

Saraya took one look at the woman and knew exactly what was wrong with her. A soulless human gave off a very distinct auric field. “How is it possible the <weapon> did this?” Saraya looked up at Jochlan who was also staring at the woman with concern on his face.

“Did what?” Elena asked, looking between the two.

“She doesn’t have a soul anymore,” Saraya frowned. “That’s what happened to those that are either comatose or have gone insane. Their souls are gone.”

“Wait... what? Gone where? How?” Will <expression>

“Hang on,” Elena’s eyes widened, looking at the woman, then back at Saraya. “Not having a soul drives you crazy?”

Jochlan held up his forearm. It glowed faintly underneath the sleeve of his shirt, before a holographic image appeared of what could have been any humanoid; Earthling or Dacwenian. Will and Elena watched the image zoom in on the figure’s head, and rotate until they were looking at the top of a head, closer in still until they were seeing a representation of the brain, a very detailed one. It looked like a storm of lightening and magic was zipping through the soft tissue. “The soul is very different from the mind, from consciousness. Consciousness is thought, memory, reason, ego. It contains knowledge of the now, which means both the present moment and the course of your life. It can be evolved and upgraded, like a computer system to retain more complex thoughts, and understand deeper emotion while assisting in keeping the body in harmony.”

“What about emotion? Isn’t that in the brain? Consciousness?” Elena asked.

Jochlan shook his head. “Contrary to what your science says, you do not carry emotion in your brain, but your brain is affected by emotion. Like a computer, it is equipped to try and understand but the brain is not suited for it. You carry emotion in your heart. You could be brain dead and still feel love. This is why for a time, before your attempted ascension, heart diseases were the number one killer of your people. because for the longest time you forgot how important your hearts are. How important love is.”

“The Soul,” Saraya interjected, “Is the knowledge of everything that was and is. The soul carries the true essence of a being, not just a human. Before coming to earth, or any planet, the soul might have inhabited a different type of body altogether. The soul is the true nature of the being that came into body and proceeded to learn how to use it, and upgrade it. Think of putting a highly complex piece of equipment inside something that isn’t smart enough to utilize it all. The consciousness the operation system of the vessel had to be upgraded to fully utilize the knowledge of the soul. A being would feel driven by their souls purpose. They were able to commune with it and get bits of information through practice. The knowledge of reincarnation was carried inside the soul and imprinted on a human’s DNA, because physicality and emotion were linked.

“The weapon wasn’t built to do this, Jochlan.” Saraya backed away from the woman, letting her rest.

Jochlan lips pressed together in thought. “That day in the asteroid field, what if the ones who attacked us hadn’t been after the codes? What if they were there because they’d been working on the Satellite and thought they had been seen?”

“Maybe both,” Saraya frowned.

“What’s the value of souls?” Will asked. “What do you do with them?”

“Contrary to your fiction on Earth, very few beings can capture a soul,” Saraya <>.

“What about demons? Can’t they you know, possess you?”

Saraya shook her head. “No. In extreme instances if they are particularly strong, and you have unwittingly given them permission, they can control a persons consciousness but they cannot take your soul. They can prevent it from ascending, so it returns to earth, likely to be tortured by the demon or other dark entities again just in another life.”

“That’s terrifying. And creepy.” Will shuddered.

“What can capture a soul?” Elena looked between Saraya and Jochlan.

“The Demiurge can,” Saraya frowned deeply and looked at Jochlan. “That doesn’t make sense though. Why give them back the souls?”

“Perhaps to sow more chaos on earth so Savil and whomever he is in league with can get to the gateway quicker?”

“But why would he want access to the doorways?” Saraya couldn’t contain the frustration in her voice.

“What are the doorways?” Will asked.

“The Demiurge sounds... familiar. I think I’ve read something about it.” Elena mused.

Before anyone could answer Elena’s or Will’s question a car<how know it’s a car? Just explosion?> outside the building exploded. Startled noises echoed in the room, eyes straying to the windows in the seconds before another car hurtled through the wall of the building.

“Look out!” Saraya raised her hands, her tanarulls glowing brighter underneath her skin. The car, an old dirty sedan, halted in mid air before it could crash into a row of patient filled beds. Will and Elena instinctively moved to cover each other and Elena reached out, grabbing hold of the back of Saraya’s shirt.

Jochlan stood next to Saraya, their hands raised and extended a barrier around the room, shielding everyone inside from the blocks of stone, glass and other debris caused by the car coming through the wall.

“Kast Aeo.” *Carry it.* Saraya’s words were for the Air. The Air complied with her request, a sudden wind kicking up through the building, swirling around the car and tossing it back outside. It crashed onto pavement, skittered and halted in the parking lot.

Chaos erupted around them. People screamed in terror and doctors, nurses and security personnel struggled to remain calm and help those in need.

“Are those things going to come out of the walls again?” Elena shouted over the noise, and it wasn’t hard to detect the note of fear in her voice.

