shake uncontrollably.

He thrashed his arms around and another man appeared from the shadows to hold him down. "You can't do this without her. You have to stop," said the man.

"Just lower the frequency!" shouted Tobias and the man obliged.

Tobias started to control his breathing again and twenty of the lights went out. "It'll still be enough," said Tobias. He still had the power of thirty people and that would allow him to test his new found power.

"Look!" shouted Grace as she saw the eyes of the crowd flicker to a dark orange. One by one they saw all fifty people get taken over and then saw lights flicker off and on as Tobias wrestled to control them all.

"What's happening?" asked March. "This shouldn't be possible. No one could sustain this many Tethers. It's impossible."

"I don't care what is possible," shouted Gabe. "Just aim your weapons."

The ten members of The Deck did their best to cover the thirty opponents they now faced. With each person they covered with blue light another one would be left exposed and free to attack.

"We can't cover them all!" shouted one of the team.

"Then run!" said Gabe. They dashed towards the door at the far end of the corridor but one of the orange eyed men jumped down and knocked Gabe to the floor. Another five people climbed over the railings and stood in-between The Deck and the door.

The remaining orange eyed people circled around them blocking both the entrance and exit.

"We have to shoot!" said Chris.

"No," said Gabe. "These are innocent people."

"They're already dying!"

"None of this is their fault. Stand down!"

Chris switched his gun back to its blue light.

Without warning an orange eyed man jumped at Gabe kicking him to the floor. They stood over him and reached for his face. Grace kicked them off him and they landed on a wooden table. "Back off!" she shouted.

One of the team looked back to see what was happening and moved his gun away. This released an orange eyed woman from the blue light who used the opportunity to dive at him. She grabbed the soldier by the throat lifting him up into the air. It was far beyond her normal strength.

"That's impossible!" shouted Grace. She shone her light onto the orange eyed woman leaving her standing in her current position. Two of The Deck released the grip she had and set their friend free.

No sooner had their friend dropped to the floor than another two orange eyed people made their move. They ran towards Gabe with their arms outstretched. Gabe punched one of them, knocking them to the floor. Grace punched the other.

As they fell down two more people emerged. They trampled on their fallen friends like they were nothing. There was no loyalty amongst them.

Grace tried to fight them off. She elbowed one of them in the face and dropped to the floor so she could kick another one of them over. It worked but it left her exposed. A third man grabbed her and pulled her over. Gabe tried to save her but he was attacked by an orange eyed woman who kicked the back of his legs sending him downwards.

The remaining orange eyed people rushed in all at once. Their attack was perfectly coordinated with military like precision. They focused on the team members who were shining blue light. As soon as one of them got hit with the light and was stunned, another one of them would attack the soldier and bat his gun away.

“Forget this!” said one of The Deck’s soldiers. He switched his gun to bullets, seeing no other option. “I’m sorry boss,” Before he could even fire an orange eyed man snapped his neck.

Grace kicked her legs frantically trying to get rid of her attacker. He sat on her chest and held her arms down. She couldn’t save herself.

Gabe could only watch Grace get attacked as he was dragged along the floor by his attacker.

Grace tried to raise her arm but it was smashed to the floor by her attacker. She lifted her head to look for help but every one of The Deck had their own battles.

Suddenly the attacker on top of Grace was kicked to the floor. “Who?” asked Grace. She saw the face of the man who had saved her. It was no one she had ever seen before but his eyes were a pure blue.

Gabe felt his legs fall to the floor. He was no longer being dragged along. He too turned around to see he had been saved by a different unknown man.

He looked around and saw many people attacking the orange eyed men. The stalls were no longer full. Every single sick man and woman was helping The Deck and fighting to stop their friends.

“This isn’t you James,” said one of the men to his orange eyed friend.

“Why are you doing this?” Asked a woman to her identical twin, whilst she pinned her down.

Grace was taken aback by such a heart-warming display of friendship and family. It was a reminder to her of exactly what they were fighting for; the ‘have-nots’ who refused to give up on life.

The Deck joined in and started to pin the orange eyed people to the floor. It wasn’t an easy fight but the extra numbers helped.

“You go on,” shouted Chris to Gabe.

“You got this?” asked Gabe.

“Yeah. You need to save Emmie.”

Gabe and Grace ran out of the large chamber.

“Jill? Do you know where we can find Emmie?” asked Grace over the phone.

“Yes. There’s a small trace of the audio signal coming from underground at your current location. It could be Emmie or it could be someone else. Either way you need to find a way down,” said Jill.

Grace hung up the phone and they soon found a spiral staircase that led down underneath the Houses of Parliament. As they ran down the last step they were both knocked to the floor by two unknown attackers.

“What do we have here?” said Vlad, his orange eyes pulsing stronger than ever.

FIFTY-THREE

Grace Wilkerson

When Grace awoke she found herself in a padded room. She was tied to the wall in chains with Gabe next to her. She nudged him to wake him up.

“Where are we?” she asked.

“Hell if I know. You just woke me up!” replied Gabe.

“At least I don’t have to hear you snoring anymore.”

The room was small. It had a broken bed on one side and the rest of the room was just white padded walls.

“Are we in a mental institution?” asked Grace. “I’m not crazy am I? Was this all just some messed up dream?” she joked.

“You are crazy but that’s not why we are here. We were knocked out by a two large men. My legs are sore underneath so they must have dragged us here.”

The door opened and in walked Vlad, his belt of knives dangling from his hip. “Hello pets,” he said.

“Where is Emmie!?” shouted Grace.

“She’s safe. I’ve been removing all the lies you put in her head,” said Vlad. “Like how you told her I killed a billion people.”

“Tobias?”

“That’s right,” he replied. “This body is just a vessel but I’m the one controlling him. He hates it when I take control but he is the best person I know for inflicting pain and a man like that can come in handy.”

“You’re sick! You killed all those people and you are causing more pain now. Why can’t you accept what you did?”

“What I did?!” shouted Tobias through Vlad. He grabbed the broken bed and threw it out of the room in rage. “They did this to me! I wanted none of this.”

“It was your team! Your team was the one who stopped the Siege. That’s what you told everyone.”

“Lies,” he replied. “Yes my body stopped the Siege but it wasn’t something I asked for. When it was all over they made me into a hero, knowing if I told the world the truth it would destroy me as well.”

“Who?” said Grace.

Vlad leant in closer and opened his mouth ready to speak. “Oh you know them very well. It was...”

Seeing an opportunity Gabe reached forward and grabbed a large knife from Vlad’s belt. He swiped upwards, cutting through the belt of knives, sending them clattering to the floor. He finished his motion by jamming the knife into Vlad’s neck who tumbled backwards in shock.

“This is our chance!” Gabe grabbed the sharpest knife he could see and cut through his chains at the most rusted part. He tossed the knife to Grace and shouted “Quickly.”

Vlad found his footing and looked ahead to see Gabe running at him with a large curled knife. He had just enough time to say “My scythe,” before the knife was hooked around his neck and Gabe pulled him to the floor.

Vlad didn’t move. A deep cut ran along his neck and the injuries he had caused to himself earlier had now been ripped open.

Gabe looked at Vlad’s body waiting for it to move. “Is he dead?” he wondered out loud. Before he got an answer Gabe was kicked backwards by the man’s twin.

Grace, now free of her chains, ran over to the taller twin with a cleaver. She swiped at his head but he darted backwards. She aimed for his arm but he pulled it away. He was fast, ridiculously fast.

“It won’t work,” said the twin. “This body understands time better than you ever will.”

Grace continued to swing the knife towards him and he dodged every shot. It was as if he knew exactly what Grace was going to do. She swiped towards his head and he ducked and dove towards her. Grace hit the ground on her back, bringing back the pain she had felt at TethTech.

“No,” shouted Gabe.

She started to rise to her feet but the twin put his foot on her to push her back to the floor. Gabe grabbed at the twin but he moved away. It gave Grace a chance to get up and she bounced onto her feet. She wasn’t going to be defeated by her back again.

She whispered a plan to Gabe as the twin looked on. “I know exactly what you’ll do,” the twin said.

Gabe dashed at the twin and drove a knife towards his eye. The twin let the knife almost touch his eyeball before he backed away.

It gave Grace the opportunity she had waited for. She sat by Vlad and pulled the scythe into his throat. “Stop!” she shouted. “If you don’t let us go then I will kill your brother.”

"I'll survive," said the twin. "I'm connected to a greater power now."

"Not forever. As soon as you stop being linked to that power you'll die. Do you want to be controlled for the rest of your life?"

The twin tried to think about this as Tobias wrestled to keep control of his thoughts. He'd been under Tobias' control for so long that he'd started to learn how to fight back. He had learnt how to feel human again.

His eyes flickered from orange to green.

"No," shouted Tobias, struggling to keep control of the twin whilst fighting The Deck on the upstairs levels. His nose began to bleed. He was feeling the pressure of controlling so many people.

"You need to stop," said the shadowy figure next to Tobias. "You can't do this to yourself."

Tobias let out a gasp and the twin felt his freedom return to him. "1012 days, 12 hours, 53 minutes. That's how long he has controlled me," he said. "My name is Gunto and I have been Tobias' servant for far too long. If you let my brother go then I will release you from this room. But next time we see each other he will be in control of me again and next time I won't be beaten."

