

Tokyo
Narita

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Chapter 1

"EVA VEGA, CIPHER NUMBER 936, PLEASE SUMMON TO NICUX TO RECEIVE YOUR EXECUTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!" Words I never wanted to hear my estranged father say overhead only to protect his own life and leave behind a wife and a shattered daughter, for a high bureaucratic position. My father disowned me, and the dictator has me listed as most wanted in every ring of Tokyo Narita. Luckily, Hunter was able to smuggle me out to the most outer ring in the mountains, so I could have a dependable place to stay hidden away from inner-ring security. "Please find me soon, Hunter." I'm stuck hiding beneath a cliff rim of a road only military APC trucks can travel on from and to the main base. One or two passes to run down to Narita every minute, and if an elite spies me, I will be the dictator's example of the eventual fate of all of my people. I'm used to all the blood now. I accidentally blew a gaping hole into the body of Dictator Victor's aristocrat, and my keeper, Ivan Andrade. I have to stay in hiding! He didn't just take all of his rage out on me, but the other prisoners too.

My turquoise hair and watercolored sleeve tattoos do not blend in with the endless falling snow up here, neither does

orange prison sweatpants and a black t-shirt. The orange makes my position obvious. In between a pause of oncoming trucks, I finally proceed to follow the mountain path further into the ever winter mountains. I would have dropped dead on the first night from the lack of oxygen and frigidness if it weren't for crystals being my energy source.

"Eva!" Hunter calls after me.

I quickly turn around. I could ask him to take me to Rholanda, but I don't want her to get dragged into my trouble, and let the dictator discover that she is alive and in hiding. She was his aristocrat long before Ivan, then faked her death and changed her name a few years before the segregation laws were set. Because she knew Victor was going to divide the citizenry. She might remember how to get into the center ring. He grabs my hand and guides me in the opposite direction of the path. "I can't go back! There's still heavy security in the rings! I still hear them, even from up here!" He doesn't answer me the whole way down the mountain to his car, a lightning blue convertible mustang.

"I brought clothes for you to change into, and I brought your crystal chokers. Change quickly, the next ring is not

far from here. I'll dye your hair when we get to my room."

"Yes, sir." I sneer. He rolls his eyes. A hooded sweatshirt, blue camouflage cargo pants, and converse all star sneakers. The first obvious clothing I strip off is the prison orange sweats and toss them out of the window. I slip on the sweatshirt over my head, and I feel a hint of warmth, warmth I haven't felt in years. Like my mother's hugs. And now she's gone because my father turned her in for not paying attention to my hand occupation before it was too late, and because he discovered she's ambidextrous. He blamed her for my outcome. The boundary walls of every ring illuminates alert red. Their usual color is viridian blue. I recently murdered the second highest person in society's bureaucracy, the dictator is going to mount my head for everyone to see! I don't know what master plan Hunter has up his sleeve, but I know one person who could aid vs. Rholanda!

As I follow Hunter through his apartment complex, I feel like the most infamous fugitive in the world. Because I am. Soldiers risking their second glance at me, taking in who I am, but they know not to notify the authorities directly. I'm not hurting anyone. I never asked for this life. But I know being persecuted for an invalid reason and having every-

thing get taken away from you for it —because of a head's belief— is something worth fighting against.

"Oh, thank God. Jaxon still isn't back." He sighs.

There's a chair in his room in front of his bed waiting to be sat in by me. First, I take on the appearance of his room, the walls painted a cerulean blue, tidily made bed, and sneakers and combat boots scattered around on the carpet. "I think I may need a pair of your combat boots."

"If you are able to fit them properly, I can't even fit them properly, I have to triple knot my laces so they won't fly off of my feet."

"I'll try them when you're done."

I lean back into the chair as he starts to run his hands through my turquoise locks. I haven't felt calmness in years either, until now.

He taps my shoulder after an hour, "Go wash your hair." Hunter's roommate Jaxon unexpectedly comes back while I'm in the shower, and automatically assumes it's Hunter in the shower. I gush over the fresh silvery blue tangles in the mirror; accepting that it is also a teaser for the

deadly mission to the center ring. They only know that my hair used to be turquoise and I was wearing orange prison sweatpants and a black t-shirt. The only prominent feature of me that isn't temporary is my sleeve tattoos. I don't regret getting them. They're coverable anyway.