“Jochlan get them to safety!” Saraya lowered her side of the shield, looking through the giant hole in the wall. Her vision, like Jochlan’s, was able to cut through the fire and smoke filling the parking lot. Six humans were there, coming towards them - souless. A souless body was open for possession, no permission required, and something possessed them all. The Human’s eyes were pure white, and as they passed through the thick gray smoke, Saraya could see flickering across their human faces like a hologram, a serpent one with a wide mouth and razor sharp teeth.

“There is no safety on this planet, Saraya. We fight them together and move to our next objective,” Jochlan spared a quick glance over their shoulder at Will and Elena. “You must stay near us.”

Saraya hesitated, though her gaze remained on the approach of the possessed human’s. Her instinct was to protect but Jochlan was right. She couldn’t hide Will and Elena anywhere. The only thing she could do was fight what was in front of them.

“These people are going to get caught in the cross hairs, shouldn’t we do something?” Elena asked.

“All right. Help them, but be careful. If you get into trouble yell, I will hear you.” Saraya ran forward blasts of dark purple energy exploding from her glowing palms and aimed at the six men and women coming towards them.

A pair of the possessed humans quickly ripped off car doors with inhuman strength and moved in front of the group, holding the doors like shields. The blasts from Saraya’s tanarull were so strong the metal dented, and by the third blast it knocked the possessed humans off balance and they fell backwards. The others raised military grade assault rifles and started firing at Saraya and Jochlan.

“Mahnendae,” *Take them* Saraya whispered to the air and kept running. Once more the Air worked with her, the bullets coming at Saraya and Jochlan caught up in small pockets of wind that smacked them off their trajectory and into the sides of the empty cars in the

parking lot. Saraya opened a pocket dimension with a wave of her hand, the world in front of her rippling like water as she disappeared into it.

Being inside a pocket dimension felt like being under water; there was no sound, no smell, the only feeling that of a warm weight, and total darkness, an endless ocean of possibility. She envisioned where she wanted to come out, saw it clearly in her mind's eye, and the world in front of her rippled again, spitting her out in front of the soulless human who held a door as a shield. She ripped the car door from his grasp and flung it to her right, Jochlan lifting his hands and sent that same car door slamming into three of the soulless humans carrying ARs. A distressing sound of bone crunching and meaty flesh smacking into pavement echoed out, but the soulless made not one side of pain, even as their bones broke, flesh tore and blood spilled.

“We just need to move you to a different room, it’s going to be okay.” Elena tried to keep her tone calm as she wheeled an elderly woman down the hallway away from the giant hole in the wall of the hospital. She didn’t think she’d ever get use to this kind of chaos. Her heart was pounding so hard in her chest she could feel it, and her palms were clammy but she kept jogging forward, slowing down to turn a corner. William was in an open doorway, waving her on. Around them Doctors and Nurses and patients that weren’t terribly injured and could help were doing the same; moving patients from one side of the hospital to the other, in a hurry, just in case Jochlan and Saraya couldn’t stop whatever was out there.

Elena didn’t want to think about what would happen if they couldn’t. Not just to them, the people inside. That thought brought another rush of worry, about Saraya. What if Saraya got hurt or couldn’t... *Nope. Not thinking about that.* Elena tightened her grip on the wheelchair handles and kept moving towards Will.

She noticed when his eyes widened, recognized the flare of panic that took over his face as he shouted, “Elena look out!”

She didn’t know how to react so she ducked. She felt the woosh of air above her head, heard the sound of something striking the poor woman in the wheelchair. The thunk. The

woman's cry. Elena looked over her shoulder and saw the <souless woman> standing behind her, wielding a metal <medical tray> like a weapon. She felt helpless in those seconds and that made her angry. Elena let go of the wheelchair and threw her bodyweight backwards, crashing into the <souless woman> behind her. They both fell backwards, and Elena felt an arm lock around her throat like an iron band.

“Oh my god, stop! Elena!” Will took off running, closing the distance and had almost reached the fighting pair on the ground when the wall next to him exploded because of the force of a body coming through it. Hands, tore up and bloody locked around his midsection, slamming him into the opposite wall so hard Will heard things crack and felt a sharp bruising pain explode up his side.

Elena couldn't get her breath. She dug her nails into the arm around her neck and couldn't get it to budge either. Spots swam behind her eyes. *Saraya*. She thought it, because she couldn't get the breath in to scream. *Saraya help*.

Elena had no sooner let the thought go, then she felt a change in the air around her, her ears popping. Saraya was there, above her, swimming in and out of sight, and Elena wondered if the blood on the woman's hands and face was her own, and felt a note of concern before she felt the world slipping away.

Elena breathe. Saraya's voice. Elena's eyes shot open and she realized she could breathe, the terrible pressure around her throat gone. She sucked in great gasps of air, coughing. She rolled to the side, off the body of the <souless woman> that didn't seem to be moving, and saw half an arm, the arm that had been around her throat on the ground, a bloody stump. That was too much for her stomach to handle. In between the coughing and the gasping she vomited.

