

## World Revolution

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I exhaustedly rolled my eyes open. I laid on a comfortable bed with my head resting on a large pillow. I was somewhere inside a well-lit room with no windows and bland white walls. A small oval table was to my right, and on it stood a vase with a pair of pink roses. The wooden table had a small drawer latched to it. There was also a steel chair with a black stain on the back beside the oval table. There was a door to my left, which appeared to be a closet of some sort. The more I studied the room, the more it looked like a bedroom of sorts. I gracefully touched my forehead and noticed that I had a bandage wrapped around my head. I could move my right arm with ease, meaning I had fully recovered from whatever had happened to me.

I had never felt more worthless and vulnerable in my life. I slowly lifted my head and sitting up straight. I moved to the right side of the bed, gingerly touching the floor with my bare feet. I stood up tall, but my head felt a burning sensation lingering from the cut William had engraved on my forehead. The door opened without warning as Judith walked in.

“Oh Luke, thank heavens you’re okay,” she said, visibly relieved to see me again. Her face showed more expression than the entire time I interacted with her. “Lay back in the bed. You’re still recovering from a serious cut on your head.” I sat back on the bed, but I refused to lie down. “Are you feeling better?” she

asked as she sat down on the steel chair.

“My head hurts a little. I can move around just fine,” I replied, downplaying the damage I had endured.

“And your arm? What happened back there?” Judith was making more eye contact with me than she had done before.

“I don’t know what happened,” I cluelessly explained.

“I think I must have broken your arm back in Donquest,” she insisted. “I knew I shouldn’t have done that.”

“I don’t think my arm is broken. I couldn’t have made it this far,” I said.

“Fair enough. Are you hungry? We have a dining room and a handful of chefs who can cook you something,” she offered.

“I am very much so.” I didn’t notice how hungry I was until she brought it up. “Anyway, where am I? Is this The Resistencia Headquarters?”

“Indeed it is,” she nodded. “This used to be an underground military base that was abandoned a long time ago. For whatever reason, The Children of Iscar haven’t found out about this place quite yet. Before I forget, here’s your watch that you like carrying around.” Judith pulled out my watch from a hidden pocket on her dress and handed it over. I immediately put it over my left wrist reading 2:08 *PM*.

“How long have I been unconscious for?” I asked.

“About a day and a half,” she answered. “We feared that you weren’t going to wake for some time. The doctor said you were just exhausted. Your body hasn’t had sufficient sleep for some

time. He also told me to let you know that your body is malnourished and need to eat more.”

“That was how I spent most days in Donquest. It’s difficult to sleep on an empty stomach,” I implied.

“Sounds like it was rough back in the city. Anyway, we should get something to eat,” she said. I stood on my two feet and made my way to the door, but Judith noticed something was wrong as she pivoted back to me. “Oh, I almost forgot. You can’t just go out there like that.” She looked back at me before she opened the door. I had forgotten that I was only wearing my underwear.

“Right, I could use a new fresh set of clothes,” I chuckled.

“Just hold up one second, and I’ll get you something to put on.” Judith left the room. I sat back on the bed and waited for her to return. She came back with a pair of clothes and politely placed it next to me in addition to my pair of shoes and left the room while I dressed. A simple black shirt and slightly ripped black jeans were all I had.

I exited the room, seeing Judith waiting for me just outside. “Ready?” she asked. I nodded without saying a word. “Follow me.” She turned to a corner on the left. I had no idea if that direction was north, south, east, or west. The hallway was narrow and extended in four different directions. No one was present, but as we walked down some stairs, I encountered other people wandering about. They were dressed casually, some had ragged clothes like in Donquest, while others seemed to have the luxury to wear whatever they desired. No one appeared to have a

dirty face as people back in the city commonly do. Considering that this was some hidden underground military base, this was just the tip of the iceberg.

Judith guided me inside the large dining room. I haven't smelled the scent of food for what felt like an eternity ago. The kitchen had a handful of cooks preparing today's meals. The chairs and tables were neatly organized and placed in various rows. The ground was solid as ice and completely spotless. Dozens were eating their meals in comfort. Judith approached a young woman sitting near the corner of the room. They both talked for a moment, unable to hear what they were saying.

"Luke," Judith called my name out. "I would like you to meet my best friend, Alexis."

"Hi Luke," Alexis greeted me and offered a handshake.

"Hi Alexis." I sounded nervously greeting her back as we shook hands. Alexis wore clothing similar to mine. She had red hair and a bun. Her eyes were gray, and she was slightly shorter than Judith. Compared to me, Judith and I were about the same height.

"Oh my, what happened to your left eye?" Alexis questioned me about the black eye Judith inflicted on me.

"Oh um, I just fell. That's all," I lied with a shaky voice.

"Actually, I am to blame for what happened to him," Judith filled her in. I wasn't too happy telling her friend about what went down. "I thought he was the enemy when I met him back in the city. I was a bit too hard on him at first."

“How could you Judy?” asked Alexis in disbelief. “Does he seem like the kind of guy that’s a cold-blooded killer? He’s a shy one. Just look at him.”

Shy? Was I really a shy person? It wasn’t as if I never talked to people. My actions spoke louder than words, although when people brought the best in me, I wouldn’t be afraid to speak my mind. I was never a brilliant talker like Gabriel.

“I don’t know,” Judith answered, shrugging her shoulders. “At least he didn’t open his mouth when William attacked us.”

“You aren’t going to say a simple thank you? You’re still alive because of me!” I snapped. I had a disgusted look on my face.

“AND YOU’RE STILL ALIVE BECAUSE OF ME!” she blurted out loud. Everyone in the dining room turned their heads to our sudden outburst. Judith almost launched herself at me. If she wanted a fight, then she’ll get one. I was fed up with her stubbornness and uncompassionate attitude.

“Easy there.” Alexis stepped in between us, pushing us back with her arms. “We don’t want tensions to flare up so soon. You’re both alive, and that’s what matters. Let’s take a seat and chow down on some food.”

I had nothing to say back. I was being myself out there against William. Nothing would have changed even if I knew ahead of time. I was satisfied being somewhere that I could stay in the meantime.

After our tempers had eased, the three of us sat at the same table. Today’s menu comprised of sandwiches with eggs and

ham. Anything sounded tasty to me. Alexis brought us each our own plates. I digested the food quickly, while the two friends ate much slower. I ate two more sandwiches until my stomach couldn't handle it anymore.

“Done already?” asked Alexis.

“Mhm,” I hummed while chewing my food.

“Give him a break Alexis. He hasn't eaten anything meaningful for a long time.” Judith explained to her friend why I ate incredibly fast. I glared back at Judith, realizing how remorseless she was despite her brief kindness earlier today. “Have you heard anything from Ellenore?” she asked Alexis.

“No, I haven't heard from her for quite some time,” replied Alexis. “Last time I heard, she was searching for stragglers who could join The Resistencia. Our numbers have risen drastically over the past couple of months. Wherever her current location might be, she has done great so far. I can't complain much.”

“As long as she's doing what she's supposed to, then I can rest easy,” said Judith.

“Luke,” Alexis called my name. “You haven't met Maxwell yet. You and Judith should go and meet him once we're done here. Does that sound okay to you?” she said while taking a bite out of her sandwich.

“Y-yeah, yeah. I'm okay. I'm excited to meet him, maybe.” I fumbled with my words. I wasn't too happy that Judith would lead me to him. What was stranger is that I couldn't understand where my sudden nervousness originated.

After wrapping up our lunch, Judith leads me to Maxwell's office downstairs. We said nothing until we reached the bottom floor. "This is ground level," she clarified. We entered a huge room. The front of the door had a rug underneath that read *HOME* in large capital letters. I immediately see a large flag hung behind Maxwell's desk with yellow, black, and red colors with three fists pointing to the sky. On the bottom of the flag, it reads *POWER TO THE PEOPLE*. The room had laptops wired throughout almost every square inch of this place. A sofa, TV, and a living room table were also inside. I heard a man's voice talking to an individual over a radio.

"Ahem, sir Maxwell," Judith called him out. The chattering came from another room behind Maxwell's desk. Suddenly, the door opened, and out came the leader of The Resistencia.

"I'll be seeing you soon," he talked to his walkie-talkie. "Phew. Oh, Judith, I apologize for not getting to you sooner. I talked to Ellenore over the radio, and she's on her way back to give us an update. And who might this gentleman be?" He turned his focus to me. "Ah, is he Luke Edwards, the straggler you told me about? You must be feeling a lot better now." He offered me a handshake.

"I am. Nice to meet you sir," I said as we shook hands.

"Take a seat," he politely offered us. Judith and I sat in front of Maxwell's desk as he sat on his comfortable leather chair. Maxwell's black ragged hair eerily reminded me of Morgan's grayish hair along with a short goatee and mustache. He appeared to be in his early to mid-fifties and close to six feet in

height. He wore a dark brown military-style shirt and dark trousers. His presence made me slightly nervous. I didn't know how I should speak to him. I noticed a calendar hung on the wall right behind him. The month read *February* and the year *2100*, with every day crossed out until *February 22*.

"I heard everything about you, how you met Judith, how you got out of the city with her, how you almost perished by the hands of Iscar's right hand, and how you wanted to get out of the city to find a better place. You understand that this place isn't just some ordinary sanctuary. With that being said, you are welcome to stay," he explained.

I quietly listened, comprehending what Maxwell had said into my ear. He was right. I desired a place where I could live in peace without having to go without an empty stomach or being chased day and night. I didn't want to associate myself with The Resistencia. I had seen and heard other Revolutionary factions bite the dust when they had their chance. It would be miraculous if they were to assemble a sizeable army of their own.

"I appreciate your offer, but all I want is to live in peace," I said my part. My voice trembled, having difficulty controlling it. "With all due respect, I don't think it is a wise choice to stage an uprising against Iscar. No one has been able to assemble a force large enough to take him head-on. You must know this yourself, don't you?"

"I know what we are up against," he spoke in a scruffy old, commanding voice. "I know who Iscar truly is. I sure know what it will take to overthrow him. We have the firepower to



overcome their stranglehold on people's lives. It is unsustainable to live in the cities these days. People must choose for themselves how they want to live their lives. Our great grandparents and ancestors made the mistake of allowing elitists like Iscar to become bigger than life itself. Everyone stood still while Iscar gained more and more power. We must take it step by step, and we do just that by spreading our word to make the world understand that The Resistencia will give them their bread, their freedom, and their liberty to live their own lives."

Maxwell's words came from the heart. I could tell this was something he had been working for a long time. He was charismatic to the core and could lead an army by the sound of his voice.

"You came from the cities, right?" he continued. "You may or may not be aware of this, but The Children of Iscar are running low on resources such as ammunition, food, water, electricity, you name it. Decades of war have brought our entire civilization near the brink of its extinction. Everything this planet has offered is finite, and we have scrapped every ounce. A lot of the guns they are using ain't got any bullets loaded."

"Are you sure about that?" I gasped in confusion.

"They use guns to instill fear in people's minds. Once people find out the truth, millions will revolt and take up weapons of their own. I don't expect you to answer this, but what did my father tell you when he left this empty, cold planet?"

So Morgan was his father. He was unlucky to have been shot by a loaded gun. I had more questions than answers about why

they lived separately. It didn't make one bit of sense to me.

"He said he loved you," I quietly answered Maxwell. He had a blank stare, showing no reaction. I wouldn't be surprised if Judith had already told him about his father's fate. "Why didn't he live here?" I asked the question that was bugging me.

"We just had a bit of a disagreement. That is all," he vaguely said. "I urged him to return where he truly belonged. Back here with us." His puzzled response opened a gateway with even more questions. "Have you chosen to fight for our cause?" he said, changing the topic.

"I don't know," I shrugged my shoulders.

"You aren't going to avenge your family's death?" he asked. How did he know about what happened to my family? Did he just assume my family perished?

"How do you know this?" I inquired, perplexed by his knowledge.

"Judith told me everything," he glanced at her. "You've sworn vengeance against Iscar. You might have helped hundreds of people in Donquest differently from what Wolf did, but even you admit that killing Iscar and his most loyal followers are the only way to find true peace in this world. Evil people will do evil things. You can't always rely on following society's law to get your way around."

"Morgan told you the rest, didn't he?" I questioned. Maxwell quietly nodded.

"Would you not seek vengeance against the ones responsible

for your misery, or do you expect and hope someone to do it for you?" Maxwell wondered.

"I will do it on my terms. I don't need your help." I brushed him off.

Maxwell sat without uttering another word. I upset him, and I was okay with it. "What will it take for me to convince you that we will succeed someday? Your parents and Wolf ain't coming back because of one man's insanity. Every man, woman, and child, young and old, have joined our cause. This is the moment everyone on this planet has been waiting for."