"What about Emmie?" asked Grace. "Is she here?"

"I'm afraid not," replied Gunto. "You need to go direct to the source. She is on her way there now."

Gunto grabbed Gabe's phone from his pocket and pulled up a map. He marked an area with an X. "This is the place. You have to hurry, I know what Tobias wants and it will threaten everyone," As he finished the sentence he felt an intense pressure in his head. He dropped to the floor holding his head with his hands and screaming.

"We have to go," said Gabe dropping the knife and running for the exit. "Come on," he shouted to Grace who looked on as Gunto writhed in pain.

Gabe pushed the elevator button and it opened instantly. "Grace! It's not safe here."

"But he was going to tell us everything," she replied. She looked back and saw Gunto's face. A mass of veins was now pulsing on the surface of his face and over the back of his head. His eyes flickered back and forth to orange.

Tobias continued to pull the life away from Gunto. "You are no longer useful," he said. His voice echoed out from Gunto.

In between the thrashing Gunto could only utter a few words: "46 years ... 10 months ... 21 days 3 hours 8 minutes ... 12 seconds ... of life."

"Grace!" shouted Gabe.

Gunto tried to crawl towards Grace but he was forced away from her. The force sent him backwards so hard that his spine ruptured and he collapsed onto the floor. His eyes returned to normal and in his last breath he uttered "Never, enough, time."

As Gunto died his brother could only watch. Tobias had a simple message for Vlad, which he sent directly to his brain. "Your brother is dead. If I release control of you now then you will die. You are mine forever," Vlad knew it was true. The freedom he had been promised was now gone. He would always be Tobias' slave.

Vlad stopped fighting Tobias' influence and gave away the one thing he had always craved. Control.

As Grace ran to the elevator Gabe watched as Vlad chased after her. "Faster!" he shouted.

Grace didn't look back. She just pushed on. "Press the button," she shouted.

Gabe knew not to argue. He pressed the button for the ground floor and the doors started to close. Vlad removed a knife from his belt and took aim.

As the doors were about to close Grace turned to her side and slipped inside. A knife followed her through and hit the back wall narrowly missing her. As it clattered to the floor the doors shut and Grace let out a sigh of relief.

"Jill," said Gabe speaking into his phone.

She answered instantly. "Yep."

"Can you put an elevator out of service?" he asked.

"Sure can. It's probably connected to a central control room. I'll just hack through there and..."

"Great," he interrupted. "I'm sending you the serial number now," he hung up.

Jill rolled her eyes. She was tempted to stop the elevator before they reached the top, to get payback for their rudeness but she resisted the urge.

When they had reached the ground floor Jill sent the elevator down so it was stuck between floors and sent a signal so that it would stop there.

As she finished her phone vibrated. She checked the message on the screen and packed a bag. There was somewhere else she needed to be.

FIFTY-FOUR

Emmie Keyes

"Where are we going?" I asked Rex.

"A power station, Emmie," he replied, as Tobias spoke through him. "Although not one in the conventional sense. This station powers something very different to electricity but far more vital to life."

"The people that made you this way, they were just trying to save everyone," I replied.

"I have no doubt of that," he replied. "But the lengths they were prepared to go to for results. The pressure they were happy to put another person through. Inexcusable. Don't think for a second they won't do the same to you."

"But why?" I replied. "There's no threat now. There's no reason they would hurt me."

"No threat? There is always a threat Emmie. There is always a reason for science to push on and experiment to get results. They just need someone to test their theories on."

"So why haven't they experimented on you again?"

"Power," he replied. "When I was freed I did everything I could to rise to power so they could never hurt me again. No-one notices when someone unknown goes missing but when it's someone famous or powerful it becomes world news."

"So that's why you started TethTech?" I asked. "For power?"

"Yes and no. It gave me the power to protect myself but I've also been secretly selling my shares for months and it's given me the money to fight back."

"Fight back?"

"You'll see when we get there."

Rufus drove the car through the city, past destroyed buildings and people living in ramshackle houses. London had been transformed into a third world city. It was now one of the largest shanty towns in the world.

Why would anyone live here? I wondered. Was the need for shelter really worth the risk of exposure to the signal? It just showed how broken the world had become.

"What was London like before all of this?" I asked.

“This city,” said Tobias through Rex. “it wasn’t meant to be like this. Without the signal this never would have happened. London would have remained a glorious city and would have climbed out of recession.”

“So how can you blame the people who hurt you? Didn’t they only want to stop all of this?”

“There is no *only want*,” he replied. “The people who unleashed the signal *only wanted* to help save people’s lives when their twin died. The people who operated on me *only wanted* to make the world right again. Neither of them thought about the cost of what they were doing.”

“But they did save the world.”

“Yes and I am the cost of that. That is a cost that must be repaid.”

“So you plan to kill the people who did this to you?”

“Yes. Every last one of them,” said Tobias.

We entered a large expanse of green land. It was odd to see such a mass of countryside in the heart of the city. On the edges of the grass were large signs which read; ‘Olympic Park’

I’d seen photos of the Olympics in books at school. It had been one of the late great triumphs of London and Great Britain before the 20 Day Siege. The city had thrived and been at a high point in the years surrounding that event. Yet now those glory days were gone.

Many of the buildings that had housed events such as basketball, cycling and swimming had been torn down after the Olympics had finished. The legacy that remained after the events – a large river, beautiful green parks and a glorious stadium were no longer the same.

In the last twenty one years the grass had been uncared for. It has spiralled out of control creating dense green fields that looked like you could get lost in them. The river was now polluted and no longer had anyone who cared enough to clean it.

At the heart of this the stadium stood tall. It no longer looked a thrilling and inviting sight. With weeds, grass and tress spiralling wildly around it, it was a menacing image. A metal structure that had served as a viewing tower lay shattered on the ground, leaving pieces of broken metal and glass scattered through the grass.

There were no other tall buildings around for miles.

Whatever Tobias had planned, this was the place. I was sure of it.

Rufus and Rex walked me towards the stadium, towards an entrance with a ‘D’ letter above it. In front of the gate stood a man with blonde hair that curved around each side of his face. He was dressed in a light grey suit and impeccably well presented. His eyes were a bright blue. Whatever he was doing, he was doing it under his own free will.

“Welcome, Emmie. My name is Jacobs,” he said to me. “Thank you for agreeing to meet with us today. Tobias is waiting for you inside.”

Rex and Rufus started walking into the base. Tobias must have had something else planned for them.

“What will he do to my friends?” I asked.

“Those two?” Jacobs motioned to Rex and Rufus. “He’ll probably keep them alive for a bit. You seem to like them.”

He didn’t sound sure. I hoped I’d be able to repay some of the debt I owed Rex and Rufus for their earlier heroics. They didn’t deserve to be a part of this. This was between me and Tobias. R&R, Grace, March, Gabe, they were all at risk.

That’s why I’d travelled this far and why when Jacobs asked me to follow him I did it without fighting him. Whatever Tobias and this man wanted it may be the only way to save my friends.

“Tobias has waited six months for you,” said Jacobs. “He doesn’t like to be kept waiting but somehow you’ve avoided his detection for six months. How did you do it?”

“I had a little help,” I replied. It made me wonder for the first time that day whether The Deck would be trying to find me. I hoped they weren’t. Tobias had trusted me to come this far alone and if they arrived it could jeopardise everything.

The blonde haired man walked me through the D gate and we turned a corner into a room located under the main seats of the venue. He closed the door behind us and locked it.

He turned away from me and leaned forward. “What are you doing?” I asked. Then I saw the steam rise above him and as his mask melted away I recognised it instantly.

I stood up and walked towards him to see who he really was. He held out a hand to keep me back. I tried to push towards him but he kept me away.

“Sit down,” he said.

I sat and then he turned around.

There was only one word I could say when I saw him.

“Dad?”

FIFTY-FIVE

Grace Wilkerson

Gabe and Grace walked back to the central area of the Houses of Parliament unsure what they would find and how many of their team would have been injured.

What they saw surprised them.

There were no more orange eyed people. The Deck team had secured the area and everyone seemed to have returned to normal.

The have-nots were tending to their injured and Chris thought about how although these people had very little it was clear they understood the importance of family and friendship.

“Chris. What happened?” asked Grace.

“We don’t know,” he replied. “Suddenly everyone just stopped fighting and their eyes turned back to normal colours. Whatever was controlling them it’s gone now.”

“It’s not gone forever,” she showed Chris her phone. “We met someone downstairs who told us where we could find the source of the signal. It’s at this location.”

“But that’s the old Olympic park. Why would anyone go there?”

“Exactly. It’s out of the way and has a lot of land. You could build anything out there now that London is a lawless city.”

The Deck regrouped. Only nine of them remained, including Gabe, Grace, Chris and March. They walked outside and were instantly ambushed by a crowd of orange eyed people.

“Where do they keep coming from?” asked Gabe as he pushed off his attacker. “Use the lights.”

The Deck formed two circles one with five of them and the other with four and shone the light around them which helped stop any of their attackers temporarily.

“We can’t do this the entire way,” said Grace. “Look over there,” she pointed to an underground station with steps descending downwards.

“We’ll be trapped,” said Chris.

Grace pulled out her phone and dialled a number, being careful to keep the other hand held down on her weapon. “Jill?” she asked.