"Hunter, there's a girl here!" Jaxon blurts out when he sees me exiting the bathroom.

"I know." He snarls. "She's my friend."

"Isn't she supposed to be in Nicux right now?"

He knows who I am, even without my hair having to be turquoise. Am I that obvious? We've never crossed paths before. I roll my eyes.

"Yes, but she's not hurting anyone now. Why turn her in?"

"She killed the dictator's aristocrat."

"So! She didn't mean to!"

"And killed 53 prisoners and 13 bureaucrats in Nicux four years ago!"

"That was an accident too! You're brainwashed by Victor, Jaxon."

"I'm not. I know my facts."

I pick up the stark defense in Hunter's tone, for me. I sense harmful energy escalating inside of me. "JAXON," I suddenly flare, with neon blue energy waves coiling my arms, "GO AWAY!"

He presses his lips into a hard line and says nothing.

"Just pretend like you don't see me."

I detangled my wet, tangled hair with a comb, then tried on a few pairs of Hunter's combat boots. They were all black, and fitted comfortably, when the laces were tied right. Shirtless Hunter. I wonder if he will accept me now after I turned him down when he asked me out on our seventeenth birthday. I still feel guilty about it, because he didn't give up on me. Today, I owe him my life, because he's helping me escape death! Or.... My smile slyly to a thought. I stand up and start to pull my sweatshirt over my head.

"Eva... what are you doing?" He asks.

I twist around to expose my bared breasts. He immediately flushes. "Don't give me that doe-eyed look, sweetie." I gig-

gle, then he slowly wraps his arms around my hips. "Well, what are you waiting for? Help me undress..."

Chapter 2

Rholanda is my second mother, who knew my biological mother before the narcissist of a dictator inherited power after his father was shot in the head and found dead in his bureau. Or I was told by her that he was found dead with a bullet hole in the left temple of his head. Nolan Victor-III wanted to avenge the assassination of his father with his top secret at the time: the segregation of hands laws. The assassinator of Nolan Victor-II was his ex-wife, left-handed and deaf. She was arrested and executed without a trial a month later.

"Eva," Rholanda narrowed her eyes. Still noticeable. "How are you even here? I thought they executed you already."

"No. How do you know about it? You're in hiding!" I catch her smile.

"My daughter likes to keep an eye on y'all troublemakers."

"You have a daughter?"

"Yes, Cheyenne Severns. She's positioned in Macusrida, the base unfairly part of east Narita, because Nolan-III is a selfish son of a bitch."

"I feel you, Rho." I roll my eyes. Rholanda babysat Hunter and I when we were babies while her daughter was in school, since she knew our mothers. They needed a babysitter while they were at work during the day. She didn't think we were still as close. I did not forget about last night.

"How did you get over here anyway?" she asks.

I grin, "Hunter is helping me!" I need her advice to help me route into the center ring without getting suspected. I still seem pretty obvious. First, Hunter's roommate Jaxon, now Rholanda, noticed me even without turquoise hair and my entire arms are covered. Her daughter Cheyenne threatened my entire existence with a look. Even though I am bionically stronger than her, I still feel like she would be able to kill me with just one sucker punch. She takes on the features of her mother in her early thirties; tea green eyes and honey blonde hair. The last time I've seen her in person was forever ago. She was working in Rholanda's divine candy shop, and I was about to get my navel piercing done by Rholanda. I was expecting her to already

know that it's me when she arrived back home from training. A german shepherd followed after her.

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"I'll let you use my old uniform. I don't wear it anymore, but I keep it hidden away, just in case."

"In case of what?"

"I wouldn't take the position back for Nolan, but for his son Noah, just in case you get to kill that asshole! It's not too late for me to take the job back."

"I don't know, Rho," Now that I accidentally put Ivan down, my father is taking the aristocratic position. "My father is taking that position now. He disowned me."

"I'm not surprised," She snarks, "Your father is a very ungrateful man. He was embarrassed to have you. He wanted a son, and insisted on secretly aborting you without your mother's permission, when he found out you were a girl in your mother's womb." I've always thought he treated Hunter better than me, but mom loved us equally. Now he despises me even more because I became a troublemaker

after he turned me in to the dictator when I was a kid. My feud with the dictator started after I was blinded with bio-synthetic gasoline, then he pretended like he had nothing to do with it. She explained how everything I went through in juvenile institution was set up by my father to kill me, and the dictator accepted every request. They didn't just harm me, they traumatized other inmates as well! Sometimes I wish Hunter would have just killed me like he was forced to in the sugarcoated mission the dictator set up himself to have me killed.