"No, I can't join The Resistencia. I will avenge my family, but I will not join your cause. I can't risk my justice being denied by associating myself with a Revolutionary group like yours," I replied. I swore to avenge my parents, but I had too many doubts about The Resistencia being the ones to put an end to it. I wanted to do it alone.

"Very well. I will give you time to think of it before you leave this place," Maxwell warned me.

"Leave? Can't I stay here for a few weeks?" I insisted.

"You have yet to choose a side. We ain't gonna put our trust and waste resources on someone who doesn't know if they want to stay or leave. You either join us or die out there. What is it going to be son?"

I didn't know what to do. Aligning myself with their Revolution could help me get to Iscar, but it was unlikely. I had lost all hope of getting that far. Nobody, and I mean nobody, could spark a fire into people's hearts, so we can finally wake up

and raise our weapons in unity.

“I’m going to give you until tomorrow to choose for yourself,” said Maxwell, offering me additional time to think. “In the meantime, I would like you to meet my son and daughter, Michael and Melaney. Judith will lead you to them.”

“Yes sir,” Judith earnestly replied. We both left Maxwell’s office. Maybe I didn’t have much choice but to join The Resistencia. My back was against the wall. I could selfishly go on my own and defeat my enemies, but how far could I go before I hit a brick wall. It would be utterly reckless. Gabriel would choose that path.

Judith guided me to a different hallway and entered a bedroom where a teenage girl was busy with her laptop and listening to music through her headphones. The bedroom was rather small, with two beds and a small desk where she was using her laptop. She had black hair and was wearing a plain black shirt and jeans.

“Hi Judy. Is there something you need?” she asked, removing her headphones.

“Hi Mel. I would like you to meet Luke,” Judith introduced me. “We both escaped the city together. He has joined us to stay here for the moment.”

“Nice to meet you Luke. My name is Melaney.” We both shook hands. Melaney’s smile was infectious, even though I didn’t know much about her. Her tone was friendly and heartwarming.

“Nice to meet you too Melaney,” I replied.

“You should know that Melaney is an expert at computers and being a hacker. Maxwell taught her everything she needed to know,” Judith explained. “She has been of great help when it comes to keeping track of the news by having access to every news channel and TV station that exists.”

“Let me show you,” Melaney agreed to show me as she turned her laptop and displayed a live news stream showing a story of Iscar and how he came to power.

“Majestic, charismatic, wise, and worthy of being called a god. *Iscar Is All of Us*,” said the news reporter.

“Neat, ain’t it?” she said. I nodded in agreement. “There aren’t any TV’s around here, so I have to keep track of what’s going on in the cities.”

“Mel. Do you know where Michael is?” Judith wondered.

“In the music room, as always,” she sighed.

“Very well, let’s head out and meet him,” Judith said. “We’ll catch up with you later.”

“Sure thing,” Melaney agreed, resuming with the work she had left. We left the room and went up one floor upstairs. I had barely been in The Resistencia Headquarters. However, I was quickly grasping how to navigate around it. A lot of the hallways still looked very similar to me, and there are countless doors and rooms in every corner I turned.

“How many people are in The Resistencia?” I asked Judith while we walked down a long narrow hallway.

“A few thousand at most,” she stated. “Most are inside here, but some are scouting nearby cities, villages, and towns looking for any stragglers that could join our cause.”

We entered a small room with a piano, a music stand, and a few chairs. Was this seriously a music room? Does having a single piano constitute as a music room? Someone was sleeping on an empty table at the other end of the room. Their head was resting on top of a small stack of papers. He had a very similar hairstyle to Maxwell. His sideburns were barely visible, and he seemed in his late teens or early twenties. Judith approached the young man and tapped his shoulder. He woke up and looked dazed.

“Uh, what?” he muttered in a state of surprise.

“Mike. It’s me,” Judith spoke to him.

“Where am I?” he tiredly said, rubbing his eyes and an equally dazed look on his face. He seemed lost for a second.

“Where you usually sleep.” Judith weakly laughed.

“Oh okay, well I gotta get back to making some music. I think I slept on top of my music sheets.”

“Mike. There’s someone here you should know about,” Judith looked back at me as I stood in the middle of the room.

“Who is he?” Michael asked.

“Hi, I’m Luke,” I introduced myself, offering him a handshake.

“Michael,” he shook my hand. “Are you new to The Resistencia or something?”

“I’m staying here for now until I figure out what I want to do. I’ve had a couple of rough past few days being outside.”

“I hear you. It’s been ugly out there, but everything that I need is in this room.” He enthusiastically smiled, although it seemed he was somewhat oblivious to the outside.

“What kind of music have you been working on Mike?” Judith wondered.

“I’m writing this melody that I plan on singing for tomorrow’s festival,” he eagerly said.

“Festival? What festival?” I asked, puzzled by something I hadn’t heard from them.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you that tomorrow is the first anniversary since Maxwell officially established The Resistencia,” Judith answered. “We are planning on having a celebration here. Feel free to join us tomorrow.”

“Yeah, I think tomorrow is the perfect day to debut my new song,” Michael excitedly said.

“Do you only have a piano here?” I curiously wondered.

“Yup, it’s all I got. It’s almost impossible to find anything out there that is still in working condition these days. What about you? Do you know how to play an instrument by any chance?”

“Actually, I do. I learned how to play the violin when I was six or seven when I went to school.” I said, reminiscing about my past and how I had once fallen in love with music.

“That’s amazing!” he exclaimed. “Too bad we don’t have a violin here. Maybe one day, we can find one and play together.”

“Yeah, maybe that could work.” I ecstatically replied. At least I had something in common with someone here. That thought made me feel much more welcome here.

“Well, you both seem to have more in common than I thought,” interrupted Judith. “I have to speak to sir Maxwell about some important matters. Mike, would you mind giving Luke a full tour of the Headquarters, so he knows his way around here?” I could see in her body language that she still didn’t care much about me. She was trying her best to keep tensions at a minimum by having Michael be my guide.

“Will do Judith,” Michael agreed to her demand. I didn’t mind it one bit. Michael was a cheerful guy for his age. It was good to know some people still had their innocence untarnished.

Michael agreed to give me a tour of the Headquarters. I learned that there were five total floors and that most rooms were bedrooms, and several had yet to be used. He showed me the armory room where all the weapons were stored. The Resistencia had a handful of guns, but they too were running low on ammunition. Most of the weapons were swords, bows, arrows, and a scarce stash of EMP spheres Judith used to help us escape the city.

We made our way to the generator room. The lights in the Headquarters were powered up by using fuel to support their generators. The Resistencia had cans ready for use, but they were strictly limited. Eventually, the Headquarters would be without power. I also learned that they had running water throughout the entire facility. To top it off, they had running showers. I badly



needed one after I was done with this tour. Michael then showed me the training facilities. Their facilities were held in very spacious airplane hangars where people learned how to fire a bow and arrow or hone their sword skills.

“This is where we will have the festival tomorrow,” Michael explained as we stood in the middle of another enormous hangar. This was a place where all kinds of aircraft were once stored. Michael talked about how the planes would be lifted on a platform and then sent to the top.

“Do you think you can show me around the island?” I politely asked.

“No problem. Let’s make our way upwards. I think I’ve shown you enough around here.”

About ten minutes passed until we made our way to the top. The Headquarters were much bigger than I thought. It was like a miniature underground city. Best of all, it was under an island. A set of stairs directed us to a diagonal steel door. Michael unlocked the fortified door, only to be greeted by a strong gust of wind. The bright sunlight momentarily blinded my eyes as my feet stepped on a soft grassy field. Today’s sky was partly cloudy. The colorful flowers and towering trees danced to the howling winds.

“This is an island? It looks more like a prairie field with nature surrounding us,” I said.

“The trees keep us invisible from the enemy who might catch a glimpse of us.” Michael filled me in. He described the island in more detail. “We have people working shifts in between

behind the trees, keeping an eye out in the distance to see if anyone needs our help and to ensure the enemy does not stalk the area around here. The middle of the island where we are standing at the moment is at least a mile wide. This grassy open field, the trees, and the coastline are the only thing this island offers.”

“This is most impressive. I wish I could stay here for the rest of my life.” My jaw dropped at such a beautiful sight to behold. This island was the very definition of paradise.

“My dad knows we can’t be here forever, but with The Resistencia and all, we have to make the world a better place and not just for ourselves. Let’s head back, shall we? It’s getting chilly out here.” said Michael, whose teeth chattered from the frigid winds.

Minutes later, we returned downstairs to the second floor from the bottom. “Well, that’s it for today,” said Michael, stopping midway through a hallway next to the music room. “I have to get back and finish my song,” he chuckled. “It was nice meeting you Luke. I haven’t had someone to talk to close to my age in a very long time other than my sister.”

“It was a pleasure,” I said, shaking his hand. “I’ll be seeing you tomorrow.”

Michael returned to the music room. Judith appeared behind me, waiting in front of the bedroom I woke up today.

“You seem to be good friends with Michael already,” she said. “He’s oblivious to the world outside of the Headquarters, but in due time, he will learn.”

“That may be, but you can’t deny he is what the world is

missing,” I tried to make sense of her use of words. “A life knowing that you have the opportunity to be whoever you want to be. No struggle to sleep without an empty stomach or trying to survive with the lack of clean water. I understand that life firsthand, and so do you.”

“And you will join us, won't you?” she asked the same question Maxwell had brought to my attention earlier. “If you want that life you yearn for, then you have to take action.”

“I will make that decision tomorrow,” I promised. “Nothing more, nothing less.” It surprised me she didn't bother to address the elephant in the room. We had almost cut each other's necks earlier today. I couldn't bear to ignore it. “Look what happened earlier today, we're both right. We have saved each other's lives.”

“And what exactly are you trying to prove by saying that?” she snarkily asked. “Do you want a cookie or what?”

“I don't need your pity,” I shook off her witty comment. “I just think maybe we should be on better terms.”

“I couldn't let you die because I felt sorry for you. William tried to scalp your head open, and I just couldn't watch you suffer. Now that you're here, I don't see someone hungry for vengeance. I see someone afraid to go on the offensive. You're letting the enemy hunt you down when you should be the one hunting them.”

Her words stung like a bee. I was a shell of my former self. I was never someone to be bloodthirsty for revenge. It wasn't who I was, yet deep down inside, I was itching for it. Judith stood

quiet as a rock. It was always difficult to read her mind. I couldn't take a guess what she thought inside her thick head.

“So is the room I woke up in my permanent bedroom?” I interrupted her thinking.

“Yes. I apologize if it bores you, but the doctor needed somewhere to clean up your wounds.”

“Speaking of the doctor, where is he? I haven't seen him all day.”

“He has been working on various other patients. He told me to look out for you. When you woke up, he was okay to let you stand up since your body needed some energy to move around.”

“All right, I'll be heading back to my bed. I need to get my feet off the ground for a couple of minutes,” I sighed.

“Very well. Meet me at the dining room for dinner tonight. Alexis will join us.” She said and walked off. I entered my temporary bedroom. The room was untouched since I left. I rested flat on the bed, staring at the bare ceiling with my arms behind my head. My watch reads *8:02 PM*. I was very comfortable in this position, hoping I could stay here for the rest of the night. It was like being reborn. I finally had a new start in my life. I had never been more alive.

## Getting Together

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I opened my eyes, realizing I had unexpectedly fallen asleep. I don't even remember when exactly I blacked out. Perhaps I was more exhausted than I thought. The lights in my room were still turned on. It is currently *8:05 AM*, meaning I slept for almost half a day. I went to bed without eating dinner and taking a bath. I couldn't endure either anymore.

Today's breakfast menu consisted of pancakes. I don't remember the last time I had pancakes, let alone a delicious breakfast. I ordered two stacks of pancakes from the chefs. The dining room was oddly quiet this morning. I was the only one present besides two other people. I sat at a table by myself, wasting no time pouring syrup and butter over my pancakes and before taking a large bite. It was perfection.

"Good morning," greeted Alexis as she interrupted my thoughts.

"Morning," I replied. "I think I slept last night without being aware of it. I'm sorry if I kept you and Judith waiting."

"No need to worry about it. I saw you asleep in your bed, and I'd figure I wouldn't bother you. I ate with Judith, so it wasn't like I had company. Today is The Resistencia's first birthday. If you want to attend, you must dress nicely for this occasion."

“Just how nicely should I dress? I don’t have fancy clothing,” I stated.

“Relax. I’ll give it to you once we’re done here,” she clarified.

We ate our breakfast together for the next several minutes. Alexis brought up what happened yesterday. “About you and Judith, are you two not getting along?” she asked. I continued to eat quietly, trying to come up with a suitable answer.

“Its sort of complicated,” I answered. “One moment, she’s enjoying our talk, and then another she’s yelling at my face.”

“She’s truly something else,” explained Alexis. “She wastes no time taking advantage of any opportunities that arise. I think living out in the woods for so long has hardened her.”