“No. It’s Kenan. Jill isn’t here.”

“Well where the heck is she?”

“We have no idea. Can I help?”

“The London Underground. Does it still run?” asked Grace.

“It was never fully deactivated if that’s what you mean,” he replied. “Jill trained me so I should be able to help.”

Grace could see the orange eyed men starting to work their way through the gaps in their defence. “We have to run,” she shouted.

The Deck turned and ran towards the underground station. “I’ll stop them,” said one of the team who stayed at the entrance and pointed his blue light outwards. “Run!”

The eight remaining team mates didn’t look back, there was no time to argue about what was the right action. They ran down the stairs into the main entrance. Grace looked at her phone and saw it dip down to one bar of signal. “Kenan, are you still there? If you are then I need you to activate the train from Westminster to Stratford on the Jubilee line. Can you hear me?”

There was no reply.

“Kenan?” shouted Grace. She looked at her phone and saw that her phone signal was gone. In the background she heard the scream as the team mate she had left behind was attacked.

There was nowhere else to run. The only way was down.

She ran towards Gabe. He asked if the train would be waiting for them on the platform and she said she wished she knew.

The eight remaining members of The Deck worked their way down to platform 5. The Jubilee line. As they reached the platform edge Grace had to stop herself from almost running off the edge in the darkness.

“Where is the train?” asked Gabe.

“I couldn’t get through,” replied Grace, with no idea what they could do next.

“We can’t go back up. How far is it if we walk through the tunnels?”

“It would take hours. Time Emmie doesn’t have.”

Behind them they could hear the footsteps coming. The platform had six separate entrances. There was no way they could cover them all. “We have to defend ourselves.”

They positioned a person at each entrance with two of the team ready to run to cover any problem areas. The entrances were bathed in blue light but the light was not wide enough to cover each entrance.

Although they managed to stop six separate attacks, it was futile. An orange eyed woman jumped through one of the gaps and punched March to the floor. Chris was the only person who

wasn't holding back an attacker so he dashed towards March and pushed the woman back into blue light shone by Grace.

"We can't hold this line forever," shouted Chris.

"Come on Kenan," Grace hoped he had received the message.

They could hear more footsteps coming. A second wave of attackers and it sounded like more than they could handle.

"Retreat into the tunnels!" shouted Gabe.

"No, wait," said Grace. She could hear a faint rumble coming towards them. It was different to the sound of the incoming wave of orange eyed people.

The team held the position and the rumble grew louder. Lights started to flicker in the tunnel.

Grace turned around and saw the train whizz into the station. It was fast. Worryingly fast and wasn't slowing down.

It was only when the train had nearly passed the platform that the brake engaged. The train gave off sparks on the track as the wheels responded to the instant application of pressure at such high speeds.

The train began to slow down but overshot the platform. It roared past The Deck, leaving them stranded.

"We have to move," shouted Gabe and this time Grace agreed. They lowered their weapons instantly freeing the first wave of orange eyed people, just as the second wave appeared.

The team jumped off the platform and ran towards the train as it finally reached a stop. Their pursuers did the same and chased after them.

Grace reached the doors first and tried to pry them open. She wasn't strong enough and they stayed shut. Gabe grabbed hold as well and the two of them tried to open them but even their combined strength was not enough.

As the orange eyed people ran down the tracks March dropped his backpack to the floor. "Everyone focus on the train doors. I've got this," he said. The rest of the team struggled with the door.

March pulled a large light from his backpack and held it in front of him. An orange eyed person stood in front of him and spoke. "I trusted you March."

March flicked a switch and a huge blue beam of light filled the tunnel. It covered every crack and allowed The Deck enough time to open the door. They worked their way inside and Gabe found a control panel.

"Come on March," shouted Grace.

He started to walk backwards, being sure to keep the light steady and not break the coverage the light had made.

Grace held out her hand ready to help March onto the train. "You can do it," she said.

March made the last few steps without error and then turned around to grab Grace's hand. As he was pulled upwards on the train the light flickered and it gave the orange eyed people the chance to attack.

They instantly went for the light, grabbing it from March and throwing it to the floor. The glass lens shattered as it hit the hard concrete. "No!" shouted March in shock.

They kicked the lens until it broke completely and then tossed the light backwards down the tunnel. It was now surrounded by fifteen orange eyed people.

"We have to get it back," said March but Grace held him back. She gave a thumbs up to Gabe who pushed forward on the train's control panel and moved them down the tunnel.

"Without that there's no way we can stop the signal," said March.

"It's gone. It's not worth your life," replied Grace, hoping that March was wrong.

March looked at the light as it was left in the distance. He had a plan B but it didn't bear thinking about.

FIFTY-SIX

Emmie Keyes

“Dad?” Although those words left my mouth I didn’t know what to believe.

I hadn’t seen my father for five years. Not since he abandoned us over the guilt of my mother’s death, yet this man in front of me was now identical to him.

“Is that really you?” I asked, unsure if this was some kind of trick. This man had had a totally different face seconds ago.

The steam had stopped coming from his face and it was unmistakable. He looked so similar. He looked like my Dad.

“Emmie,” he said. “It’s me.”

I stood up in shock. “You abandoned us!” I shouted. “And now I find out you’ve been working for this villain. What happened to you?” I felt fuelled by rage and questions flooded through my brain. How could he leave us? Was this really going to avenge my mother’s death? Working for the man who had killed Will?

“Just tell me he’s controlling you. Tell me he forced you to do this,” I shouted. “Just tell me something to make sense of this.”

“No. I am working for him under my own free will. Working with Tobias is the best way to get payback for what happened to your mother.”

“But how?”

“Tobias is the reason your mother is dead,” he replied. “Tobias killed her and by working with him I can stop him before he hurts anyone else.”

“No Dad. The 20 Day Siege killed her. It wasn’t Tobias’ fault.”

“In time you will see that it was. He is just as guilty as the people who started the signal on that day. I’ve seen what he is capable of. He killed your brother and he’ll hurt you too.”

“He has said he will protect me. That there are people out there who want to hurt me. I have to at least talk to him.”

“The only people you can trust now are The Deck.”

“And how do you know that?”

“Because I fund them,” he replied.

“What?” I shouted. “You are in charge of The Deck?”

“Yes. That’s how I’ve been able to keep you safe all of this time. They are my private army in monitoring Tobias and watching after you. Why do you think they hold you in such high esteem? Miss King of Clubs? It’s because I told them to protect you.”

I didn’t know what to say. All of this time my father had been alive and had been watching out for me, whilst he tried to get justice for my mother.

“You could have told us you were alive!” I shouted. “Why didn’t you send me a message?”

“No. I couldn’t. It would have blown my cover,” he replied. “That’s why I’ve been working for Tobias for three years. I’ve slowly gained his trust and helped fund his research. It’s given me a front row seat for his latest experiment.”

“But how do you have so much money?”

“I found someone who hates Tobias as much as I do. He has his own motivations for wanting him stopped and so he was more than happy to help,” he said, not giving away any names. “I know this is a shock but I need you to do exactly what I tell you. I promise I will tell you everything as soon as Tobias is stopped.”

“Why should I trust you?”

“You know how much your mother’s death affected me Emmie. You saw me during my worst times and you know I would do anything to get her back. I now finally have the chance to get revenge. This is the man who killed your mother and brother. We can stop him.”

He placed a box on the table. On the side it said ‘Skin 1.5’. “It’s not as advanced as the tech Grace has but it’s gotten me this far,” he scooped a pink blob of skin from the box and turned back into the blonde haired man I had seen earlier.

It was like a bizarre dream. For a brief moment I had my father back and now he had morphed into someone else. He left the room and promised to return. I stared at the dark room and wondered how my life had changed so much.

FIFTY-SEVEN

Grace Wilkerson

“There it is!” shouted Grace as she pointed towards the Olympic park in the distance.

Chris, Grace, Gabe, March and the handful of remaining Deck team members ran towards the park and the stadium ahead.

“That’s the location marked on the map,” said Grace.

“And if it’s a trap?” asked Chris.

“Then at least we’ll meet the people who have Emmie,” she replied. “We can still get answers one way or the other.”

As the park got closer they could see people standing between them and the stadium.

“There’s a welcome committee,” said Gabe.

“I doubt they will be very welcoming,” replied Grace and they were soon close enough to see orange eyes across the crowd.

“There must be fifty of them,” said Chris. “We can’t take them.”

“We don’t have to,” said Gabe. “We just have to get past them and into the stadium.”

“Then what?”

“Find Emmie no matter what the cost.”

The group formed into a circle and walked towards the crowd of orange eyed people. The crowd ran towards them and they aimed their guns outwards emitting a circular ray of blue light that temporarily stopped their attackers in their tracks.

In no time The Deck were surrounded but they held their ground and continued to force their way through the crowd.

“The door is just up ahead,” said Gabe.

No one looked for the door. They kept their focus on the targets and walked one foot next to each other, slowly and carefully. A tumble or fall would mean the line would be broken and they would be attacked.

As they moved ever closer to the door Gabe saw a blonde haired man stood in the doorway. Gabe gave him a nod of acknowledgement and the man walked back inside. No one else saw the exchange.

“Almost there,” said Gabe.