She handed me her old bureaucratic uniform, "Please, take this, and my pass card! Put your hair in a presentable style, make no eye contact with anyone in the chancellery, and kill that son of a bitch and your father! Is Hunter still here?"

"No. He went to training. He said he was going to come back to get me later."

"It's okay! I'll get Cheyenne, and I will tell Hunter to help you with this. It's a deadly mission for you, Eva."

She smiles weakly when I nod, "Okay! Thank you, Rho!"

She calls for her daughter, then we get into her truck with her combat canine, that I learn the name is Stryker.

All of the borders of the rings are still alert red in east Narita. "I thought you were supposed—" Cheyenne breaks our heavy silence, and I interrupt her with a burning glare. I've heard it a million times already. "I know. I'm supposed to be in Nicux. I escaped."

"Geez, I'm sorry, Eva. I know you are disturbed about your father right now. Your mother is still alive, you know. She needs you, Eva."

"What do you mean? My dad turned her in, she shouldn't be alive now."

"I've been to his chancellery a while ago, and the things the dictator does to her... you wouldn't want to find out for yourself, and your father does not care."

I stroke the sapphire crystal shard pendant on my rope choker. "What does he do to her?"

"Basically torture. I saw her with fresh bruises on her face and her arms. I'm surprised she's even still alive."

The stuff she told me made me even more angrier at my father, and urged me to plan his and the dictator's fate to be even more painful.

"I see you wearing two chokers with crystals on them all the time."

"I need them. They're my energy source."

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I reminded Cheyenne to drop me off at the apartment complex Hunter lives in; in the Carleone ring. I step into the complex with Rholanda's aristocrat uniform and pass card in hands. A pack of inner-ring security officers are surveying the main foyer. They turn their heads to look at me. They are nothing like the usual security in the rings. They are more elite and powerful. They will be around more as I'm running and hiding, until I am captured and successfully executed. A blonde-haired officer with brownish gold eyes and a stubbled face calmly strides towards me. I take a baby step back towards the door, in case hell breaks loose.

He clears his throat, then speaks, "Ma'am, I just need to scan your card. That's all."

I hand him the card with my right hand. He gets out a scanning gun from his back pocket, then quickly scans the silver line on the back of it. I expected the gun to reject the card, but it didn't. I never got my own card because of my record. None of the captured prisoners get a card to get into places around Narita. Victor made things impossible for anyone without the privileges of a right-handed, carded person. Most officers are trained to tell by which hand we move first. I'm not as obvious as I thought. He hands me back the card and lets me pass beyond the foyer. It feels really good to finally be a normal right-handed citizen of Tokyo Narita, temporarily. Hunter's roommate doesn't say a word to me when he opens the door for me, like he was expecting me to come. I just need to take the pair of Hunter's combat boots that I approved of, and wait for him to arrive.

Chapter 3

"Perfect." It started to rain while Hunter was driving me to the center ring. My sight enhances drastically in rainy weather. I turn my head, "Hunter." I haven't been able to see him clearly since I was blinded. I can only see shadows on sunny days, on cloudy days, my sight enhances a bit to where I can see wisps. "You're beautiful."

"So are you, Eva." His smiles.

"I can see you smiling."

"What?"

He figured I was visually impaired during a scheduled day with me. I was struggling to catch a ball he was tossing to me. My weak senses — at the time — couldn't acknowledge things happening around me. "I can see you. Clearly." I haven't seen his smile in years.

"Eva," I hear him speak, "I love you."

The last time I've ever heard "I love you" was from mother before I was taken away for good. And he merely remind-

ed me of how much I miss her. With just a bureaucratic uniform and a privileged pass card, I will be able to see her again, and possibly overthrow the dictator. I smile heartily. "I love you too, Hunter! Now GO! GO TO RHOLANDA AND DON'T COME BACK!" Even if I die. I have limited time until dawn. Make no eye contact and always use my right hand.