“Can’t you talk to her out of it?” I asked.

“I’ve tried to understand where she’s coming from. She’s lost so much I think it has gotten the best of her. I’ve calmed her down repeatedly, time after time. I try to cheer her up when she’s not in the best mood. Trust me, Judith can be lighthearted if you get on her good side.”

“That’s easier said than done.”

“She’ll get over it soon enough,” she optimistically said.

After breakfast, I returned to my room. Alexis agreed to give me something to wear for today’s festivities. She brought a pair of neatly folded clothes: a casual sleeved shirt, dress pants, dress shoes, and black socks just for me.

“Put this on for later,” she said. “The festival starts at noon,

so you have plenty of time. The bathroom is behind that door.” She pointed at a door to my left. All this time, I thought the door was a closet, but I was wrong beyond belief.

“And please, take a bath. You really need it.” She also realized I had not taken a bath in weeks. I desperately needed one.

I opened the door to the bathroom and turned the light switch on. Never have been inside a bathroom so clean and structurally modernized. Its floors and walls were equally unblemished. The bathroom light was very luminous, almost as if I had looked directly at the sun for a moment. There was also a bar of soap and shampoo hung against the wall of the shower. I turned the shower faucets on, took off my clothes, and bathed in the refreshing, crystal clear water. The dirt came off from all over my body, darkening the water.

After taking a long relaxing bath, I noticed my fingernails and toenails were not only still dirty, but they were grossly overgrown. I found a usable pair of nail-clippers in the drawers and trimmed my nails and cleaned off any dirt stuck in between. I then used shaving cream as I shaved my facial hair and sideburns. I stared at the foggy mirror, reflecting on my physical appearance. The bandage over my head was moist from the water. My face was nearly spotlessly clean. My new look was eerily different that I almost wondered if anyone would recognize me again.

I exited the bathroom and dressed in my new set of clothes. I buttoned my black-and-white striped dress shirt, put on my dress

pants, black socks, and dress shoes. For some reason, I found a belt lying on my bed. Alexis must have left it there while I was showering. I tightened it across my waist. Everything fitted perfectly fine. There was something unique about me at the moment that I could not describe. Someone knocked on the door to my room. I opened the door, seeing Alexis stand with a beaming smile.

“Need something?” I questioned. Alexis’s expression suddenly shifted in a beat. It was as if she had seen a ghost. “Is something wrong?” I grew concerned. Did she not recognize who I was?

“Oh no, it’s nothing,” she broke her silence. “I just think you look handsome.”

“Handsome? What are you implying?” I could hardly accept what she just said.

Alexis seemed to blush at my comment. “Well, I couldn’t help but say that about you. You look nothing like the cute guy from before. By the way, I brought the doctor so he can give you a new bandage.”

A dark-skinned man entered right behind her. There was nothing to signify he was a doctor of sorts by the casual clothes he was wearing. He looked just like everybody else in The Resistencia. “Luke, meet Doctor Conrad,” Alexis introduced him.

“Hello Luke,” he said as we shook hands.

“Hello doctor,” I responded.



“Is your head feeling better?” he asked me as I sat on my bed.

“Yeah, I’m feeling much better. I could use a clean bandage.”

“Very well, hold still for a moment.” Conrad slowly unwrapped the bandage from my head. “You still have quite a nasty cut on your forehead,” he said, staring at the scars. He pulls out a small mirror, carefully examining the damage William had inflicted on me. His knife had sliced about halfway through across my scalp. I had several stitches attached, but the gruesome cut was still visible. The doctor pulled out a fresh new bandage and wrapped it around my forehead a few times over. Once he finished wrapping the bandage, he pulled out his stethoscope and listened to my heartbeat.

“Hm,” he hummed to himself. “Your heart rate, pulse, and breathing are all normal. You seem to be in good health, but you still need to eat more. You have been malnourished for weeks. It might take several more days before you can take off your bandage permanently while it heals itself.”

“Thank you doc,” I said, appreciating his services.

“I’ll be seeing you soon,” he said, taking off with his equipment.

“The festival starts in about half an hour,” Alexis reminded me. “We can start making our way to the hangar.”

“Aren’t you going to dress up too?” I reminded her.

“Don’t you worry about me. I’ll be there before the clock

strikes noon. Most of us are already there. Why don't you go on ahead and check it out for yourself?"

Alexis and I parted ways. I made my way to the hangar where the festival was being held. Inside, there were hundreds of round tables and chairs set throughout the enormous ample space. A piano was placed in the front middle part of the hangar. Michael was making sure it was in tune. This was a different piano from the one in the music room. Next to the piano was a small stage set. Michael was wearing a black suit, black pants, black shoes, with a bow tie.

"Hey Michael, are you ready to introduce your new song tonight?" I questioned.

"Hey Luke. I'm quite excited for everyone to hear it. Do you think you could lend me a hand and push this piano back a few feet? It's too close to the front tables," he contently asked.

"No problem," I agreed. We pushed to the piano until Michael told me to stop. The piano was very heavy, but I had regained much of my strength that it wasn't much of a hassle.

"All right, that will suffice," Michael stopped me. "I'm kind of hungry. They'll be serving some food soon. Let's go find a place to sit."

Each of the tables had an elaborate white cloth over the furniture. Plates, glass cups, forks, spoons, knives were neatly placed. "Let's sit over there," Michael said, pointing to a table with Melaney. I had a gut feeling she had been watching us from afar.

"Hey gentlemen," Melaney said first. "What are you both up

to?”

“Nothing. We just want some food,” Michael replied. We sat with Melaney. She was wearing an elegant blue dress, and her hair was neatly combed.

“Are you going to introduce your new song today Mikey?” Melaney asked her brother.

“You bet I am. Have you heard anything of importance from outside?” he curiously asked.

“Nope. It’s business as usual. I don’t know when our dad wants to strike back against Iscar. He says when the time is right. Ellenore should be back in a few days. Maybe she has more information on what’s going on. What about you Luke? Are you joining The Resistencia?”

I had to make a decision today, no matter what. My biggest fear was The Resistencia falling to Iscar like every other Revolutionary movement. I knew it would be a risk to align myself, but what else could I do? I was slowly feeling at home here.

“I’m uncertain about it,” I answered. “I need to give it more time.”

More and more people gathered at the festival. Seats filled up quicker as noon approached. Judith and Alexis were yet to be seen or heard.

“Luke. Do you know where Judy and Alexis are?” Michael asked.

“I’m not sure, to be honest. I think they’re still both getting

ready for the occasion,” I said. Conveniently enough, two familiar faces walk up to Michael.

“Are you asking for us?” asked Judith. Michael turned around to see Judith tower next to him. Next to Judith was Alexis. Both young women wore fabulous dresses made of a silky fabric. They wore sharp earrings and small traces of make-up.

“Oh, there you are! We just didn’t know where you were at. You’ve both arrived past the hour,” said Michael. My watch read precisely at *12 PM*. They had arrived right on time. Not a second too early or too late.

“The clock reads *12 PM*,” said Judith, pointing to a clock hanging near the top of the hangar entrance. “You know that I arrive precisely when I mean to.”

“Oh, my goodness!” Alexis blurted out, interrupting their conversation. She had an ecstatic look on her face. I was beyond confused as she stood still, oddly locking her eyes on me. I had never seen someone so happy to meet somebody else they met just yesterday. “Sorry, but I had to see you up close again. You look even more handsome and cuter!” She gave me a weak hug.

“Um okay,” I said without any excitement in my tone.

“I didn’t know you brought such an adorable friend of yours Judith,” Alexis eagerly said.

“Friends?” Judith sounded surprised. “I’m not sure if we are friends.”

“Don’t say that,” said Alexis, defending me. “You helped

save his life, and saved yours, didn't he?"

"Yeah, but it's not like we are close friends or anything like that. I got him out of the city because I felt bad for him. He's just an acquaintance." Judith made it crystal clear what she thought of me. I wasn't too surprised. I shook off her comments, ignoring her hurtful words.

Alexis sat down next to Judith at the same table with me, Michael, and Melaney. The hangar became livelier as the seats filled up. The chefs brought out food carts and began serving our warm meals. The main dishes were rice, chicken, and salad.

The food did not disappoint. Every bite I took reinvigorated my spirits. Judith and Alexis were talking to each other, but I could not catch on to what they were saying. They laughed for whatever reason, perhaps just some crude jokes or thoughts. I didn't want any part of either way.

The way they talked to each other reminded me of my own banter with Gabriel. We would sometimes tease each other for not having a girlfriend. One time, he dared me to ask a girl from school on a date. I tried to prove him wrong, but I got so nervous, the girl didn't seem into me. Instead, Gabriel ended up asking her out without a problem. He would usually make fun of me for not being able to beat him in anything such as sword fighting or foot races. He was always a step ahead of me.

I caught a glimpse of Maxwell, making his way to the small stage set. He seemed ready and poised to address everyone who had attended. I had the slightest idea of what he would say.

"Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention for just

one moment,” he began. His voice was loud enough that it echoed from the hangar walls. “We are gathered here today to celebrate the first year since the birth of The Resistencia. I founded this group not only so we can unite as one against the menace that is Iscar, but to break the chains people around the world have been living with. As more and more join our movement with every passing day, the more our Revolution grows. No longer will we be shackled by the power of one man. It will be up to the people to choose what is best for themselves. Our predecessors made the mistake of submitting to the most powerful people on this planet who never for a second intended to be the saviors of a world crumbling beneath us. I promise to every one of you in this room and those fighting for The Resistencia that we will not go quietly into the night! POWER TO THE PEOPLE!”

“POWER TO THE PEOPLE!” Everyone in the room said in unison, raising their fists to the sky.

I was gleefully enjoying the food, the water, the people, the atmosphere, and the celebration. Maxwell joined us at our table. We each spoke out about our favorite hobbies.

When he was my age, Maxwell’s favorite hobby was to fix run-down cars. He passionately enjoyed being a car mechanic before he joined the military. Judith’s favorite hobby was to stroll around the streets of her hometown and exploring new places, which is nearly impossible to do so today without getting into trouble. Alexis said she enjoyed cooking, often helping around the chefs in the dining room. Melaney’s favorite activity is

playing video games on her laptop since she had not much to do other than being bored most times. Michael's favorite hobby was, of course, playing and writing music.

"How long have you been doing it for?" I asked him.

"My mom and dad always loved music. I became a musician like them," he clarified.

After finishing my meal, my stomach was full. When was the last time I had this exact feeling? Maxwell kept talking about his days as a General while serving the United States Armed Forces. This was supposedly the country that existed in the North Continent.

"The country was in turmoil as it went under trillions of dollars in debt. We had military bases in every corner of the planet, but as time passed, countries such as China retaliated. The United Nations and the US collaborated close together that they turned off other countries. Resources grew scarce, economies collapsed, countries were desperate for money. It seemed that world peace was fulfilled after the United Nations got back together by coalescing into the People's World Government. Still, people felt betrayed after billions fell into poverty, famine, and malnourishment. The wealthy survived the Second Great Depression, moving in separate regions far isolated from the poorer populations."

"Where did you end up during that time?" asked Alexis.

"I supported the poor fighting by their side, and a Revolution sparked. However, this radical group called The Brotherhood of the Templar took matters into their own hands. Their leader Iscar

was responsible for the death of millions who fought against the United Nations. The United Nations became greater than any other government entity. Countries lost their sovereignty and submitted to the will of the People's World Government."

"Iscar huh," Judith added. "He has been a part of this all along. You have been at odds with him since."

"We have been at odds for as long as I can remember," Maxwell continued. "Iscar believes that human nature is flawed and that it is better for humanity to perish even if it means committing genocide. He doesn't give people second chances to reclaim the world for themselves because humanity has been given too many opportunities to redeem itself. He may be right in that humans are beyond repair, but he ain't got any right to slaughter billions. Iscar has devised a twisted and cruel world where everyone but him and the elites survives. Why prolong our suffering any longer?"

"He says human nature is evil, yet he is the one leading that same stigma he is fighting against." Alexis described it perfectly. I couldn't agree more with her. Maxwell continued to talk to Judith about some intel The Resistencia had acquired. I wasn't paying attention to their conversation, and I instead spoke to Michael, who seemed lonely.

"Hey Michael," I smiled. "Can I just call you Mike instead?"

"Yeah, go ahead, everyone calls me that. What's up?" he asked.

"Aren't you going to play that song of yours?" I reminded him.



“In a moment, give me more time,” he refused.

“Building some anticipation, aren’t you?” I tried goading him to sing his song.

“You could say so, but I’m not telling you for sure.” We continued to discuss other interesting details of our lives. I learned he was 19 years old. His sister was only 17, just two years apart.

“Do both of you get along very well?” I interrogated them.