The gun started to feel heavy in March’s hands. His shoulders felt weak from carrying the light earlier and now keeping his arms locked in position was proving difficult. He rolled his shoulders backwards and tried to ease the pain.

On the edges of the crowd orange eyed people sneaked around trying to find a way past the blue light. Whenever they got too close and touched the light they were stopped in their tracks. Yet, each step The Deck took forward, they would free another person from their grasp. The threat was continuous.

The Deck walked face to face with their enemies, who looked like statues as they made their way past.

The pain in his shoulder caused March to twitch, jarring his arm and pointing his gun up for just a second. It was enough time for one of the orange eyed people to break free and lunge towards him. By the time March had moved his arm back into position, two arms were stretched out in front of him over his shoulders. Had he been any slower he would have been caught.

March ducked under one of the arms and they continued their path forward.

Gabe reached the door first and he and Grace walked inside. The rest of the team formed a half circle around the door, facing outwards. As they shuffled into their new positions their orange eyed attackers got several steps closer. Thankfully The Deck were able to hold the line steady.

“March, we need you!” said Gabe.

March looked behind him keeping his gun held steady. He looked forwards again and saw three orange eyed people right in front of him.

“I can cover you,” said Chris.

March lowered himself to his knees and kept his gun pointed outwards. He then placed a hand behind him and started to crawl backwards.

Slowly the team moved in closer and formed a tighter semi-circle around the door. Only five of them remained to hold the position.

“All clear?” asked March.

Chris confirmed everything was ok and March put his gun down and rose to his feet. He turned around just in time to see Gabe throw his fist towards Grace as he let out an almighty scream.

FIFTY-EIGHT

Emmie Keyes

My father had returned and he now held my arm in a tight grip and walked me out onto the stadium field.

I could see row upon row of computers with orange lights lit up on them. On the stands of the stadium there were many more computers that didn't have any lights on but could still be heard whirring away as if they were awaiting instructions. It looked like a computer was located in every seat of the stadium, with many more on ground level.

"Just do exactly what I say," said my father. He gripped my arm so tightly that it seemed more of a threat than comforting.

Around the running track of the stadium were hundreds of satellite dishes aimed up to the sky. Thousands upon thousands of wires criss-crossed around the stadium connecting the satellites to computers but there was one destination every wire seemed to flow to.

In the centre of the stadium was a large chair that connected up to thousands of wires. In the seat sat Tobias. He was held in place with a tight harness across his chest and a helmet on his head. From the helmet ran small wires that circled around his chair and the harness.

It was a more high tech version of the machine I had seen in the video. The machine that Tobias had been subjected to when he was younger. It was horrific to think what had happened to him then and why he would want to subject himself to it again. Yet, the most horrific image of all was not Tobias but the chair that sat next to him. Unoccupied.

"It that chair for me?" I asked my father.

"Yes," he replied. Tobias would no doubt be able to hear us by now so there was no more time for questions. I hoped what the man who claimed to be my father had told me was true. If he was my father, then I hoped I could trust him after all this time.

"I have her," said my father.

Tobias did not move from his chair. His eyes remained motionless and he did not look at me. His gaze remained fixed at a point in the distance slightly upwards to the sky.

"Welcome Emmie," said Rex, who stood next to Tobias with Rufus. Tobias did not move and did not speak, he continued to use Rex as his voice and as his puppet.

"Do you like everything I have shown you today?" he asked.

“Why are you doing this to yourself?” I replied. “You hated the people who did this to you. Why would you return to the chair?”

He didn’t reply for a moment as if his attention was elsewhere. I could hear shouting coming from outside of the stadium. Some of the voices sounded familiar.

“What ... they did ... to me,” he replied, his voice breaking and trailing off every few words. “It cannot go ... unpunished. I need to get revenge... and I need ... you to do it.”

“Me?” I asked. “But why?”

“Show.. you...”

“I’ve seen enough,” I replied, as Rex started to walk towards me, an arm held out to escort me.

My father held one hand in the air in front of him. “I’ll do it,” he stated. He gripped tightly on my arm again and walked me towards the chair. I could see where we were heading and I tried to fight him. I’d seen what the chair could do and how it had destroyed a man. I couldn’t let that happen to me.

“Trust me,” he whispered into my ear. As I looked at how Tobias was mesmerised at the distance, I started to trust my father even less. I tried to fight him but he yanked me forwards. “Emmie, you have to do this. If you fight me then it will ruin everything.”

Rex looked at me with intrigue. I hoped my father hadn’t said too much. He was right, if I exposed him now then Rex, Rufus and my father would all be killed.

He placed me into the chair and I was close enough now to hear Tobias groan. There was a low groaning sound coming from him which gradually increased in volume every so often and then died down again. It was like watching someone experience a dream, although this very dearly wasn’t one.

My father placed the helmet onto my head and started to connect something into the back of it.

“This is taking too long,” stated Rex and he walked in front of me, pulling my shirt upwards and ripping it slightly. He applied a silver gel to my stomach. *Just like the video*, I thought. He then drew wires from the harness and injected them into my chest and arms.

Each injection gave off a burning sensation as it went into my skin. A sensation that did not stop even when the needle was all the way in. I could still feel it inside me, scraping inside my body and the burning sensation spread around the needle’s entry point.

My arms were bound to the sides of the chair and the harness was placed around my chest. It was tight and made me gasp for air from the impact of it being tightened in place. Rex was not gentle in any way.

“Ready,” said Rex and he held up a thumb in the air.

“Ready,” said my father, although I could not see him behind me.

For two minutes there was nothing but the pain of the needles in my body. Not a word was said and all I could hear were the mysterious shouts from outside the stadium and the groans of Tobias. The tension built up inside me. Rufus and Rex stood perfectly still, not giving any signs of what would happen.

I could no longer see my father and I hoped that he truly was working on my side.

Then without warning the burning sensation spread throughout my body. It snaked down nerve pathways and I could feel it travel down my arms and legs. By the time it reached my neck every inch of my body was tingling and warm.

The tingling feeling worked upwards and as it passed my throat I felt like I was going to be sick. The sensation reached my nose and I could smell burning. By the time it had reached my brain my body started to shake in an attempt to remove the sensation but it was too late. It was a part of me now.

Rows of computers on the edge of stadium started to flicker and the harness in front of me gave off the same groan as Tobias. Then I realised that he wasn't making the groaning noise, it was the sound of electricity crackling and the same thing was happening to me. I was being electrocuted from the inside. The burning I smelt was my insides being burned away. The sick feeling I felt, was my stomach acid being heated and forced upwards.

My father dashed in front of me. “Fight it!” he shouted, no longer seeming to care about giving away his identity. “I know you can do this.”

I didn't know what to do. He hadn't told me any of this or what would happen. I wasn't sure how to fight.

He tilted my head backwards and said “This will relieve the pain.”

It did help slightly. It forced the sensation away from my head and took away some of the sick feeling. Yet the burning feeling remained and the points where the needles were in me now felt incredibly hot. I could feel my skin around them starting to burn on the outside.

“Think about your centre,” said my father.

Suddenly in-between the burning I started to feel a cool spot within me. It felt like a desert oasis and a momentary break from my pain. A small smile formed on my face as I felt a brief moment of peace that quickly faded as the heat raged back over me.

“That's it,” said my father. “Focus on that place.”

“Don't lose her!” said Tobias through Rex. It sounded like a threat.

For my father's sake I tried to find that peace again. I could feel it slightly around my belly where the grey coating had been applied but deep inside of me rather than on the outside. As I focused on that point I could feel the fire inside my body being pulled into that point.

My neck felt cool and I felt like I was winning. The fire started to push back and I tried to focus even harder on that single point; just above my belly button. I could feel it there. It felt safe and it was all I could think about. For a moment I forgot that I was in the chair. I forgot about everyone. The only feeling in my body was that of the cool relief that spot offered.

From that singular spot I felt a wave of cool wash over my body. The warm feeling was gone, yet something else had gone with it.

I tried to open my eyes but all I could see was darkness. I couldn't move my arms or feel my body. I felt motionless.

For a second I wondered if I had died but then a familiar voice comforted me.

"You did it," said my father. He brought me back to reality but I could still not see or move. All of my senses had gone and there was nothing but darkness.

FIFTY-NINE

Emmie Keyes

The first sense that came back to me was the power of hearing.

The noise was overpowering. I could hear the screams of every person Tobias had taken control of. In amongst the chaos I could hear Rex apologising for what he had done. I could hear his every thought and how he longed to regain control and stop Tobias. Rufus too was worried and obsessed about grabbing a frying pan and beating Tobias with it.

The thought made me want to laugh but I couldn't articulate the sound. I felt like a passer-by observing Tobias' power but with none of my own.

My other senses were lost in the ether and the collection of other sounds were not familiar without any other context. I could hear Grace shouting and yelling at Gabe to stop. I had no idea why and hoped that she hadn't been possessed by Tobias as well. Although if what The Deck told me was true that should be impossible.

Then I could hear my father. I knew he hadn't been turned so I must have been able to hear him through someone else like Rex.

"Emmie has been successfully transfused," he said.

"Good," said Tobias. This time it was his voice I could hear. There was no one else speaking his words for him. His voice was real and filled my head, blocking out every other sound.

"Emmie," said Tobias. "Welcome to the greatest experiment of all. You are now a part of the world that was created twenty one years ago and soon you'll be able to see the true extent of what was done to me that day."