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I almost forget that my crystal chokers are hidden beneath the collar of this uniform. Other bureaucrats and aristocrats amble about the inside of the Chancellery as if daylight was still sprawling through the windows. No one pays even slight attention to me as I climb the first flight of stairs to the second level. The presence of elite security officers increases and the presence of bureaucracy decreases as the floor level increases. I instantly lose track of the number of levels, but note the intensity of elites. They put more eyes on me than the bureaucrats and aristocrats did; I didn't dare to look up at one of them. I reach the specific level and a man's voice suddenly calls out towards me, "Hey!" I hold my eyes lowered and clench the privileged pass card in my right palm.

"You have to have a privileged card to go beyond this point, ma'am."

I hope it's not Rhodanda's citizen pass card. I calmly hand the card to the elite. He gets out a scanner gun from his back pocket, and this time it produces an almost inaudible beeping sound when he scans the card. He doesn't hand me back the card, instead, he whispers in a subdued tone, "Are you looking for the dictator?" I don't answer him. I don't want to blow my cover.

"Eva..." He mutters.

I finally raise my head to face the officer and he winks a brownish gold eye at me, then hands my card back to me. "Yes." I answer. He spared me from immediate capture and execution in the apartment complex!

"He is not in his bureau right now."

Good. I will probably be able find mine and everybody else's file in there. I slightly nod my head to him. He must be on my side. The officer follows me into the dictator's bureau, without the curiosity of the other elite officers. Funny how a person that is in possession of a high position can do so much for another. "You know you will lose your job if he finds out you are helping me."

"I know."

"Then, why are you helping me, sir?"

He suddenly smirks. "I'm helping you on your mission, Eva."

"How do you know about my mission?" I immediately raise my head. I thought he looked familiar, other than sparing my life from merciless death. Mr. Malonnie, Rhodanda's husband and Cheyenne's father.

Chapter 4

His son Noah is actively against him. The last time I've seen Noah I was being sentenced for the postulated massacre in Nicux—when my powers activated suddenly, and killed 177 prisoners and 13 bureaucrats—he noticed the dismay in my eyes as his father scolded me. It was the first time the dictator got in my face. I was sentenced to be ever-isolated from the rest of the prisoners, and from society, because of the overall number of bureaucrats that died.

EVA VALERIE VEGA: DETAINED. In harsh red print, on my record folder. But not anymore. RHOLANDA ESMERALDA MALTIN-MALONNIE: DECEASED. That's what he thinks. I can't help but laugh, because he cannot see that her daughter Cheyenne looks almost exactly like her. But why does he keep dead people's records? I really want to take my father's record folder and burn it. JANELLE

KATHERINE AVLIVIA-VEGA: DETAINED. My mom. I know she's not okay, but I hope she will be able to pull through his corruption longer until I rescue her. "Mr. Malonnie, do you know where my mom is, or at least where my father is?"

"I'm not sure where your mother is, but I know where your father is. I saw him leave with the dictator."

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Elite security officers were waiting outside of the dictator's bureau for us, with lethal firearms, the dictator himself, my father, and Cheyenne and my mom with their arms pinioned behind their backs. "Cheyenne, what are you doing here?!"

The dictator doesn't look amused. His lightning blue eyes burning on me. "Really, Miss Vega. You thought I wouldn't acknowledge you in Mrs. Malonnie's old uniform. I saw you pretending to be a real aristocrat, how cute. For a worthless cipher like you."

"Yes."

"You need to try a little harder, little woman."

Mom wouldn't even look at me. She held her head low and turned away so she wouldn't have to look at me. "Is that how you really feel about me...?" I hiss. It truly pisses me off how both of my parents despise me after what they decided to do with me. "LOOK AT ME, MOM, DAD! FOR ONCE AFTER FUCKING YEARS!"

"YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT, MISS VEGA!"
He immediately barks.

"YOU DID THIS! YOU FUCKING DID THIS TO ME! LOOK AT YOURSELVES, YOU CAN'T EVEN LOOK ME, AT YOUR OWN DAUGHTER!" An officer attempts to tackle and shackle me as I rage at my parents. "FUCK YOU BOTH—I HOPE YOU ALL BURN IN HELL! GET YOUR FUCKING HANDS OFF OF ME!" The Nicux massacre nearly repeats itself. My energy suddenly produces a shield of radiation from accumulating anger. The electric blue cuffs attempting to shackle my hands behind my back melts off of my wrists. An officer shoves the muzzle of his gun to my forehead and my fiery dominate hand melts it. More than a few weighty bodies of elites avidly tackles me onto the floor, and then I hear the blaring whistle and the thunderous BOOM of a nuclear bomb exploding close in my ears. A tiny shard of glass carves a long bloody line across the bridge of my nose before I black out. My uniform transformed from black to ash gray.