“Before, we had the usual sibling relationship where we fight and argue a lot,” he said. “but we’re all grown up now. We spend most of our time helping our dad any way we can during these desperate times. Things have gotten more serious around here. I miss my old home, but at least I get to continue playing my music.”

“I see you haven’t changed very much then?” I wondered.

“No, not really. I just moved to a different home. Mel and I have gotten along better as we got older,” he chuckled.

“Did you call my name,” Melaney overheard our conversation.

“Yeah,” Michael said honestly. “I was just talking about our past selves.”

“You better not talk crap about me Mikey,” she warned him as she pinched her brother.

“Ow.” Michael flinched in pain. “I’m not. Don’t get so moody with me.”

“Aren’t you going to play that new song of yours?” she

asked the same question I asked him earlier. “Come on. We’re dying to hear it.” Melaney sounded excited, almost like a playful puppy.

“I’ll give you a heads up when I’m about to play it,” Michael replied to her sister.

“Why wait? Do it now Mikey. Don’t make us wait any longer. We need to lighten up the mood here,” she begged.

“Come on Mike,” I tried to convince him. “Don’t tell me the nerves are getting to you. In the end, it’s just a passing moment. Give it a go, won’t you?”

“F-fine,” Michael stuttered. He sounded just like me when I got visibly nervous. Sometimes, I couldn’t help myself, even when things were perfectly fine.

“Now that’s what I’m talking about!” exclaimed a joyous Melaney. Michael made his way to the piano that had been set up next to the small stage. “Go Michael!” Melaney rooted for her brother. He sat next to the piano, ready to begin his song. The sound of chattering dwindled as he was preparing to play his song. A shroud of stillness blanketed the once voluble hangar that you could hear a pin drop. He began playing the notes to a soothing melody that could maybe pacify Iscar. I was speechless, listening to the melancholy piano and Michael’s crisp vocals.

*Ringling bells through the streets, I’m here by your side. I walk through the valley of death where I will fear no evil. Wherever you go, I will be with you.*

*Broken hearts, broken minds, you have come and gone.  
Remember thee who will fly to the heavens. Into the void, I see  
the truth. In utter darkness, as the world falls.*

His voice was pitch-perfect. The song was beyond the limitless stars, akin to experiencing an epiphany. A round of applause erupted throughout the hangar. We stood up in unison, giving him a well-deserved standing ovation. Everyone else followed suit. His choice of words resonated with everybody. I had no shame in calling him my friend now. He gave a bow to the crowd who cheered him on.

“That’s my brother!” Melaney exclaimed to me during the flood of cheers and clapping.

The cheers and claps died down as Michael made his way back to our table. “Good job man,” I gave him a pat on the back and a handshake.

“Thank you,” he said with an infectious smile.

“That’s the Mikey I know,” said her proud sister as they both hugged it out.

Alexis and Judith also hugged Michael. His dad also emotionally embraced him. “I’m proud of you son,” said a very modest Maxwell. “You have a bright future. I’ll do whatever it takes so you can live your dreams.”

“Thanks dad,” Michael began to cry. He sniffed his nose and wiped his tears with his arms. “I’m happy I made you proud.”

After a long day, I was beyond exhausted. The hangar

emptied as the celebrations came to an end. Everyone returned to their rooms, with some even taking some leftover food. I hadn't had a night quite like this in my life. This is what a celebration was. I almost had forgotten what world I was living in.

Judith and Alexis joked about how they would escort a random guy back to his room. They weren't referring to me, but to a man who stumbled in the hallways after drinking more than he should have. The three of us stopped in front of my room. The corridors were silent tonight. People seemed to be hungover.

"Well, here we are," I said to both ladies.

"It's been quite a day, hasn't it?" said Alexis. "You came just in time to celebrate our first year."

"I didn't come here for that. Don't forget I have a bounty on my head," I said grimly. I didn't want to be reminded again why I had to leave the city.

"Haven't you been enjoying your time with us?" asked Alexis.

"If you say so," I said, grabbing the strands of my hair for no good reason. My nerves returned to me once again. I found it hard to believe it, but I enjoyed everything about today. I made new friends and learned more about everyone. Was this becoming my new home? I would put my life at risk by doing so, but I have been doing just that for a long time.

"You don't want to admit it, don't you?" Judith interrupted my thoughts. "I can read you like a book in the dark. I know you don't want to align yourself because no one hasn't defeated Iscar, but do you seriously believe there are other groups out there like

us? Do you really think sir Maxwell is someone who would take Iscar lightly? He has lived and breathed his entire life for this moment. To break the shackles of millions like you who have had to endure a world run by a tyrant. It's now or never. Your time is up to tell us whether you want to join us."

"Very well, um, I'll admit I kind of like it here. It's much better than Donquest, that's for sure," I said with the utmost veracity.

"Alexis, do you think you can give us time to talk alone for a while?" Judith asked of her friend.

"Sure, do what you got to do," Alexis agreed to Judith's wishes. "Goodnight Luke," she gave me a very fragile hug.

"Goodnight Alexis," I anxiously replied.

"You still look handsome." She winked back at me. I shook my head as she walked off.

"Luke," Judith called my attention. "I'll say it again. I'm sorry for what I did to you back in Donquest, but my main goal was to rescue Morgan. It was never about you. You just happened to meet Morgan, who knew your friend Gabriel. The Resistencia, specifically Maxwell, wanted your friend to join us after he became a symbol of hope to millions. I heard how you and your friend wanted to change the world for the better. Why not do this not only for your family but for your friend? They would be proud of you. You risked your life doing what you did in Donquest and when William ambushed us. We can rebuild the world how we want and have a new beginning for future generations. Don't be stupid."

Judith quietly stared directly at the windows to my soul. I wouldn't forgive her for the hell she put me through and admitting I was just an afterthought to her. We just crossed paths because I was friends with someone. I surely would not give up what Gabriel originally started back in Donquest. That was more important to me. There is still a glimmer of hope to hang on to.

"I have nothing to lose," I began speaking my part. "It is a risk I must take if it means that I keep the promise I made to Gabriel to *Punish the Unjust*." I take a deep breath, anticipating her response. I didn't know she would say, but I crossed my fingers, hoping I got through her thick skin. "I can no longer hide the truth that The Resistencia is a new beginning for me. You've given me a tough time here, but I've made some friends thus far. I will fight with The Resistencia, with the people, against all odds and against the evil that has clouded us. Our Revolution begins today."

"Very well," is all she said.

## Stronger

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I entered the training room Judith had told me about last night. She would teach me how to use a bow and properly wield a sword. The Resistencia barely has any guns or ammunition. Thus, it was best if everyone who joined the rising movement to learn how to use other weapons. Inside, a handful of people were practicing with a variety of weapons at their leisure. The place used to be a small hangar that stored smaller aircraft. The ground was spotless and meticulously polished that I could see my reflection. There were yellow, red, and white lines painted on the floor, dividing the different activities. I stepped into where the archery range was located. A row of cardboard dummies was placed against the wall. Judith had been waiting for me here.

“Good morning,” I said first before she released an arrow hitting a dummy.

“Morning,” she said. This was the first time I heard her say those words. “Ready to get the day started?”

“I’m ready when you’re ready.”

“Good. Have you ever used a bow before?” she asked.

“No. Only a gun and a sword once when I was a kid.”

“Then we’ll just have to start from scratch then.”

Judith demonstrated the proper posture on how to hold a bow. She relaxed her shoulders, stood tall, pulled the bowstring

with her right hand, and latched an arrow. Her left hand grabbed the handle and firmly aimed at her target. She made it look easy.

“Stand tall, aim for your target, and take a deep breath before releasing the arrow,” she explained as she fired an arrow and hit a bullseye on the dummy.

“Who taught you how to use a bow?” I was curious to know.

“I learned how to survive on my own before I joined The Resistencia,” she said. “I built one by myself from a bunch of wood and strings.”

Judith carefully placed the bow on a table. “Grab it from the grip, then take an arrow from the quiver and place the arrow on the arrow rest. Make sure the back of the arrow rests at the nocking point.” She pointed every part of a bow as I picked it up. I was primarily right-handed, so I grabbed the grip with my left and would have to pull the string with my right. The bow is hard as steel, but light as a feather. Judith gave me an arrow, and I placed it exactly as she demonstrated.

“Good. Now use your three middle fingers with the index finger resting on top of the arrow. Slowly draw the string as far as possible. Your right elbow should be parallel to the ground.” I followed her every word and tension gripping on my right hand as I pulled the string and arrow with my fingers. This was a little harder than I expected. “Now, relax your fingers to release the arrow.”

I released the string, but the arrow fell far short of the target. Not even halfway across the range. “Let’s try that again,” said Judith. I kept trying over and over again. The distance of my



arrow gradually grew, but I still couldn't hit my target.

“Relax your fingers when you release. Hold your breath to remain steady,” she reminded me.

I kept trying and trying until finally, I hit the target. “I did it,” I proudly declared.

“Now, if I could only get you to hit the bullseye,” she teased. I took another arrow and placed all my focus to hit the center of the red X. I took a deep breath and relaxed my fingers as I released the arrow. Bullseye.

“Good,” said Judith. “You still need a lot more practice to get more consistent bullseyes. I think that's enough for today.”

“Okay then. What else are we doing?” I placed the bow back on the table.

“Sir Maxwell spoke to me earlier today. He wanted a word with you in his office.”

“Is this about me joining The Resistencia?”

“He didn't tell me anything,” Judith clarified. “I'll walk you to his office.”

“Okay,” I muttered. Judith was oddly friendly to me today. It was perhaps because I had chosen to remain with The Resistencia. I wondered how long her current mood would last before it shifted.

We made our way downstairs and into Maxwell's office. The room looked precisely the same it did yesterday. The Overseer sat patiently in his chair, writing on a piece of paper.

“Ah Luke, I've been waiting for you, take a seat,” he warmly

said. Judith and I quietly took a seat in front of his desk. “I appreciate you choosing to stay and fight for our cause. You will be a most valuable asset in our ranks. We could use your knowledge of Donquest to hopefully one day liberate the city.”

“Thank you sir,” I thanked him. “I made a promise to my friend to protect people. I will fight in his memory.”

“Well said,” he said, cracking a smile. “Speaking of your friend, I wanted to say something more about him. Judith already told you we were originally looking for him to join us in the fight against Iscar. Wolf, as we refer to him, is responsible for the deaths of over a dozen police officers, Fanatics, and political figures who usually either murdered innocent civilians for minor demeanors or ordered the execution of hundreds for opposing the People’s World Government. You are uncertain of what happened to your friend, is that correct?”

“Yes. I haven’t heard from him since the day we were caught stealing rations. William executed his family, just like mine.” There was a pause in between my sentences, knowing how much I hated reminiscing about the macabre acts that tainted my essence. “William thought Gabriel was the Vigilante because of their similar physical descriptions, but he had no other evidence to prove it. He wanted to ensure it was him so he would receive a proper punishment.”

“William huh? Warlord of Donquest and Iscar’s lackey. He killed your family and your friend’s. He deserves nothing more than a painful death,” Maxwell spoke menacingly. “Anyway, this ain’t about William or Iscar. This is about your friend. Melaney

was able to hack into the criminal database of the PWG. The information of everyone with a criminal record, minor or serious, is in there. According to the information Melaney was able to access, it says that Wolf was set free after 90 days in hard labor. Nothing about him says that they executed him.”

“Are you saying there’s a chance he might still be alive?” I asked in absolute disbelief. I was frozen still for a moment, realizing a slim possibility that he might be alive and well.

“We can’t say for certain,” he continued. “All this means is The Children of Iscar didn’t execute him. He was set free from the labor camps after serving his sentence. We ain’t know nothing of his whereabouts.”

I could listen to every heartbeat pound through my chest. Knowing Gabriel, he would always find a way out of the toughest situations. He would survive whatever obstacle that was in front of him. If Gabriel was released after 90 days, he couldn’t be in the city. He would have come back and stayed with me. He was like a brother to me, and I knew he wouldn’t leave me behind to fend for myself. Gabriel had to be out there somewhere. There was still a shred of hope left.

“He’s out there somewhere, I know it,” I said, inspired by the sudden turn of events. “He would never leave me alone. We’ve been friends since childhood. He is tough as nails, and he would have survived anything that has stood in his way.”

“Finding him is like trying to find a needle in a haystack,” said Maxwell. “For all we know, he could be hiding in the forest, on the beach, underground, under a cave.”

“I understand,” I quietly replied. “He’s just gotta be out there somewhere.”

“The Resistencia will work day and night to find him. In the meantime, we must begin preparations for our first operation.” A knock on the door abruptly interrupted our discussion.

“Come on in,” hollered Maxwell.

The door opened, and in came a man dressed in a raincoat. His clothing was slightly wet, suggesting it had been raining outside. It was always difficult to tell what the weather was for today. He seemed to be one of the guards who patrolled the Headquarters from outside.