The blackness all around me started to light up slightly and in one corner there shone a bright beacon of light. It moved towards me as if Tobias wanted to show me something.

As the light reached me and filled my vision I could see inside the Olympic stadium again. *Am I seeing through my own eyes?* I wondered. The view was not what I expected. I could see Tobias from head on and as the view shifted I could see myself in a chair held in place.

The view moved closer and I could now see my face up close. My eyes were wide open and I was staring to the sky, just like Tobias had been. My arms were limp and I seemed lifeless.

"Am I dead?" I asked and I could hear the words emerge from elsewhere. The voice was not my own. "Rex?" I asked and I could hear his voice repeating me.

The view startled backwards away from me and I then realised what was happening. I focused on the floor and the view shifted downwards. I gasped in shock as the realisation hit me and then saw a hand raise up to stop the gasp.

I was controlling Rex. He was carrying out my every thought and saying my every word.

I looked around to try and get my bearings and saw Rufus standing totally still. In a heartbeat I was pulled away from the vision and towards a new bright light. As I approached this one I could now see through the eyes of Rufus and was looking back at Rex. I moved his arm to wave at Rex and then switched back to Rex so he could wave in return.

“What have you done to me?” I asked and the words were echoed by both Rufus and Rex.

“That’s nothing,” said Tobias. “With this power anything is possible. We can change the world in any way we wish. Imagine being able to take over anyone at any time. The possibilities are infinite.”

He was right. This power could change the world for the better. If we took over corrupt politicians and the people who were destroying society then we could shape a better world. Yet everything I had seen of Tobias made this seem like an impossibility. The man was obsessed with war.

I pulled away from the bright light. “In time you will be able to control many people at once, it will make you unstoppable just like I am now.”

In front of me I saw many more lights emerge. “What are they?” I asked.

“They are all people I control and with each minute I can control even more. My own private army,” he replied.

I looked through one of the lights and was stuck in a body that could not move. In front of me were soldiers from The Deck shining a blue light in my face. They were trying to stop this chaos. Beyond those soldiers I could see Gabe and Grace fighting each other. I had suspected Gabe was unstable but this was something entirely different.

“What have you done to him?” I asked.

“Gabe?” replied Tobias. “He’s the test subject for a new serum we have been perfecting. I must admit it was quite handy having him back at TethTech when we needed a test dummy. It unlocks people’s raw strength, although it looks like it had some unexpected side effects.”

I tried to move my new body but it was stuck from the blue light. All I could do was watch as Gabe tried to kill my best friend.

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Grace Wilkerson

“Why are you fighting us?” asked Grace. “Are you working for Tobias?”

Gabe didn't reply, he just kicked his leg out towards Grace's chest. She grabbed his leg with her hands and twisted it, trying to force him downwards. He swung his arm around and punched her on the shoulder knocking her off balance and releasing his leg.

March jumped on to Gabe's back, holding both arms around his neck and his feet around Gabe's belly. Gabe reached backwards with his hand to remove him but March swung his body weight to one side taking Gabe down with him. They both tumbled onto the floor.

"Do you need our help?" shouted Chris, hearing the commotion behind him.

"No," said Grace. "You have to hold the line."

Chris looked ahead at the orange eyed people who were still being held in place with the blue lights. "I hope you gave these guns long batteries March," he joked.

March tried to push Gabe off of him but he wasn't strong enough. Gabe pulled his fist back ready to punch March. Grace kicked dirt from the floor towards Gabe and it hit him in the face. He moved his hands to his eyes to try and clear his vision and by leaning backwards he released March from the bulk of his weight.

"You have to stop!" shouted Grace. "I don't know why you are doing this but this isn't you."

Gabe stood up on his feet again and cracked his knuckles. He formed a fist with his right arm and led with his left foot towards Grace. As he threw his fist forward she ducked and tried to avoid the impact but he anticipated it and hit her on her left side. She struggled to stay on her feet and he caught her with an upper cut with his right fist this time sending her tumbling backwards and on to the floor.

"No!" shouted March, who tried to grab Gabe but was stopped by a kick to his leg. He felt the full force of the impact on his knee and it sent him down to the floor.

Gabe sat down on top of Grace. "Now to do what General Kull couldn't do."

The General, thought Grace and then she remembered the man who had tried to sexually assault her. The man who had almost broken her back. It was all about to happen again. "This isn't you!" she screamed at Gabe.

March tried to crawl towards Grace to help her but Gabe kicked him in the face, stunning him.

He grabbed Grace's top and started to tear it off her. "No!" she screamed. As Gabe went to place his hand on her chest a loud gunshot echoed through the air.

Gabe placed a hand on his shoulder where the impact had occurred. Blood started to seep from the wound and he let out a groan of pain. The second and third bullets hit him in his chest, sending him over onto his side. The final impact was the butt of Grace's gun as she knocked him off her and onto the floor.

"Why?" asked Grace, as she looked down at the gun in her hand. "None of this is right."

She walked over to Gabe and opened his shirt. Two bullets had hit his bulletproof vest and the first bullet was lodged in his shoulder. He'd survive. She hoped.

She walked over to March and helped him to his feet. "I'll be ok," he replied and he hobbled over towards the stadium entrance.

"Hold the line," Grace said to Chris.

He turned around to confirm the request but did so in time to see Gabe's hand as it grabbed Grace's foot. Thinking on instinct Chris turned around and shot Gabe in the chest again.

"No!" shouted Grace and she watched in horror as the line was broken. Chris turned around to try and block the gap but it was too late. A swarm of orange eyed people ran towards The Deck breaking through their defences. One of the team was knocked to the floor and an orange eyed man starting punching him repeatedly.

SIXTY

Emmie Keyes

“Why are you doing this?” I asked, as I saw The Deck get attacked.

“They are a threat ... and all threats ... must be stopped,” replied Tobias, his focus had shifted now, away from me and onto the battleground. I could hear it from the gaps in his voice.

I sensed my opportunity and took control of one of the orange eyed men. I controlled the man through the crowd and towards the downed members of The Deck who were on the floor. Using his body I kicked the orange eyed men off them and held out a hand.

“Take my hand,” I said.

The man looked back with fear in his eyes but held out his arm regardless. “Thank you,” he replied, unsure what had happened.

“Grace,” I thought, as I saw my friend up close. A little too close. Grace ran towards my orange eyed body and shone a blue light at me. I was stuck in a frozen body once again.

I switched bodies to one at the back of the pack that wasn't exposed to the blue light and shouted. “It's me, Emmie!”

“More mind games?” asked Grace.

“No, it's me. Two years ago on the 21st September we kissed. Remember?”

Grace looked at me dumbfounded. “No one knows that,” she said.

“I do,” I replied. “Trust me.”

Before Grace could confirm if she did indeed trust me, she was tackled by an orange eyed woman. I tried to save her but another member of The Deck shone blue light on me.

“Dammit!” I shouted. I pulled myself back away from the light and tried to find another way to help. There were so many lights in front of me, each one a different body to control and a different way to help. Then I realised there was another way to help.

I saw an orange eyed man that was fighting Chris and I took over his body. When Chris threw a fist I did nothing. I took the impact and let the body fall to the floor. “*One down,*” I said to myself.

I continued to jump from body to body deliberately losing any fights they were midway through. I jumped into the body on top of Grace and threw myself to the floor away from her.

“What are they doing?” asked Chris. “It's like they want to lose.”

"It's Emmie," said Grace. "This is our chance, form the line," she said.

Grace and March ran into the stadium and the remaining members of The Deck formed a line with enough blue light to block the entrance.

As I watched them run into the stadium I jumped back into the darkness and a voice was waiting.

"Impressive," said Tobias. I had his full attention now. "Now do you understand your power?" he asked.

"You have to stop this before someone gets hurt," I replied.

"People will get hurt," he said with certainty.

I jumped back into Rex's mind just in time to see Grace and March enter the stadium. They looked around and saw my body in the chair.

"Emmie!" shouted Grace. What have they done to you?"

March hobbled over towards me. He seemed injured but was determined to reach me. I held out my arms to hug them both but it was Rex's arms that raised not my own.

"What have you done to her?" asked Grace.

I felt myself kicked back to the darkness and I could hear Tobias speaking through Rex.

"I gave her what everyone wants. Power."

Grace looked at Rex. "What happened to you Rex?" she asked.

"Rex is gone," he replied. "I can control anyone now. Except you and your team, Grace. Why can't I control you?" he asked.

"It's a mystery."

I felt happy knowing I had one up on Tobias. Without twins there was no way he could control any of The Deck. I hoped that would be enough to keep them safe.

"No matter. I've killed most of your team now so no one will be able to stop Emmie and I."

"Don't make me a part of this!" I shouted, although only Tobias heard me.

"You have been a part of this since the day you were born Emmie," he replied to only me.

SIXTY-ONE

Jill Blackwood

Jill walked down the street in a police woman's uniform. She looked up into the sky and saw the TethTech building on the horizon.

"Didn't think I'd see this place again," she said.

She turned around and walked towards the tower that houses Mr King's empire. The media were gathered outside interviewing employees, none of whom had any good answers.

"Why did Mr King fund terrorists?" asked a journalist.