Distantly she heard shouts, another thump, then Will was on his knees next to her, one arm held tightly against his side, his other, trying to push the hair back from her face.

“Don't look at it. You're okay. We're okay,” his voice sounded shaky and in pain.

Elena sucked in another breath, reaching out to grab him with one hand, clutching the front of his shirt. “The woman... that poor lady...” she looked over her shoulder but only saw Saraya, blocking the sight of the hallway behind her. Saraya touched both their shoulders and whispered something Elena couldn’t make out. In the next breath she felt as she had that day in the helicopter, like she was everywhere and no where all at once. Nasueau attacked her again, she thought she was going to throw up again in... wherever she was... thankfully it lasted only seconds. When the world settled she was outside, breathing in the fresh air, concrete underneath her feet.

“Where...” Will sounded as out of sorts as she felt.

“Rooftop. Stay here.” Saraya’s tone was firm, and sounded a lot like an order to Elena.

“But the woman those people-” Elena wiped the back of her mouth with one hand.

“Their lives are at risk because of you. This hospital is under attack, because of you. You can’t help them. Stay. Here.” Saraya **marched** to the edge of the roof, looking at something.

Elena flinched at Saraya’s words. “Oh god. Oh god she’s right.” Her mind flashed back to the poor old woman in the wheelchair, who had taken the blown meant for her. Elena brought her hands to her face, tears coming to her eyes. She felt Will’s one arm around her again, and she leaned into him. “You’re hurt...” she mumbled into her hands, realized he probably couldn’t understand a word she was saying. She wiped at her cheeks, her nose and said louder, “You’re hurt.”

“Just my arm. I think. I’ll be okay.” He pressed his cheek against the top of her head.

“Saraya, Will’s-”

“Broken arm, broken ribs. I’ll tend to him in a moment, Elena,” Saraya didn’t look back at them. “He’ll be fine. You both will.” She paused, adding a moment later, “The woman downstairs you were trying to help? She’ll be all right.”

Tears streamed down Elena’s face again. “Oh thank the god, thank the goddess.”

“Jochlan I can see more of them. A lot more. We need to move,” Saraya spoke aloud, the Air carrying her words to her mentor.

“Perhaps not.”

As Jochlan’s words reached her, three black Humvee’s roared into the parking lot. The first and third vehicles had .50 caliber machine guns mounted to the tops. The guns seemed to operate on a remote control because Saraya didn’t see a person operating the weapons that turned and fired with deadly accuracy at the second large group of Soulless that were approaching the hospital. The soulless dropped and she could hear the roar of the <demiurges minions> as they were forced from the meatsuits, unable to repair them enough to be used effectively.

Elena helped Will up and both of them came to stand beside Saraya. “SVT Securities is here?”

Saraya looked at the pair. “You know them?”

“Kind of? They’ve come to help a few times,” Elena said. “Getting power turned on. Connecting us to the new internet. They do supply runs too to any communities that need help like that. We’ve heard they’ve also helped people get out of the red zones. We don’t know who runs them though. They’re... weirdly mysterious.”

“They’re here for us.” Saraya stepped over to Will, and put her hands on his broken arm.

Will flinched the contact. “How do you know?” he asked in a tight, pain filled voice.

“There aren’t a lot of things that happen on Earth that Terenzio isn’t aware of. Be still.” She closed her eyes, and began whispering. <a call to the sun to help him heal>.

Will winced again, but Elena watched the tightness of his feature slowly begin to lessen. “Why is that so warm...” Will sighed clearly in relief as the seconds ticked by. “That... that feels so much better.”

Saraya moved her hands to his side. “That’s incredibly warm. It feels like you’re just... I don’t know...”

Saraya took her hands away less than a minute later. Will blinked in awe. “It doesn’t hurt. At all. How did you do that?”

“I asked the Sun to jumpstart your healing.” Saraya said.

Will blinked in shock. “Do what now?”

Elena looked up at the sky, like it had answers, before she looked back at Saraya. “You asked the Sun? It can talk?”

Saraya shrugged. “Nearly everything has a form of consciousness. For beings with our genetic makeup it’s possible to utilize the UV rays to speak with your DNA to accelerate healing.”

“That’s... that’s fucking amazing.” Will rolled his shoulder, bent his arm and wiggled his fingers. Then he twisted at the waist, working his midsection. “No pain at all.”

Without knowing exactly what she was doing Elena found herself moving forward to wrap her arms around Saraya hugging her tightly. “Thank you,” she whispered. “For saving our lives.”

“Again.” Will tacked on.

Saraya was still for a heartbeat. After a moment, she lifted her arms and hugged Elena back. “We have to go.”

“Right.” Elena gave the woman a squeeze but let her go. “You said something about Terenzio. Who is that?”

“She runs SVT Securities and and other things that remain on this planet. Her family freed you. Well, humanity.”

“Free’d us?” Will and Elena looked at each other, as if the other hand answers.

“A story that can be told another time. Let’s go.”