“Sir Maxwell,” he said. “We have been keeping a close eye of the coast where William ambushed Judith and Luke three days ago. We haven’t seen any sign of The Children of Iscar or William himself patrolling the area as expected.”

“Hmm, that’s strange.” Maxwell sounded confused. “Something ain’t right about this. “Have our scouts observed the rest of the coastline?”

“Yes Overseer,” the guard continued. “There are no signs of William or Fanatics. It seems that they have not returned since the attack. We believe he has remained in Donquest during this time.”

“I will speak to Ellenore when she arrives. Something’s fishy around these parts, and we’re gonna get to the bottom of this. Let’s hope this is the opening we have been waiting for. Keep the scouting efforts alive and get back to me with any new intel you

find.”

“Yes sir.” The rebel left the room and closed the door behind him.

“This is bizarre,” said Judith. “I feared the worst when William attacked us. No matter what we did, he should have returned and done his damndest to find our location. What’s going on?”

“Not even I know the answer to that question.” Maxwell was equally perplexed. “Ellenore should come back with some answers. There must be something we know little of that could be forcing Iscar to move his board pieces.”

“Understood sir. We have to get going now if you will,” Judith insisted.

“Very well. I have said my part for today. You are both dismissed.”

For dinner, there were mashed potatoes, salad, and bread. The smell of the seasoning was the icing on the cake. My nose could not forget the oozing scent once I stepped inside the dining room. My mouth watered at the taste of mashed potatoes. The only thing missing was gravy. I ate with Michael, who was taking a break from his day working on his next song. Almost nobody had seen him until now because he spent long, tireless hours inside the music room.

“You aren’t thinking of doing something else besides playing music?” I asked Michael who was chewing his food rapidly as if he lived in the cities.

“Not at the moment,” he answered with his mouth full. “I’m doing just fine.”

“Have you thought of at least picking up a sword or a bow and learning how to use them?” I questioned.

“I’ve been thinking about it. I never could rely on someone to teach me because my dad is always busy. Maybe when I’m done writing this next song, I can ask Judith or Alexis to teach me.” He somehow spoke fast with his mouth full of crumbs.

After we were done eating, Michael returned to the music room. I returned to the same training room from earlier. Judith was practicing on top of a field of blue mats. I’d figured they were there so you wouldn’t land on the hard ground. As soon as she saw me, she immediately handed me a sword. The sword she gave me was sharp, shiny, and in perfect condition.

“Be careful with that. It could cut through almost anything,” she warned. I grabbed it with my right hand, studying it up close. The steel and iron were thick. It was slightly heavier than the bow, but it was nothing I couldn’t handle.

“This is a neat sword,” I said, observing the burnished sword.

Judith showed me how to take a swing and how to approach a foe who may be stronger than me. “Always look for an opening. Overpowering your opponents is one way, but that may not always be the case. Use your speed and quickness when encountering foes who are much bigger than you.”

I practiced basic maneuvering for the next several minutes, learning much faster than I could have predicted. I got into the

groove to the point I was having too much fun with myself.

“You’re a fast learner, aren’t you?” Judith asked me.

“Yeah, this has been a lot of fun for me,” I chuckled. “I once bought a sword with Gabriel when we were kids. We practiced with it every day. I think this is my thing. I could probably take on anyone,” I confidently said.

“I see you want a challenge,” she goaded me. “A friendly duel is what you really need to prove just how good you really are.”

“No, that’s not what I meant.” She must have misheard me. Before I knew it, she pulled out her katana from her sheath and pointed it at me. “I don’t want to fight you.”

“Oh really? You don’t want to beat me up like how I gave you a beat down when I first met you? I’ll give you a chance to get some retribution,” she insisted.

“I don’t hit women,” I explained. “Ask somebody else to give you a fair challenge,” I turned around and walked away.

“So, you’re walking away from a fight, huh?” she teased me. “You call yourself a man? Do you think I care if you hit me? Unleash your frustrations and waves of anger you have towards me!”

I closed my eyes and shook my head. She demanded a fight with me. “Fine,” I turned back and faced her. It surely wouldn’t hurt by redeeming myself for what she did to me before. “Don’t think I’ll go easy on you. You brought this on yourself.”

“Give me your best,” she taunted me. “Don’t kill me, or else

I'll kill you first.”

With a sword in hand, I was ready to begin our duel. “Let’s do it,” she said, charging at me, swinging her katana as I blocked her swipes. We were locked together like two bulls. I stood my ground, locked both feet, and used my entire body, pushing her back several feet.

“You got nothing up your sleeve to fool me this time, don’t you?” I reminded her about the dagger trick she had once pulled on me. “Maybe you should have brought a table and put a dagger right in the middle.”

“Oh, so you’re trying to be a comedian, haha,” she said, faking a laugh. “I’m gonna have to put you in your place then.”

Judith charged again, swinging her katana several times over. I retaliated with both our weapons clunking against each other. She was slowly pushing me back with her quickness. I had difficulty keeping up with her every move. She nearly landed a deadly swipe, but I ducked my head and tackled her to the ground. We rolled over a few times, but I had her pinned on the ground. Judith suddenly swept both of her legs against mine, knocking me over, and used both of her legs to put me in a chokehold. I could hardly breathe as I tried to find an escape from her hold.

“Giving up already?” she asked. “Tap out for me, will ya.”

My hands grasped her ankle as I twisted it. She groaned in pain as she released the hold. She laid flat on the ground as I pointed my sword over her throat.



“You talk too much,” I grinned.

“And you can’t hold a candle to me,” she said. She swept her legs again, knocking me off from my feet. She had cat-like reflexes. I quickly stood back up, but she unleashed a flurry of swings again. I was growing weary with every second that passed. Judith knocked my sword from my hand. I was defenseless. For no good reason, she used her knee to kick me in the gut. It hit me like a brick as I fell to the ground. I groaned unwillingly.

“If you got any fight in you, show it to me!” she exclaimed, smirking as if she enjoyed beating me senseless. I would not allow her to stand tall against me again. I quickly grabbed her arm before she could react, dragging her to the ground with me. I ran to grab my sword again, but Judith immediately threw herself at me. She found an opening and used her leg to trip me backward. I fell on my back. She waited for me to get back into the fight.

“You’re stronger than I thought,” she said. “but it’s obvious by now that you can’t keep up with me.”

“I’m not giving up.” I could barely say as my breathing weakened. I scrambled back to my feet, yearning for more.

“I’ll give you credit, you don’t know when to quit, do you?” she said to her enjoyment. “Fine, let’s continue our dance.”

As I was about to charge at her, I suddenly lost sensation in my right arm. A jolt followed by a shock pierced my right shoulder. My fingers felt a burning sensation coercing me to drop my sword. The excruciating pain from before returned. I

collapsed to the ground as Judith ran to my aid.

“Luke? Luke! What’s going on? Are you okay!?” Her voice sounded concerned.

“My right arm!” I screamed. “I don’t feel it. It’s too much!” My arm felt like it had disappeared from existence. I was clueless about what was happening. My heart raced to new heights, fearing the absolute worst.

“Let’s take you to the doctor!” Judith pulled me up, leaning on her shoulder. She ran far faster than I could ever imagine, pulling my entire weight with her.

Judith opened the door to my room, laying me down on the bed. “Wait here while I find the doctor!” she yelled, quickly dashing out of the room. I waited in my room alone, experiencing the worst feeling ever. I could still feel the burning sensation in my fingers. It was utter torture enduring it.

“Luke, are you okay?” asked Michael as he stepped into the room. “Judith came and sent me to look out for you while she looked for Conrad.”

“My right arm. I can’t feel it,” I moaned.

“What did you do? Did you get cut, or did you break your arm?” he said worryingly.

“I don’t know. My fingers feel like they’re burning from the inside. This isn’t the first time I’ve gone through something like this.”

“All right, take it easy man. You need some water?” he offered.

“Yeah, I could use some,” I agreed.

Michael left and immediately returned with a glass of water. I grabbed the cup, chugging it whole.

“Thirsty, aren’t you?” he asked me.

“I was just training with Judith when this happened. I’m crossing my fingers, hoping its nothing too serious,” I writhed. I heard voices coming from the hallway belonging to Judith and Conrad.

“Hey Judy,” said Michael.

“Mike, thank you for taking care of Luke while looking for the doc,” she replied.

“Oh, it was no problem.”

“Let me look at your right arm,” said Conrad. “Can you tell me what you feel?”

“I can’t move it,” I explained. “I can’t feel it. It’s as if someone cut it off clean.”

Conrad stared at my right arm for any signs of injuries, cuts, scratches, or bruises. “Do you have any history of injuries or disabilities I should know of?”

“No, nothing. I experienced the same thing right before Judith and I were attacked by William.”

I could only see Conrad move my arm. I felt nothing as his hand grabbed mine. “Did you accidentally injure him with your sword?” he asked Judith.

“No, we just had a friendly duel,” she responded.

“Nothing seems to be fractured. No injuries, no wounds, no

cuts. Nothing.” Conrad pulled out a syringe with a needle attached to it at the tip. It appeared that he would draw a blood sample from my body. “I need to know more about this strange phenomenon. I must draw blood to study if there’s anything in his blood system causing this.”

He pierced a needle through my lifeless arm, draining a few ounces of blood. It was great knowing I couldn’t feel the needle injecting through my skin. “I’ll come back with the results as soon as I can,” Conrad informed me.

“All right doc,” I nodded. Conrad took his equipment bag and left the room.

“Are you sure you don’t have a bad history with that arm?” Judith wondered.

“Not to my knowledge. Maybe I’ve put too much stress in my arm,” I tried to explain.

Having heard the commotion, Alexis walked into the room. “What’s going on here? What happened to Luke?” She gazed at me worryingly.

“Your guess is as good as mine,” I replied.

“Oh, I’m so so sorry,” she said sincerely. “I hope you’re feeling better now.”

“Not quite yet,” I mumbled under my warm breath.

Judith stood quietly at the entrance before making her exit. I wondered if there was still a grudging guiltiness inside her thoughts for attacking me. I resented her past actions. I didn’t want to look at her face anymore. She brought me misery,

embarrassment, and agony. I joined The Resistencia to fulfill a promise, and once again, Judith had impeded my desires.

## Plan of Attack

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I felt much better the next day. I could once again move my right arm with no issue. I spent most of my morning in bed. Alexis kindly brought my breakfast, and Conrad had visited me to change my bandage. I wouldn't know the results of my blood analysis until the afternoon. I was anxious to find out. Hopefully, this was nothing more than a mere coincidence, but it was too good to be true. Maxwell visited me for a minute last night. "Get well soon," is all he said to me. He was a very busy Overseer.

"Feeling any better?" asked Melaney.

"Oh, absolutely," I smiled. "I honestly think my arm fell asleep yesterday from so much training." I sat near the corner of my bed as I spoke to the siblings about our favorite foods.

"My favorite food is gotta be pizza," Melaney answered. "We don't have too much around here, but when we have enough dough to make some, it doesn't disappoint."

"Well, my favorite food is hot dogs and hamburgers," Michael happily explained. He was the easiest person I could open myself to in The Resistencia. "When we have barbeques, I like the smell, taste, and sizzling sound from the grill. You can't go wrong with either, especially when you add some ketchup. What about you Luke?"

"My favorite dish is lasagna," I replied. "I haven't tasted

lasagna in forever, though. I wished they had some here.”

“Unfortunately, we wished we still had some,” said Melaney. “Not too long ago, we had some left. If you had joined us sooner, you could have had some.” It upset me to hear my favorite dish was long gone. I still remember my mom cooking lasagna for dinner at least once per week. It was expensive to buy, although it was worth every single dollar. I could still smell the garlicky taste even after all these years.

“I heard you joined The Resistencia,” Michael pointed out. “I’m glad you could join them.”

“Wait, are you both not with The Resistencia?” I asked them.

“Well, we aren’t necessarily in the front lines. We work for our dad,” he explained.

“Work for him as in doing his work for him?” I continued, baffled at his reply.

“Sort of. Melaney is our bridge to the outside with her hacking expertise.” he continued. “We only understand what’s going on with The Children of Iscar in due part because of my sis. Right Mel?”

“Yeah, and I don’t mind it one bit,” she added. “My dad taught me how to do it, and I got better at it. We’re all a team.”

“And what exactly do you do Mike?” I put him on the spot once again.

“I entertain people,” he said. “There aren’t any other musicians except me. My dad can also play some music, but he’s a busy man. I lighten up the mood anytime my dad wants me

too.”

“I want to ask you both a serious question regarding Maxwell,” my tone shifted. Melaney and Michael paid close attention to me, curious to know what I was about to say. I had something to get off my chest. “Do you know who your grandfather was?”

“Grandfather?” Michael seemed utterly clueless, solely based on his puzzled reaction. His thoughts were lost in the void. “I’ve never met him to my knowledge. Dad never talked about him.”