"Did he cause the 20 Day Siege?" asked another.

Jill walked up to one of the police officers trying to control the crowd. She showed the officer an assortment of paperwork and walked through the throngs of people.

"Why does she get answers?" asked a journalist whilst pointing to Jill.

Jill ignored him and walked inside the building. *Results are better than answers*, she said to herself.

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Mr King

Mr King sat behind his desk his head in his hands. *How did it come to this?* he wondered.

A police officer sat in front of him. "Why did you do it?" she asked.

"I've told you," he replied. "I funded the Separationists but I had no idea any of this would happen. Every experiment they did was approved by the Government. It all seemed safe."

"Safe?" remarked the officer. "A billion people died because of your investment."

Mr King stood up and slammed his hands on the table. "That wasn't my bloody fault!"

The officer stood up and shouted back. "Do not raise your voice Mr King. You are already facing a significant amount of jail time. Do not make it worse for yourself."

There is nothing worse than being a rich man in jail, he thought.

He heard a knock at the door and the officer walked outside.

He stood up and started walking towards the window, looking down at the street below. *I should throw myself out right now, he thought to himself. You'd fucking like that wouldn't you Tobias?*

He heard the door shut which shocked him from his thoughts. "How long must we do this?" he asked. As he turned around he saw a different officer looking back at him.

"You have to do exactly as I say," she stated.

Jill looked at Mr King as he thought about her statement.

"How dare you tell me what to do!" he replied. "How old are you? Eighteen? Twenty? Some pre-pubescent teen is not going to tell me what to do. I didn't become a champion of industry by listening to little bitches."

Jill ignored his ageism and sexism and placed a tablet computer onto the table. "Look," she said.

The screen showed Tobias taking an elevator down to the server room. Mr King watched in shock as he saw the recording of Tobias planting an USB stick into the network and then leaving the room.

"When was this taken!" he demanded.

"Six months ago."

"That's impossible. I know that day. I watched every bit of footage from when he tainted this place. That never happened."

"It happened. He switched the footage but this is the original recording that was wiped."

"That's crap," he replied. "How would you have such a thing?"

"One, your security is terrible and two, nothing is ever really deleted. I found it in a sealed off hard drive partition and revived the data using..."

She was interrupted by Mr King. "What did he do?"

"So you will do what I said?"

"Yes," he replied. "Anything to stop that orange wearing freak."

"Then here's what you need to do."

SIXTY-TWO

Emmie Keyes

I continued to watch from my small light out into the world and could hear Tobias speak to me. "Everything I've done to get you here has been leading up to this one moment," he said.

"You have seen what those people did to me," he said. "Do you feel they need to be punished?"

"They were trying to save billions of lives," I said.

"Yet my life was an acceptable risk?"

"I don't know. But whatever you are planning it isn't worth taking over all these people."

"People?" he replied. "They aren't people any more to me. They are vessels for my own power. Hands to do whatever I need. Yet they are not the people I really want to control. Let me show you the people who deserve my attention."

The lights in front of me shifted to reveal ten windows of new light. "Take a look," he said.

I looked through the portals and didn't see anything I recognised. The inside of a jail cell, the padded wall of a mental institution, a derelict apartment, the dark corner of an alleyway. Whoever these people were, none of them were in good places.

"They are the people who did this to me," said Tobias.

Tobias revealed an eleventh window and urged me to look through it. I focused my vision on it but could only see myself in the chair. It had to be the vision of someone in the room.

"Don't hurt Rex!" I shouted.

He moved the vision around and I could see Rex and Rufus. I knew he couldn't be controlling Jill or March which just left one person.

"Dad?"

"That's right Emmie," said Tobias, hearing my every thought. "Your father. I doubt he told you he was one of the people who did this to me? I've been watching him a long time, as he has no doubt been watching me. It was nice of him to stay by my side this long."

I was in shock. I couldn't believe my father would hurt anyone. "You're lying!" I said.

"I promised I would always tell you the truth. This is no lie. Your father was not there on the day you were born. That day he was with me. Operating on me. He felt my suffering was more important than your birth," stated Tobias.

"He was trying to save the world. My life is more important than that!" I said back.

"Didn't you ever wonder why he blamed himself for your mother's death so much? It was because she was the last person to die from the 20 Day Siege. If he had used me to find a cure sooner then he would have saved her. Your mother died because he didn't torture me enough."

There were no words to describe what I was feeling. I didn't know who to blame for my mother's death. No one could blame Tobias for what he went through and yet my father should not have pushed him to such dark places.

"I can hear your thoughts Emmie," said Tobias. "You are conflicted but I'm going to make your life simpler. The eleven people you can see in front of you were the ones who operated on me and made me what I am. They have all carried a large burden for what they did, none of them going onto live normal lives afterwards."

He continued. "I'm going to show them a kindness that they did not show me. I'm going to end their suffering."

"No!" I shouted.

One of the lights moved forward and I could see through the eyes of the man in the prison cell. He started banging on the bars shouting "Guards! Guards!". The guards came rushing over and dragged the man out of his cell. "What happened to your eyes?" They asked.

He grabbed one of the guards and threw him over a railing onto the concrete floor below. The other guard grabbed a gun and shot the prisoner. I could feel the gunshot rip through his body and then he fell to the ground. Two more shots were fired and the light disappeared.

"That was an easy one," said Tobias, clearly enjoying this.

My view moved to the darkened alley as I saw someone hand over thousands of pounds for a large packet of some kind of white powdered drug. "Be careful with that," said the dealer.

I watched the body walk back to the dark corner and snort the drug until every last flake had gone. The body started to convulse and I began to feel delusional as his brain ceased to function. The light disappeared and nine nights remained.

"I wanted to save your father to the end but I'm too excited," said Tobias. "I'm going to give this one to you Emmie. You can kill him any way you like."

A light moved towards me and I could feel in control of my father's body. I looked at Grace and shouted "Help me."

"Emmie," she replied and while she was distracted an orange eyed Rufus grabbed her and pinned her to the ground. "Get off me!" she shouted but she couldn't compete with his improved strength.

"March, help," I said but Rex now held a gun directly at March.

"Emmie, you have no choice," said Tobias. "You saw what this man did to me. I showed you the tape. I showed you where he kept me whilst he tortured me. You know what he is capable of. He deserves to die."

"I can't do it! He's still my Dad. He didn't do those things to hurt you."

"Don't be so naive! He could have found another way. He could have saved everyone without hurting me. There's always a choice."

"You don't know that!"

"No one left to die," said Tobias. "That should be how the world works but it isn't. It's all a lie! People are left behind to die every day to further a career or science or sometimes for fun. Your father is just the next person to be left behind to die."

Rex clicked off the safety on his gun. "I will make you do this," said Tobias. Rex aimed the gun towards himself and placed the end inside his mouth.

"Don't!" I shouted.

"Why are you doing this to her?" shouted Grace. "She didn't do anything to you."

I tried desperately to break free from the light and jump into another body. *If I could just grab control of Rex I might be able to save everyone*, I thought.

"Fine," I replied. "Just have Rex drop the gun."

"That's better," said Tobias. Rex lowered the gun but held it by his side with the safety off. "Sorry Emmie, I can't have spare weapons lying around."

Rex walked towards a table that sat to the side of my chair. He kept looking backwards towards March and aiming his gun at him. "Don't move traitor."

Rex pulled a cloth from the table. "I wanted to give you options," he said.

I walked my father towards the table and saw its contents. It was a table of death; knives, pills, razor blades, barbed wire, brass knuckles and more. So many different ways to die. "You can kill him any way you like but remember I can feel his vital signs. If you try to trick me I will know."

I looked down at the table. I wasn't prepared to kill my father, even after knowing what he had done.

"I need you to make a promise," I said. "If I do this. I want you to stop controlling other people. This has to end now. You will have had your revenge and you can stop."

He replied. "I can't do that Emmie. That won't restore balance for what happened that day."

I made sure my back was to everyone and concealed a knife in my father's pocket. Then I picked up the wire and turned around. "Then at least my father will have a quick death."

I walked towards Tobias' motionless body. "I want you to see this up close. That's what you want right?"

As I walked past Grace I moved a hand to my father's pocket and slid the knife out to her. She quickly grabbed it and stabbed Rufus in the leg. He screamed out in pain and rolled off her whilst frantically trying to pull out the knife.

Rex turned to face Grace, ready to fire but he was stopped by a bright blue light. March had retrieved his gun in the chaos and now stood there shining it brightly on to Rex.

I ran towards Tobias with the wire and pulled it tight with my hands in preparation for one last desperate act. "This has to stop," I shouted.

As I reached Tobias I felt myself stop running. The arms I had moments ago held outwards were now heading towards me and were wrapped around my father's head. I no longer had control.

"I told you I can see everything Emmie. You knew the rules. I gave you the chance to do this but I'll have to do it myself."

I could feel my father's neck as the wire cut into it, its razor sharp points cutting through the skin and causing blood to flood outwards. I could feel him gag as he tried to breathe in air but his airway was blocked and his neck ruptured. The pressure began to build in his head and I could see his vision start to blur as his brain shut down.

"You were right Emmie. It will be a quick death," said Tobias. "This is for twenty one years of suffering."