“Um, we have no idea who he was to be honest,” Melaney was equally baffled as to who their grandfather was. Had they never met Morgan? How could their grandfather not have met his grandchildren? And why was an elderly man living separate from them? Why did Maxwell choose to bring Morgan to his sanctuary here so recently?

“Morgan. Does that name ring a bell?” I tried my best to recuperate their memories. They didn’t answer.

“No, never heard of that name,” Michael stated. “Why? Am I missing something?” His voice sounded lost.

“Well, your dad wanted your grandfather to come and stay here,” I continued. “That’s why Judith left for a few days to find him. I assume he didn’t tell you anything about it, did he?”

“No, not at all,” Michael said, unsure of himself. “We were told by Judith that she was on a ‘mission.’ That’s all we heard. I didn’t know she was going to rescue our grandfather. Did you



meet him?”

“I did actually. He was a selfless old man.”

“That’s good to hear. I wish we could meet him. Where is he now?”

I gulped, knowing the harsh truth. I didn’t want to say it to them, but I couldn’t just keep them in the dark about it. “He’s gone. I’m sorry,” I quietly replied as if I was at a funeral.

“Oh,” muttered Michael. “I never got to know him then. Why was he living in the same city you were living?”

“That I don’t know. I’m still scratching my head about why he lived there in the first place. Nothing adds up.”

“Our dad never told us about our grandfather,” added Melaney. “We always thought he was dead. Maybe I can look for a Morgan Greene on the criminal database.”

“That could come in handy,” I agreed.

Both siblings had stunned looks on their faces. The entire ordeal was bizarre from top to bottom. Maxwell was hiding something he didn’t want any of us to know. All I knew was that they had some differences they could not set aside. Maxwell was very vague in his responses. I must ask Judith if she knows anything more about this.

“We’ll be talking later,” said Michael. “I’ve got to continue writing my new song.” They both stood up and made their way out the door. “Hope you feel better soon.” We both shook hands.

“I’ll be seeing you later,” Melaney told her goodbyes. “I’ll see if I can find anything on Morgan. In the meantime, get well

soon.”

“All right. Thanks for the talk guys,” I said as they left the room. Shortly after, Judith and Conrad entered. The moment of truth had arrived.

“I have the blood results ready,” Conrad informed me.

“Very well. Spit it out doc.” Conrad and Judith take a seat as the mood in the room seemed to change drastically. I was mildly nervous to hear the results. Was I suffering from a medical condition that I wasn’t aware of my whole life?

Conrad then explains in more detail and says, “The blood tests showed no signs of a disease or infection. I have been endlessly trying to figure out what you might be suffering from. It appears based on your symptoms and lack of serious injuries that you are likely suffering from Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.”

“Uh. What is that?” I asked, greatly concerned about my well-being. I had no idea what this medical condition was about. The world froze for a moment, trying to absorb what it was I had been diagnosed with.

“It is a condition in which your median nerve, which runs from your forearm into the palm of your hand, is squeezed or pressurized at the wrist. In your case, it seems to be serious since you have lost feeling in your entire right arm.”

“How did this happen to me?” I tried to understand the cause of my condition.

“There can be a myriad number of reasons you have Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. It could be stress, trauma, or injury to the

wrist over long periods. I can't say for certain you have this condition unless we examine your wrist with an X-ray. Unfortunately, I don't have an X-ray machine at my disposal. For now, we can only assume, and thus we must take necessary precautions."

"Is there any cure for it?" I held my breath, hoping for a feasible solution.

"Through surgery, yes, but I am not a surgeon," he said to my disbelief. I was stuck with whatever this syndrome was. Regardless of the causes of this condition, I couldn't just let it consume me over time and prevent me from fighting on behalf of The Resistencia. The one person responsible for my condition was in this room.

"This is your fault," I glared at Judith. "You brought me here and tried to convince me to join the group, and now I've suffered this condition."

She looked back at me with a grim look on her face. "I can't believe it," she muttered. "I didn't know I would permanently injure. Look, I'm sorry."

"No, you got it all wrong Judith," I said unapologetically. "You're to blame for my condition. You thought I was the enemy, but you jumped the gun. I don't know if I'll be able to forgive you for that. Doc, is there a way to ease the symptoms?"

"I could place a splinter on your right arm to reduce the pressure and decrease the likelihood that you suffer from the symptoms." He opened his black bag and pulled out a splinter he spoke of. Conrad placed the splinter on my right wrist. It was

very comfortable, although it was a little too tight. Nonetheless, I could move my fingers and arm without any issues. “That is all I can do for now. Until we meet a surgeon, you can expect the symptoms to continue. Try not to have your right wrist still for long hours. Do not take the splinter off for whatever reason.”

“Okay,” I nodded. Conrad picks up his equipment and leaves the room. Judith sat silent, knowing she likely had caused my injury. She had shown no compassion towards me, and I would show the same feelings in return.

“Judith. Please get out of my sight,” I said bitterly. “I’ll do things my way from here on out. I’ll fight with one hand if I have to.”

“I saved you from certain death, and that’s how you repay me?” Judith calmly replied.

“I tried to make sense of you, but then I realized you never cared what happened to me. You wanted this to happen.”

“I simply overreacted. If I could go back in time, I would have done things differently,” she begged, raising her voice at my level.

“It’s too late for that. Please leave me alone,” I said without looking at her. Judith shook her head and stormed out of the room. Thankfully, Judith avoided me for the rest of the day.

The following day, Alexis came to my room and had an urgent message on behalf of Maxwell. “Sir Maxwell is holding a very important meeting right now,” she said. “He wants everyone to attend.”

“And Where is this meeting at?” I questioned her.

“At the hangar where we had the festival.”

We left my room and headed together downstairs and into the large hangar. Chairs were lined up in rows as thousands had already gathered. “Let’s sit up front near the stage,” Alexis said as she leads the way until we found a few open seats. Maxwell stood on stage, waiting for everyone to settle down. Alexis left a seat open for Judith, but she hadn’t arrived yet. Maxwell began his talk.

“Greetings my fellow Rebels,” he began. “We are here on this faithful to discuss our very first plan of attack.” A shush filled the hangar. Maxwell uttered the words everyone likely was waiting for. But this soon? The Overseer had better know what he was doing. “Ellenore has returned to give us the splendid news that has reached my ears. I trust that each of you will understand why now is the time to unleash a counterstrike. That is because The Brotherhood has unleashed a massive counterattack against The Children of Iscar.”

People began chattering amongst themselves in confusion, breaking the silence. I was admittedly more confused than they were. I had no knowledge of what Maxwell was referring to.

“Who is The Brotherhood?” I asked Alexis.

“A faction responsible for the rise of Iscar,” she informed me. “They helped him get to the place he is now, but it is unusual for them to attack what they created.”

“The Brotherhood has sent out ships to block any reinforcements from traveling the seas,” Maxwell continued.

Behind Maxwell, a projector was turned on, showing a map of the entire Western Hemisphere.

“They have taken control of Ruby Canal, which separates the North and South continents,” stated Maxwell pointing at each location he mentioned. “Their armies have taken a large foothold throughout much of the North Continent. Whatever the reason they have for beginning this civil war, it is our opportunity to begin our first strike in Port Bell. William and the majority of The Children of Iscar have been sent to combat The Brotherhood, thinning their forces throughout the South Continent.”

Judith materialized near the side of the stage as she took a seat of her own. She watched on like the rest of us. No question, she was still upset with me. I could care less about her selfish feelings. Beside Judith, a middle-aged woman sat next to her. Long black hair and wore casual clothes. She hardly looked different from everybody else, although she had a very menacing look on her face. Both of them were talking to each other.

“Any questions?” asked a confident Maxwell.

“Why is The Brotherhood against The Children of Iscar?” asked a rebel several seats to my right.

“That I do not know the answer to,” answered Maxwell. “Not even Ellenore knows why they are at odds. They have broken a long-standing alliance that has lasted for decades. The Brotherhood has aggressively forced The Children of Iscar to pull their best forces to the front lines, leaving them wide open for us to get the upper hand. We hope to understand their reasons

behind this fallout. But the time for talking is over. The time to strike is now! POWER TO THE PEOPLE!”

“POWER TO THE PEOPLE!” Everyone stood up and shouted in unison, raising their fist in the air. Everyone dispersed as Alexis met up with Judith and the other woman sitting next to her.

“Hello Judith,” Alexis greeted her.

“Alexis, I was looking for you,” Judith said to her relief. “You arrived in time to hear what the Overseer had to say. He has ordered me to lead the attack on Port Bell. I want you to be a part of it.”

“Really? I would love to,” her friend replied enthusiastically. “Oh Luke, you haven’t met Ellenore before.” Alexis was referring to the woman next to Judith.

“Hello, you must be Luke.” Ellenore and I shook hands. “Nice to meet you. Judith and Alexis have spoken a lot about you.”

“Nice to meet you ma’am,” I said, feigning a smile. There was something strange about her look and attitude. It screamed untrustworthy, vile, and dangerous. Maybe that’s how she wanted to look, but I wouldn’t necessarily be comfortable talking to her for long hours.

“Oh dear, what happened to you?” she asked about my bandage.

“Just an injury. I’m feeling much better.” I replied to her concerns.

“You came from the city of Donquest, didn’t you?” she asked. “William keeps a watchful eye on the city. I saw him not very long ago rallying his forces towards Brotherhood territory.”

“Is that why no one has come back to search for the location of the Headquarters?” I wondered.

“You are correct,” she answered. “The Brotherhood has fiercely retaliated that even Iscar himself was caught off guard.” Ellenore had a very stiff tone to her voice. It didn’t feel like she was a part of The Resistencia. It was as if she didn’t like me for whatever reason.

“Ah, Ellenore,” interrupted Maxwell. “You’ve met Luke, haven’t you?”

“Yes, we have been getting along so far. I’m sorry you had to go through that,” she said, staring at the bandage on my forehead. “William will not get away with something like that so easily. Now that you have joined our Revolution, we could use your knowledge of The Children of Iscar against them.”

“We begin in a week,” promised Maxwell. “This is a war we can’t afford to lose. Everything that we have worked for leads up to this moment.”

“We have to be careful about The Brotherhood,” Judith reminded him. “We are fighting two common enemies at once. The Brotherhood likely doesn’t know of our presence, but The Children of Iscar do. They seem to not consider us as much of a threat as The Brotherhood, which speaks volumes to their prowess.”

“Indeed,” Maxwell agreed, scratching his grayish beard.



“The Brotherhood and their capital are in the North Continent. Only The Children of Iscar have complete control of the South Continent. If we can take town by town, village by village, city by city, we can ultimately take control of their Network, hack into it, and spread the World Revolution worldwide.”

“First, we must liberate Port Bell,” Judith continued. “It is the closest village to our location.”

Maxwell nodded. “A fine start. We still have a lot of work to do. We must begin preparations starting today. Ellenore, return to your duties and keep an eye on Ruby Canal. We understand why The Brotherhood has turned against The Children of Iscar. Alexis and Judith, muster a task force to begin our assault on Port Bell. Luke, I will ask you to fight alongside Alexis and Judith in the meantime.”

“What? Are you certain of this sir Maxwell?” Judith seemed surprised. “He only has one arm he can use. He can’t fight.”

“I can still go with one arm,” I answered. “If you think I can’t go, then I can prove it to you.”

“But...” she hesitated.

“I can still fight,” I interrupted her. “I’m not letting William or The Children of Iscar continue to their dominance over the South Continent. This is the closest we are getting to this so-called World Revolution, am I right? Then we will fight with whatever it takes. Our Revolution begins today,” I emphatically declared.

I had never sounded more confident to start a fight. Judith didn’t say a word back. She seemed to be equally skeptical and

guilty. Just because she probably injured me doesn't mean I could no longer wield a sword or a bow. Her time spent helping me with my training wasn't a waste, and I would prove her wrong. New people, new friends, and a new beginning. This is what I hoped for, even if there is a slim chance.

## Final Preparations

*1 Week Later*

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I mindlessly stared at my reflection in the silver mirror. My black eye had vanished, and my bandage was no more. The large cut across my scalp still needed several stitches. If I touched the closed wound, I would jump in an awful amount of pain. I hadn't felt close to one hundred percent in a long time. I exited the bathroom, making my way to the dining room for my last lunch before our mission tomorrow. There, I found Alexis by herself eating soup.

"Hello there," she grinned. "You going to get some soup?"

"Y-yeah, I was about to go get some. It's one of my favorite dishes. I can't miss out on this," I said while trying to keep an honest smile. I grabbed a boiling can of soup that was already well boiled with noodles and vegetables. I didn't care so long as I got a taste of it. I gulped a mouthful with a spoon. Little did I know that I would spit it back out.

"Too hot?" Alexis tried not to laugh.