My vision went black and the light shattered and fell away. Then there was nothing. No lights and no sound, not even the voice of Tobias taunting me. Worst of all there were no feelings. No anger, no sadness, just a feeling of emptiness at my father's death.

SIXTY-THREE

Jill Blackwood

Jill looked at the computer terminal in front of her and smiled. "Your system really was remarkably easy to hack. When all this is over you should give me a job," she joked.

"If you ruin Tobias then I will give you anything you want," replied Mr King. "but what exactly have you done?"

"It's simple really. Tobias hijacked your network and is using it to broadcast a sound wave to any cell phone he wants," said Jill.

"So can you stop it?"

She looked at him and winked. "I already have," she pulled out her phone and called Grace's number.

"Hello?" answered Grace.

Yes! Finally a hello! thought Jill and then realised she hadn't said anything. "I've got good news."

"Jill?" said Grace. "What the hell happened to you? You can't just leave the base without telling anyone."

"There was no time. How is everything there?"

"It's bad. Tobias has taken control of Emmie and he tried to make her kill her father."

"Oh my God. Is everyone ok?"

"March has checked Emmie's father and he still has a pulse. One minute he was trying to cut his own throat and the next minute his eyes turned brown and he dropped to the floor. We've checked around and all of the orange eyed people in the area seem to be back to normal."

"Perfect!" said Jill. "Can you guess who did that?"

"Hmm, was it Emmie?" joked Grace.

"Very funny. I've stopped the signal now so Tobias can't take control of anyone. All you need to do is get Emmie out of there. March should know the technology better than I do. Is he still with you?"

"Yes, he's fine. We'll get Emmie out now and do what we can with Tobias. Nice work Jill," she hung up.

"It's over. We stopped Tobias. Frankly I thought that would have been harder," she smiled at Mr King. "I'll take that job offer now."

Suddenly the computers behind Jill started to kick into life and began buzzing loudly. The lights on them flickered quickly and she could hear the loud hum of a thousand fans kicking into overdrive.

"This isn't good," she looked at Mr King and saw that he hadn't moved. Her eyes were drawn to his face and she saw his eyes flicker to an orange tint. So not good!" she repeated.

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Emmie Keyes

The darkness around me filled my head with thoughts of my father. He had done truly horrible things but he didn't deserve to die in that way. No one did.

As I tried to remember the good times we'd shared, before he became obsessed with avenging my mother, I saw a light appear. "Dad?" I said with hope in my heart.

Before I could go to the light I saw another light appear next to it and then another and another. Lights started to flood in, first one by one and then ten by ten and even more after that. It wasn't long before my entire field of vision was clouded in a flood of light and the darkness had gone completely.

What is happening? I wondered.

I fought my way forwards and looked through one of the pools of light. I could see out into New York City. It was the morning there and I could see hundreds of people in Times Square. Yet they were not walking. They were simply standing on the spot without so much as flinching. I tried to move the body I was in but it was held in place and refused to move.

I jumped through more lights and saw similar things all over the world. Birmingham, Tokyo, Africa, Europe, America, everywhere I jumped I could see large groups of people not moving. The times when I could see another person's face there was another constant; orange eyes.

"What have you done Tobias?" I asked.

I tried to find my way back to Rex or Rufus' light so I could see what was happening but there were too many lights and possibilities. I'd jumped through what seemed like a hundred lights and could not find my way back home. My body was there but my mind was trapped in this maze of lights and other bodies.

I made one more leap and ended up in the body of an elderly Chinese lady on the Great Wall of China. She had a small stall that sold postcards and souvenirs. From her perch you could see for miles down the Great wall and it was the same as everywhere else. Hundreds of orange eyed people stuck to the spot. "I will find you Rex," I said as I tried to jump back.

Something was stopping me. I tried to pull my body backwards but I couldn't return to the lights. I tried to move the Chinese lady's body but it was also stuck in place. My mind was trapped in a body that I could not control. All I could do was watch and wait.

SIXTY-FOUR

Mr King

Mr King continued to stay fixed in one place, now bound by plastic wire cables that Jill had fashioned around his arms and legs.

"Ok, just stay there," said Jill, as she carefully walked around him to move some cables from one of the servers. "What have you done Tobias?"

Jill heard her phone ring and saw the caller ID was Grace. "Hello?" she answered.

"What happened Jill?" asked Grace. "We are surrounded by tens of thousands of computers and they all just turned on at the same time."

"The same thing happened here. Have the orange eyes come back?"

"Yes. I thought you stopped them?"

"I think Tobias was one step ahead of us. He probably had a backup in place. Damn! I should have seen it. There's no way it should have been so easy to hack in. I just thought it was Mr King's crappy systems but Tobias wanted me to hack in."

"Why?"

"I got Mr King's admin login so I could shut down the servers. Tobias must have been hoping Mr King or someone else would use his admin login and now he's hijacked the account. It means he can control every satellite and computer controlled by the company. Which means he could turn anyone he wanted into those orange eyed freaks."

"So he could control the entire world?" asked Grace.

"Yes, apart from The Deck, Emmie and anyone else who was born without a twin on the last day of the Siege. I don't fancy our chances in that war."

"All I need to know is if you can stop it."

"Maybe. I'll need more time. Does March still have the light from the helicopter?"

"No, it's gone. The orange eyed people took it."

"Then March will have to use the backup plan."

"I won't let him do that. Not yet, it's too risky."

"You may not have a choice. I'll let you know if anything changes here."

Grace hung up. "What did she say?" asked March. "Should we prepare the backup?"

"Not yet, Emmie may still be able to stop this. We can't risk her yet."

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Emmie Keyes

My eyes scanned across the Great Wall of China and the people from all over the world who remained motionless along it.

Suddenly one of the men closest to me turned around. I remained stuck, as did everyone else but he was able to walk towards me with a large creepy smile on his face.

"Do you like what you see Emmie?" said the man.

"Tobias?" I asked.

"Who else? Everything you have seen me do today was given to me. The power to control people was given to me by your father and now this," he motioned his hand in the direction of the motionless bodies, "was given to me by one of your friends at The Deck. When you try to play with Science there is always a cost and today I am the one who earns the profit."

"What will you do to all of these people?"

"What was always meant to be done to them," he replied. "The sound wave that caused my awakening and killed all those people twenty one years ago was never meant to be stopped. It was our punishment for trying to break the Tethers that bind us. That's why it has to happen again and this time no one will be able to use me to stop it."

"You can't do this!" I shouted. "These people don't deserve to die. Was there not enough bloodshed all those years ago? A billion people died! Isn't that enough?"

"And what did the world learn Emmie? The have's just got richer and the have-nots became poorer than ever," he said. "The world could have grown stronger by that experience and united together but it didn't. A billion people died and the survivors behaved worse than ever to each other. So no, it wasn't enough."

"They are trying. People every day are trying to survive. You can't take away their choice."

"Isn't it my right?" said Tobias. "My body was used to stop the Siege so if I start it again then I'll simply be returning things to the natural order. It'll be like I never existed at all."

"Someone will stop you. There must be someone else who has the power to do it?"

"There is. It's you Emmie. Why do you think I bought you here and trapped you in this body? You are the only other person in the world who is like me and now all you can do is stay fixed to this spot and watch the world end. Goodbye."

He turned away from me and ran towards the edge of the Great Wall, throwing himself over the side and down onto the cliff face below. "No!" I screamed.

“Don’t worry Emmie,” I could hear his voice in my head. “I won’t leave you. It can be me and you until the end of time. Now watch.”

Watching was all I could do and suddenly there was so much to watch. Every single person on the bridge, apart from my vessel, placed their head in their hands and screamed. Their cries echoed around the canyons of the Great Wall and combined together to make a horrific scream of pain.

I could feel their pain reverberating through my body and knew that this was not an act that could be stopped by me. Almost every person on the planet was dying and all I could do was watch and feel every ounce of their pain.

SIXTY-FIVE

Chris Jacobs

Chris looked out in horror onto the fields surrounding the Olympic Park. Aside from The Deck every single person in the field was screaming into their hands.

The people they had moments ago been fighting were now in intense pain. "We have to help them," said Chris.

His team dropped their weapons and ran out into the field. They tried to talk to the screaming people and calm them but there was no reply and no sign of recognition.

Chris radioed through to Grace and told her what had happened. She was soon interrupted by a call from Kenan. "We're picking up the sound wave worldwide now. It's everywhere."

"March I need to know what is happening to these people," said Grace.

March watched through gritted teeth as Rex and Rufus screamed into the sky. He removed a stethoscope from his backpack and used it on Rex. "Their bodies are responding normally with typical heartbeat and pulse. I have no idea what is happening to them."

"So you can't stop it?" asked Grace.

"There's only one other thing it could be," said March. "He must be controlling their Tethers. If he's doing that then he could kill anyone he wanted by severing the link to their twin."

"Dammit!" shouted Grace. "Then we don't have any other option. If he can kill anyone and he's controlling everyone then we have to use the backup. Emmie, I'm sorry."

"Are you sure?" asked March, as he loaded an app on his phone.

Grace didn't reply, she simply gave a small nod and looked away.

"You can do this Emmie," said March as he activated the app.

The screams continued.

"Did it work?" asked Grace.

March scrolled through the data on his phone. "No," he replied. "It's unresponsive. It's as if Emmie isn't alive anymore."

"I can see her breathing!" shouted Grace. "She can do this."

“I’ll keep trying but I don’t think the problem is something we can fix. I think it’s all down to Emmie now.”

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Emmie Keyes

The pain continued to build inside of me as the combined cries of a world in agony thundered through my body.

“Stop it!” I shouted. “STOP!”

I could feel the pain getting worse and each person in the chain was starting to weaken, their bodies crumbling under the combined pressure. They couldn’t take this anymore and I knew everyone was going to die.

I forced myself backwards again and again trying to break the hold that Tobias had upon me. The screams forced me to continue, to try and help in any way I could even if it was only to save one person.

As I thought about all the people I knew who were dying at that very moment and the people who I would never meet who deserved to live just as much I felt more determined to continue on. Their pain gave me the strength to continue and as they weakened I felt myself grow stronger and could feel the seal that was blocking me in beginning to break.

With one final push I emerged out of the light and into the darkness. Back in the confines of my own mind I looked through the other lights trying to find one that would lead me to the room holding Tobias.

Before I could find one I started to feel a cold sensation. It was the first feeling I had felt in a long time that came from my own body and it felt unnatural. I could feel it building by my stomach and soon it started to spread across my belly and out across my torso.

“What is happening?” I asked. No one replied. Not even Tobias.

The feeling continued until my body felt numb. *Is this death?* I wondered, hoping that I hadn’t failed.

As the feeling rose up my neck and hit my brain I could see the lights around me starting to change. They grew brighter than ever and began to merge one by one into a giant white light that filled the entire space. When the light was at its brightest I felt myself pulled in.

The sensation was incredible. I felt in control of everyone that Tobias had connected to. I could hear all of their thoughts and could move their bodies together as a single entity.

“Tobias. You have to stop,” I said and I could hear my sentence repeated back by billions of voices.

Yet there was one voice that rose above all of the others. I tried to focus in on it and move away from everyone else. As I left each of the bodies I could feel them being released and freed

from the chain. The screams started to stop one by one and people began to regain control of their own minds and bodies.

One scream continued and no matter how many people I saved this one voice could not be silenced. Eventually only one light remained and I dove into it.

I looked out through the light and could see Rex and Rufus being treated by Grace and March. Their eyes had returned to a normal colour. I prayed they had survived the assault.

I wanted to cry when I saw my father helping them. "You survived," I said, filled with relief.

Back in my own body at last, I thought.

"Not quite," came the reply.

My vision was moved to the left and I saw my body still in the chair. There was only one place I could be now. In the mind of Tobias Zen.

"Bravo," he said. "You saved everyone but you know I can do it again just like that. You'll have to kill at least one person today."

"No," I replied. "You just need to stop this. You tested the entire planet and we survived. That was your revenge. It's over."

"It's not over until I say it is!" he shouted.

Lights began to emerge in the room and I could feel it starting all over again.

I felt an immense rage build inside me. Rage at the people Tobias had hurt and the lives he had threatened. It was unlike any feeling I had felt before, and it was a feeling that started to intensify through a cold shiver that shot through my body with lightning like intensity.

As I felt the power build inside of me my mind had a single pure focus; stopping Tobias. Just as I was about to attempt to jump into the lights to free everyone my vision was pulled backwards and I felt myself being taken back to my own body.

"No!" I shouted but it was too late. I returned to the darkness and could see a single bright light filling the wall. The light for Tobias' mind. Before I could dive back in I opened my eyes and could control my body again.

"I have to go back in!" I shouted. "I have to stop him."

"You already have," said March who had run to my side.

I looked over at Tobias and saw that his eyes had been destroyed, dark holes resting in place where they had been. My father released him from the machine and Tobias fell to the floor unable to move his body.

SIXTY-SIX

Emmie's Father

"Does she know why she survived?" asked Emmie's father.

"No," replied March, "and we have to keep it that way."

"So she has no idea that you didn't remove the core that was inserted into her in Birmingham?"

"That's right," replied March. "and she doesn't suspect that we were the ones who implanted it into her originally."

"That really was a fantastic Tobias disguise," replied Emmie's father. "Well make sure she stays that way. The core saved her life today but I pray she never finds out the true purpose behind it."

"She trusts me," replied March. "I'll make sure she never finds out."

"Excellent. Now go cure Gabe. We'll need him going forward."

"Ok boss."

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Emmie Keyes

We watched Tobias for the next three hours but his vitals showed no sign of improving. He was alive but only just. March said it was probably a coma bought on by the pressure of controlling all those people but I had a different theory.

In my last moments in Tobias' mind I felt connected to him in the same way I had felt in control of the other orange eyed people. So when I was awoken it felt like a part of me still had that control; that I was the one who was not allowing him to wake up again.

If that was the case I had no intention of ever allowing Tobias to hurt anyone and I vowed to never use the technology again, even if it could be used for good. If there was a small chance some of Tobias lived on inside of me then I couldn't risk the chance of setting him free and allowing him back into his body.

If Tobias was trapped in my brain then he'd be staying there for a very long time.

Jill removed the virus that Tobias had been using to communicate with the world and March dismantled the technology Tobias had been using in the Olympic Park. We removed all traces of the technology that we could, to try and prevent this ever happening again.

The Deck took Tobias' body back to their base for safe keeping. I made them promise not to experiment on him. He had been through enough. My father agreed and said that his days of experimenting on Tobias or anyone were long over.

On the nights that followed my father opened up to me about what had happened twenty one years ago. About the guilt he felt for hurting Tobias and the blame he placed on himself for my mother's death. He had done a truly horrible thing in the past, there was no doubt but he had put things right today and I hoped that would ease his conscience. He was a good man and I was prepared to try and trust him again, he was all the family I had left.

March had also earned my trust. He had saved me so many times and I was thankful he had operated on me all those months ago. I dreaded to think what would have happen if he hadn't removed Tobias' device. The love I felt for him had only grown stronger and I longed to be with him again when I recovered. March suggested I rest for at least a month to help my brain recover from the 'mental trauma' as he put it, so I decided to obey Doctors orders for once but only as they came from him.

It was Rex and Rufus I felt the biggest debt to. They hadn't deserved a part in any of this. Everyone else had joined The Deck in order to fight but they were innocent. After we'd moved Tobias to The Deck I returned home with R&R and Grace who promised to help me recover. We spent the next few weeks catching up and laughing more than we had done for years.

Life slowly began to return to normal. Well as normal as things could be in our world of haves and have-nots.

SIXTY-SEVEN

Emmie Keyes

I felt everything.

I awoke with a jolt and could feel beads of sweat all over me. I ran to the bathroom and tried to cool down but felt a hard thud at the back of my head. It was followed by a sharp pain in my stomach that caused me to gag over the sink.

My body felt cold and I started to shiver. It was a cold that started in my stomach and spread over me quickly. I'd never had a fever like it and I let out a blood curdling scream from the sudden pain.

When the cold reached my head I could feel pressure building in my brain and I passed out, hitting my head on the sink as I went down.

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Emmie Keyes

"Emmie? Emmie?" a voice came from outside my door. "Are you ok?" It grew louder.

"I'm ... ok..." I said weakly.

I slowly stood up and put on a dressing gown. I opened the door and saw Rex.

"Oh my God. What happened to you?" he asked. "You're bleeding."

He walked me to my living room and sat me down. "I'll get you a bandage."

As Rex walked away I felt dizzy and could feel the room spinning. Suddenly there was a flash of light that darted across my eyes. When the light had gone my vision had changed.

My apartment was gone, replaced by a brightly lit room covered in white padding. It felt familiar and as I tried to think back to where I had seen it I could feel a sharp pain in my head.

I tried to look around for more clues but couldn't move. *Whose body is this?* I wondered.

My eyes began to adjust to the light and I could see the padding on the walls much clearer now. I had seen this place before. It was identical to the room where Tobias had been tortured.

As I tried to understand the body I was trapped in and who was being subjected to such torture a door in front of the room opened and a tall man entered.

It was a man covered in facial scars with a large deep cut across his neck. A man I had never wanted to see again. A man called Vlad.

Vlad entered the room with a knife in each hand, which he scraped across each other, sparks flying outwards. He took one look at the body I was trapped in and said four words that changed everything.

“Are you ready Will?”

You Rock! A Message From The Author

Thank you so much for reading Tethered Twins. I hope you enjoyed it and if you did it would be fantastic if you could leave a review. On Kindle this is as simple as scrolling to the right and filling in the options listed under 'Review this book'. As a self-published author reviews are a massive help in allowing my books to reach more people and making it easier to keep writing so thank you in advance.

As for what's next the sequel to Tethered Twins is available now. It's called Tethered Souls and continues Emmie's story right where we left her. The final book in the trilogy is currently being written and expected to be released in 2014. Here's hoping I'll see you at the finish line.

This is my first novel and it's been so much fun to write. I have to thank the people who encouraged me to write this book, including my wife; Marie and my parents, as well as the friends who helped me delete so many typos. If you've ever thought about writing then just do it. It's fun and I believe anyone can do it. Just write 5 pages a day and you'll be finished in no time.

So thanks again for reading and hopefully you'll also enjoy Tethered Souls. You can email me any time on mike@blagman.co.uk with any feedback or questions. I read every one of them. Oh and if you can leave a review that would be AMAZING.

Mike Essex