"It burned my tongue," I embarrassingly said, wiping my mouth with a napkin. I drink a cold cup of water to extinguish the burning liquid from my mouth. "It tastes better than in the cities. It's delicious."

"You're funny," she giggled to herself. "I like how you

smile.”

“Excuse me? Am I missing something?” I said, unamused by her comments.

“Nope, you’re just naturally a nice guy,” she complimented me. “You have good manners and always try to be kind and generous. I don’t understand why Judith doesn’t see the same thing I do.”

“Okay?” I said, rubbing the side of my cheek, not knowing what to say. Was I really that compassionate to others? “Speaking of Judith, why isn’t she here with you?”

“She didn’t want to talk with me,” she clarified while stirring her soup. “Ever since yesterday, she hasn’t talked to anyone. Did you say something that rubbed her the wrong way?”

“Oh, um. Kind of.” I stuttered, not wanting to admit that I was rude to Judith. “I blamed her for injuring my right arm. I think she took it to heart.”

“Well, that makes sense. You probably shouldn’t have said that to her. She’s easily turned off if you say something like that,” she implied.

“She doesn’t want to train with me no more. I’m sure she doesn’t want to train with you either.”

“Nope. I saw her yesterday practicing on her own. It’s good to have someone like you to train with.” Alexis was referring to our past week of training. She was fun to work with sometimes having competition showing off who has the better strength or accuracy. Her accuracy with a bow was unparalleled and beyond

mine, but I improved because of her. “Let’s get back to it, shall we?” I nodded, agreeing with her.

We returned to the training facility or the training grounds as Alexis liked to call it. Before we began our work for today, we moved additional weapons and equipment for tomorrow. After we finished moving everything for today, we resumed to what we had been working on for the past few days. The rest of the equipment would be moved by other Rebels, who provided a helping hand.

“Okay, let’s get back to it.” Alexis clapped after our work was done.

I grabbed the bow I’ve been using since last week. It was a black and brown bow which was favorably light and versatile. I had grown a strong liking to it. I placed an arrow on the string and released it, hitting a bullseye.

“Wow. You’ve gotten a whole lot better,” Alexis complimented me. She offered me a high five, and I playfully accepted it.

“What? Are you surprised?” I chuckled.

“Duh. You’re a fast learner. Fast learners are my kind,” she winked. “Watch this.”

Alexis placed not one, but two arrows on her bow. Because it was made of hardwood and steel, her bow reflected a bit of the light from the ceiling. Mine was just a simple, generic piece of wood. She pulled the string slowly, compensating for the extra arrow. She released the pair hitting the bullseye of the same

dummy I had targeted.

“How about that?” she bragged.

“Impressive. You’re a better shot than Judith,” I praised her.

“Mhm. I’ve always loved archery. It’s been my thing since I was young.”

“I bet this is like shooting sitting ducks for you.”

“Easy as pie,” she snickered.

“You don’t use swords, do you?” I asked.

“Nope. I was born to do archery. Watch this.” Alexis aimed at another dummy. She then starts walking backward, pulled out two arrows, and placed them on her bow. She picked up momentum, then jumped on the counter, aimed her bow, leaped forward, and released the arrows. Bullseye. *I get it. You’re really good*, I almost wanted to say.

“How about that,” she grinned.

“Nine out of ten,” I said.

“Oh, so you didn’t think that was good enough?” She was flabbergasted about not rating her a perfect score. “Stand back, and I’ll show you my best trick.” I heeded her, moving back a few steps, giving sufficient room for Alexis to shoot the other dummy. No matter what she did, I wouldn’t give her a ten. She would have to demonstrate something I never thought was possible. Alexis moved backward like before, pulled out three arrows, and placed each one on her bow. She ran picking up more momentum from before, jumped on the counter, aimed her bow, jumped down while spinning 360 degrees, and released the

trio of arrows. Bullseye. My jaw dropped.

“What now, huh?” she cheerfully smiled.

“I mean,” I sighed, rubbing the back of my head. “That was really well done.” I smiled.

“So?” she playfully asked. “What’s your rating?”

“Oh geez. Honestly, I thought it was over the top,” I admitted.

“Really? You couldn’t judge me by my accuracy?” she scoffed.

“Your accuracy is perfect. I just don’t know if those tricks are necessary during an actual fight.”

“It doesn’t hurt to make sure I kill my enemy,” she shrugged her shoulders.

“I guess you’re right. Fine, I’ll stop being too picky and give you a ten.”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought,” she smirked. “You are judgemental of others, aren’t you?”

“Sometimes. I just grew up living a tough life, screaming on the inside, hoping for a better future. I guess nothing is holding me back now since I’m not in the cities.”

“I don’t blame you. Tomorrow is a big day. Maxwell wants to address The Resistencia one last time. Thousands have returned to the Headquarters from all over the Continent to hear his speech.”

“That’s why I’ve seen more Rebels than usual the past few days,” I interrupted her. “Hmph, I guess I should have asked

earlier.”

“That’s probably the only time I’ll be seeing Judith today because she’s being forced by Maxwell to be by his side. Anyhow, let’s get back to business, shall we?”

We continued our training without trouble. I progressively improved my speed while holding a sword. Alexis was carefully challenging me while trying to strike me with a variety of kicks and punches. I urged her to use a sword against me, but she refused. It was a lot of fun for us, even when she didn’t use a sword of her own. I didn’t need Judith to help me strengthen my abilities. I only needed someone around who could be fun and humorous about it.

That very night, Maxwell gathered everyone at the hangar for one last pep talk. Thousands of Rebels had crowded the place. This was the moment they had been waiting for. A Revolution that was about to usher in a new world.

Maxwell stood atop the stage in the large hangar room where the festival was held. Judith, Alexis, and Ellenore stood behind him. I leaned next to a wall at the very back of the hangar, looking on. Thousands were here, each more than ready to spark the World Revolution as they liked to call it.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he spoke, clearing his throat before he continued. The crowd hushed as soon as they heard his opening words. “Tomorrow is a momentous day. I speak to every man, woman, or child in this room who has yearned to break the world’s chains from a power-hungry ruler. His days are numbered, but so is his lackey William, whom we must eliminate



to reclaim control of the South Continent for the people. We will fight them on the beaches, towns, villages, streets, forests, deserts, mountains, and anywhere else on this Earth. Our very existence rattles the shackles that have kept us chained. You and I likewise will finally be able to live a life where we can eat our bread without worrying about what we will have next for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Our past governments have failed us because of our fear to keep them accountable for their greed and selfishness. Don't let that same fear consume us in the battlefield. Let the bells toll, for tomorrow, is our day. The people have spoken, and they want freedom, liberty, humility, dignity, safety, peace, and bread. Onwards my fellow Rebels fight on to victory!"

Maxwell pulled out a saber and raised high in the air.

"POWER TO THE PEOPLE!" he yelled at the top of his lungs.

"POWER TO THE PEOPLE!" Everyone raised their fists, chanting in unison.

The hangar cleared out, but the celebration had just begun. Many drank what they could scrounge, while others simply enjoyed their conversations with their friends. The dining room was packed. Many would eat their last meal here, enjoying whatever moments they could savor. Tomorrow would be a long day. I had nothing to say to Alexis, Judith, or Maxwell while they spoke to others. They were occupied with other matters that didn't concern me. A new dawn was on the horizon.

## Who We Are

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“Alexis. I need to talk to you about something,” I asked her as the breeze rattled the trees and grass. Today was a gorgeous sunny day. A new day was upon us. I hadn’t felt such excitement like this in a very long time. It was refreshing to be spending more time outside than inside the Headquarters.

“What is it?” she asked as we carried out more equipment onto the boats. Hundreds of Rebels were helping us carry out firearms, swords, bows, arrows, and whatever fuel we had left.

“It’s about Maxwell. Do you know why he and Morgan lived apart?” I questioned.

“I’m afraid I don’t know the truth to it either,” she said.

“Please, can you just tell me what you know,” I demanded answers.

“Okay,” she agreed. “Promise me you won’t tell anyone else.”

“I promise I won’t,” I replied.

She takes a deep breath, clears her throats, and says, “I don’t know every single detail, but I know Maxwell and Morgan had a fallout regarding the Overseer’s true intentions. Morgan is perfectly fine with The Resistencia being the answer to overthrowing Iscar, but he accused Maxwell of having a different agenda. Morgan feared this, and Maxwell didn’t allow him to

come with him here, so he doesn't spill the beans."

"How do you know this to be true?" I curiously asked.

"I overheard Maxwell talking to Morgan with an earpiece. I never knew who Morgan was in person or what he said. All I know is Maxwell talked about doing things his way and that he didn't need his dad to do it for him."

"Melaney and Michael didn't know their grandfather was alive," I said, dropping the bombshell.

"What? Impossible?" Alexis learned to her surprise. "They never knew if they had a grandfather who was alive?"

"Not once. Maxwell kept them in the dark. Are you sure we can trust him?" I doubtfully asked.

"Sir Maxwell has been more than just an Overseer," she defended him. "Not one person has said anything negative about him. Every single rebel has earned his trust. He has taken us this far, and we can't turn back now."

"I-I don't know now," I replied. "We should find out what Morgan had to say about Maxwell."

"I wish I knew more," she said. "but we have more important things to do right now."

"Okay then," I mumbled under my breath. Alexis seemed blind to what was going on with Maxwell. I couldn't say for sure what Morgan wanted to tell us. It was nothing more than speculation. Regardless, this issue shouldn't fog our minds. We had an important task at hand, one that would determine the fate of millions.

Hours later, we reached a distant part of the coastline, which was miles north from where the Headquarters were located. Dozens of Rebel boats made landfall on the shores. I had sailed along with Alexis on the boat, who entertained me by telling stories of her past. I couldn't help to think about Judith during our travel. She wasn't with us on the boat, suggesting she still hadn't gotten over our oblique differences.

Port Bell was less than two miles away. Dusk approached while we disembarked from the boats and moved the equipment. "Set up a small camp in the trees," Judith ordered everyone. "We must keep a low profile tonight."

We were to strike Port Bell after midnight. It was a village of no more than a few thousand people. At most, there were only a few hundred Fanatics. On paper, this sounded like a guaranteed victory. However, nothing is for certain. Hundreds of Rebels had gathered as a small camp was established. I had never camped in my life before, especially out in the woods. People laughed, gossiped amongst themselves, or refined their combat skills. A few bonfires were kindled, keeping a source of light intact in the darkness.

"Alexis. Luke. Can I talk to both of you for a second," said Judith while we were polishing our weapons.

"Yeah sure," I responded with haste. Alexis and I followed Judith outside the camp and to a distant part of the forest. The moon was our only other source of light under the darkness. I could hardly see either of them. It didn't help matters that we were all wearing black clothing. I wore a black plain shirt, black

leather jacket, black trousers, black shoes, and black socks. We stopped after a short walk, and Judith began to talk.

“Luke, since you’re new to The Resistencia, you should understand that we use pseudonyms to encrypt our information from spilling into the wrong people. That’s why we called your friend Wolf, so we don’t have to refer to him by his real name.”

“Wolf? Why Wolf?” I curiously asked.

“Your friend was something else,” she quietly replied. “Anyhow, you should learn the pseudonyms of everyone in The Resistencia. Mine is *Iris*.”

“And mine is *Nightingale*,” said a joyful Alexis. “They are my favorite kind of bird, giving us the only music that nature has to offer.”

“Maxwell’s is *Overseer* if you haven’t already noticed,” Judith reminded me.

“Overseer? I thought that was his title?”

“He calls himself the Overseer of the People. No one debates him about it.”

“Fair enough. So, do I get to pick my own call name?” I patiently wondered.

“If you would like to unless you want me to come up with a name for you.”

I struggled to come up with a call name that would be symbolic of me. Nothing stuck out in my head until I thought about what had happened to me for the past couple of weeks. I felt like a different person, almost reborn from my youthful years. I had

risen from the ruins and ashes amid a desolate civilization. Anytime I was about to meet my demise, I kept going and going. Maybe it was luck, but I think it was something more than just chance.

“Phoenix,” I declared my call name.

“Phoenix?” Alexis seemed surprised. “That’s a lovely pen name.”

“I think you could have come up with something better,” implied Judith. “but it’s my own opinion. You sure you want to stick with it?”

“Yeah. Phoenix is fine by me.” I nodded.

“Very well,” Judith agreed. “Now, let’s talk more seriously.” She sighed and took a deep breath. “I just want to say good luck tonight. We’ve made it this far. I never knew a day like this would come. This is a moment I’m sure each of you has dreamed of for a very long time.”

She turned to Alexis and said, “I heard you trained with Luke for the past week. I didn’t know he could overcome it with one good arm. You almost made him forget that he had a bad arm. I honestly thought he wasn’t going to be here.”

“He wasn’t going to turn his back on me,” Alexis explained. “Look, you and Luke need to settle down a bit. I beg of you to understand where he is coming from. No more arguing and bickering, please. We’re in this together, remember?”

Judith then turned to me, itching to speak to me. “I know we haven’t been getting along, but the real test begins soon. I looked

at myself in the mirror, thinking about the past few weeks. You were right to be frustrated and angry at me.” I was speechless to hear her what she had to say. Was she conceding that I was right all along?

“Um, you’re welcome,” I cautiously answered. I stared at my splinter, realizing I hadn’t felt any sudden loss of sensation on my right arm since Conrad had placed it. I had exclusively used my left arm to continue my training with Alexis.

“I didn’t think you couldn’t possibly fight yourself out of a paper bag,” she continued. “You can wield a sword with your left hand, you risked your life against William with one hand, and you almost beat me in our friendly duel. You weren’t in great shape back in Donquest, but you didn’t give up when you climbed to the top of the cliff. Although I originally came to rescue Morgan, I did feel some sympathy for you knowing you were on the run from authorities. I know what it’s like to live in the cities.”

“I appreciate the words,” I said acceptingly of her forgiveness. “The Resistencia has brought back some of what I have lost.”

Judith nodded. “We are here to change the world. One day, we will liberate Donquest, that I can guarantee. Then, we will avenge those you have lost by tracking down William first.”

“The Resistencia has brought everyone closer,” interrupted Alexis. “This is the Revolution the world has been asking for. Millions are ready to hear the truth. Little do they know, The Brotherhood has done us a favor. Maxwell wants to take

advantage of it. Judy. Luke. We can do this together as one.”

“That’s the spirit!” said an enthusiastic Judith. It was the first time she was in a merry mood. “Let’s go back and rally the Rebels, shall we?”

“Let’s head back and get this show on the road,” said a motivated Alexis.

Later that night, our first strike was finally set into motion. We would liberate people from the clutches of Iscar and his pawns, starting in the rural areas. There were over 300 Rebels who surrounded Port Bell. Everyone was well armed with various rifles, pistols, swords, knives, and bows. It would be inevitable that we would run out of ammo, so Judith reminded everyone to conserve their ammunition. Judith, Alexis, and I crouched behind a line of bushes. Judith would give the signal to attack the village after she threw a handful of the EMP spheres she still had at her disposal.

“How many of those you got left?” I curiously asked. She was cautiously grabbing a handful of the small spheres with her black gloves.

“Not very many,” she replied. “No more than ten. I must use at least half of them to shut down their communications.”

I couldn’t read the exact time on my watch, but it was past midnight. There were only a few patrols around the small town, so this was the perfect time to strike. Everyone wore black gear while some wore war paint on their faces. I had a bow and a quiver for my arrows. I also carried a sword and a small knife on the side of my pants.



“Okay, I’m going ahead and chuck the spheres around the town,” Judith said, setting a time for each individual sphere she was going to activate.

“Be careful,” whispered Alexis. Judith nodded and left. Alexis and I watched her sneak around the village. She was quick on her feet, slipping behind buildings and using the shadows to her advantage.

“She’s fast,” I said, keeping track of her every move.

“Iris knows her way around in every situation,” answered Alexis. “She also taught me how to survive on my own, how to wield and use an array of weapons, and to be aware of my surroundings. She’s tough as nails.”

“How did you find the Resistencia?” I wondered.

“Judith. Excuse me,” she cleared her throat. “Iris found me while I searched for food inside a vacant food shop. I had recently escaped Jacinto, a city to the West, after I learned about The Resistencia from a few close friends of mine. We all escaped the city, but before we could get far, The Children of Iscar hunted us down one by one. I dispersed from my group and found myself lost for several days in the wilderness. I met Judith after being chased for days by The Children of Iscar. She helped me fight off the Fanatics. When I learned that Iris was with The Resistencia, I couldn’t have been more excited. We have been best friends since, almost like sisters.”

*Gabriel.* Alexis’s conversation about Judith being her best friend deeply reminded me of Gabriel. I had forgotten my talk with Maxwell, about my friend who could still be alive

somewhere out there. I had faith that if he were still alive, he would have to show up somewhere.

“So word got out in your city about The Resistencia?” I questioned Alexis

“Yes, but any talk about The Resistencia would lead to 90 days of hard labor,” she said

“My city has had no such luck yet,” I explained my side. “I only heard about it from Morgan, that was until I met Judith and learned more with each passing day.”

Judith had finished placing the EMP spheres around the village as she gave us a thumbs up. Any second, a blackout would ensue, signaling our green light. I stared back at Alexis, and she was ready to fight with a bow in hand. The next thing I heard was a tiny booming sound followed by the blackout of lights.

“ATTACK!” Judith yelled at the top of her lungs. The Rebels charged into the village, and the takeover began. The Children of Iscar were caught off guard as their empty guns did nothing. Maxwell was right, not all of them had ammunition. The enemy was visibly perplexed. They had no idea what hit them as they fell one by one. I hardly heard any gunshots blast through the village.

Judith looked on carefully, making sure the situation was under control. Some Fanatics surrendered without further retaliation. I glanced at a young man who appeared to be about my age who was running in the wrong direction. I immediately stopped him in his tracks, aiming my bow with an arrow ready to

fire. He quickly dropped his gun and begged on his knees, raising his hands.

“I surrender!” heaved the frightened young man as he dropped his gun. I stared at him for a moment as I kicked his rifle away, then pushed him to the ground and bound his hands with a rope. “I didn’t want this to happen!” His panicked voice couldn’t be any louder. “Please spare us!”

“I gotta do what I gotta do,” I replied to him. I momentarily left him alone while I watched civilians join the fray once they realized we were not on Iscar’s side. The Resistencia showed no sympathy. They truly hated The Children of Iscar. In my world, I couldn’t bear the thought of killing someone, especially who may have been innocent and never actually killed someone before. I was with The Children of Iscar for no more than a few months, but some of them were not terrible people. Some just had to make a living for their families. Luckily, I didn’t have to kill anyone today as The Resistencia overwhelmed what remained of The Children of Iscar.

The Rebels cheered in victory. The town’s power re-surged. Lights flickered back on as the village became lively again. Civilians thanked us for liberating their homes, most of them eager to join us. Prisoners were rounded and thrown into a small prison in the town, although some were executed when they tried to escape us. The Rebels were vicious and even more ruthless, arresting anyone tied to The Children of Iscar. Propaganda posters burned to ashes, and a statue of Iscar in the center of town was torn down. Never have I seen such emotions from

Rebels who, like myself, have lost everything. I watched from the front of the prison entrance as it was filling up.

“Great job,” Alexis winked at me.

“I didn’t do much,” I said honestly.

“I saw you tie up one of them, so there’s that. You haven’t done that before, haven’t you?”

“Yeah,” I nodded. “It sucks seeing some people our age join them.”

“It sure is. Kind of makes you wonder how differently this could have turned out if you were still with them.”

Judith abruptly interrupted our chatter. “Phoenix. I need your help with something. Come inside. Nightingale, keep an eye out here and make sure nothing gets out of hand.”

“You got it Iris.” Alexis obeyed. I entered the prison with Judith as instructed. The interior of the building was bare, walls riddled with crevices, unpadded chairs and tables in terrible condition. It didn’t look much different than Donquest. It was warm inside, which was a pleasing thing since the weather was much cooler than I had anticipated. A man was tied inside a jail cell near the corner of the station. Judith opened the cell door and began the interrogation.

“Tell us what you know about the war between The Children of Iscar and The Brotherhood,” she demanded. The man had a nasty bruise on his face. He blankly stared at the ground, ignoring Judith’s words mumbling something to himself. He didn’t seem to have the energy to talk or the awareness to

understand what was going around him.

“Hey, I’m talking to you!” Judith snapped.

“Oh, um,” mumbled the lowly man. “Me?”

“Yes!” she stomped her foot in a whiplash of fury.

“I know nothing about The Brotherhood.”

Judith moved close to the prisoner, threatening him by taking out a small knife and pointing at his gut. “I will cut you wide open if you don’t speak!”

“I don’t know! I swear it to you!” responded the man. Judith stabbed the man’s left hand, which was bounded to the arms of a chair. The man shrieked to his horror.

“Please lie to me,” she snarkily glared.

The man repeatedly swore that he didn’t know anything about why both sides were at odds. “I was put in charge of this city and nothing more. All I know is that Iscar ordered several of us to silence The Brotherhood.”

Judith left the prisoner alone after she was unable to get him to spit out more about the warring factions. She had taken it one step further to torture him. I was conflicted as to whether this method was necessary. I quickly learned more about the Resistencia and their questionable tactics.

“Did you have to make him suffer like that?” I challenged her.

“They killed my family, friends, and everyone I knew,” she spat.

“Is torture the answer for The Resistencia? Is this what this

is going to be about? What makes us better than them if you continue to do that?" I tried my best to make sense of her actions.

"Iscar has done worse things, and we can't allow him to win. Our time is now to strike back against him. You must understand that this isn't any ordinary enemy. We must win at all costs. It's the existence of the human race at stake," she said with a starkness in her tone.

"That may be so, but have you considered trying to convince the prisoners to join our side? Strength in numbers."

"None of them deserve my empathy. They have chosen to stick with The Children of Iscar. This is a war now, and I'm not willing to spare any of them," she said with a fit of bitter anger. "I'm sorry if it bothered you back there, but this is the path I have chosen."

"Is this who we are?" I challenged. "Are we going to tell future generations that we tortured and hunted down those who have little to do with what has occurred. Do you think all of them are too far gone? Many like myself didn't have a choice but to join The Children, yet you are here acting like our enemy, showing zero sense of remorse. What kind of Revolution is this?"

Judith looked at me dead in the eye with a disgusted look on her face and said, "I do things my way so back off and continue to follow my lead or go find someone else who agrees with you." I didn't mean for our conversation to escalate like this. I did my best to give her some thought in her actions, but my words fell

on deaf ears.

I watched as the sun slowly rose from the east. The port was becoming visible to me. The docks were empty, say for a few boats. The Resistencia had liberated its first location. The Rebels didn't break a sweat on our first mission. There were perhaps no more than fifty buildings in Port Bell. The infrastructure was similar to Donquest, although I would have rather lived here than inside the muggy city.

“Overseer, do you copy?” I heard Judith speak through her radio.

“What is it Iris?” asked Maxwell's voice.

“We have captured Port Bell as you instructed. No casualties to report. Prisoners have been rounded up. I'm trying my best to get the Warlord of the town to tell us more about what we don't know of.”

“A job well done. I'll send more reinforcements on your way. Port Bell is our home base on the mainland for now. Do what you must to get their Warlord to speak,” Maxwell said, sending out orders.

“Roger sir, I will make him talk some more,” she unquestionably agreed.

Judith returned to interrogate the prisoner. This time, she didn't call my name to follow her inside. Either way, I followed Judith, peeking behind the corner of a wall watching her berate the man. Things weren't getting any better.

“I'll give you one more chance, or I'll stick this other blade

on your other hand.” Judith pulled out another dagger from her belt. Her odd calmness was indicative of how serious she was. I was disgusted at the sight, feeling nauseous, thinking this is what people were capable of. Have I chosen the wrong path? “Please lie to me again.” She approached the man, showing him the dagger.

“Please. No!” The man tried to squirm his way out of the chair. “I know nothing! I swear my life to you! I’ll do anything in return!”

Judith punctured her dagger on his other arm. He was so exhausted that he hardly writhed from the stabbing. “Please stop!” he gasped for air as he endured Judith’s punishment. This was unnecessary. Why couldn’t Judith put him out of his misery? “Kill me already!” yelled the man with whatever voice he had left.

“I’ll set you free if you tell me what I’ve been asking for!” Judith promised him.

“I’ve been telling you the truth! Our master told us nothing! We know as much as you do!”

“Then, I’ve wasted my time.” Judith unsheathed her katana and sliced his throat, killing him instantly. I closed my eyes, not needing to witness this atrocity. It was thankfully over. If Judith was going to kill him, she should have done so earlier. She has chosen the path The Children of Iscar have also taken. What was this supposed to prove? Judith removed her dagger stuck in the man’s hand, cleaning it with a piece of cloth. She calmly exited the building, following behind her.



“Did that make you feel better?” I doubted her strategy. Her face was cold as the morning breeze, and her face equally showed no feeling. She had shown her true colors.

“It was vengeance for my family and everyone who has lost their lives,” murmured Judith, unfazed by her actions.

“Fine. If it makes you feel better, go for it. I won’t get in your way.” I pretended not to care as much as I did. “What is our next objective?”

“We wait until the Overseer arrives to give us instructions for our next assault. I’m going to take a rest for now until he arrives. You can do whatever you want. I don’t care.” Judith walked off, not wanting to see me around. The sun had risen from the horizon. 7 AM. My head was wobbly, struggling to keep my eyelids open. I needed some rest as well.