Debris and concrete dust elevates and clouds the air from the demolished structures. I vomit up the remaining pressure in my body, and the first person that crosses my mind is Rholanda, and how I failed the prisoners of Tokyo Narita.

And if the dictator survived the explosion, we left-handed and disabled people would not exist any longer and I would be the first cipher on the list of death row. Because he is right and all of his followers are right about us abnormal people. We are worthless little ciphers, but so are the normal people. Nobody is worth more than anybody else.

I press my left hand onto my chest and it burns the torso of the uniform off of my body. I'm used to the firm smell of blood, ever since I was blinded, the smell was clinging to my nostrils for as long as I can remember. Just arriving rescue soldiers begin roaming and rummaging through the concrete dust and lifting up large pieces of debris to recover bodies, some dead, some alive. Many survived, hearing the repetitive screams of souls for help. Rholanda, wearing a camouflage army uniform, combat boots, and a protective face mask concealing her mouth and nose doesn't notice me standing in just a tank top, tarnished uniform pants, and combat boots as she moves past me deeper into the cloudy destruction. I know she's looking for her husband and her daughter. I start to follow the distant barks of a dog, through rounds of soldiers lifting up heavy debris. It's Cheyenne's combat dog, Stryker, and Hunter, with a face mask on and a heavy duty flashlight in his other hand. "Eva!" He wraps his arms around me. I move my left arm out of the embrace so that I wouldn't burn him. Stryker proceeds to bark at a large piece of rubble.

Cheyenne's arms are still shackled behind her back with the cuffs and she's lying face down with her back caked with dust. "Cheyenne!"

Chapter 5

"EVA! Your father is on the run!" Rholanda knew what she was doing. Hunter and I found Cheyenne, and Rholanda found her husband, the dictator, and my mother. This time, I didn't even take a slight glimpse of my mother in pain, and the dictator's hands were shackled behind his back by Rholanda. Surprised to see her again after all these years? He deserves to be put down. "KILL THAT SON OF A BITCH!"

"Do you need a lift for that?" Hunter asks me.

"No," I frown, "you've done enough for me." My left hand is warm and my neck suddenly turns hot. "Where did he go?"

"That bastard ran away from me!"

I want to use my powers this time. Hunter didn't want to let my hand go, like a clingy child. He was clutching something in his other hand, something like a rope choker. I cast my eyes, "Look, I need to do this alone." I lean in closer to his face, then turn into atomic crystal modicum to bolt away before his lips could touch mine.

I've always felt like running. Not away from my fears, I've been doing that for too long. Running just to know that I'm alive, and I survived. All of the stuff that I went through was because of my father, not me, and not bad karma for not being what the dictator wanted everybody to be. The same.

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The man who I thought was my dad, winces, "You wouldn't kill me, girl. You can't."

He speaks like I wouldn't, like I never cognized that he is in charge of all the things that has happened to me.

"I'm your father."

"You think I give a fuck right now?" I take a step towards him. He won't even call me by my name. He doesn't answer. He just throws me a somber look with his eyes. I extend my left arm out, the snow around me starts to thaw. He doesn't try to attack me, or run for his life. He turns his head, then closes his eyes; accepting his own fate.

An auroral orange, keen edge abruptly gashes the skin along his right arm from his wrist to his crease, leaving behind a gaping wound in his arm. "Eva!" I hear a couple of voices call out after me, and I writhe around.

"Leave him! He'll freeze to death up here anyway!" Cheyenne exclaims.

"How did y'all get up here so fast?"

"Don't worry about it! Your mom needs you!"

"WHY?!" I turn my mind to take my last glance at my bleeding father lying almost lifelessly in thawing snow with his eyes wide open. After she decided to ignore my existence in the Chancellery! Cheyenne and Hunter both turn into shooting aura lights following the path forward towards the border of the first ring of West Narita, and I follow after them. Border patrol officers had stopped their work to ascertain out what happened in the center ring and what happened to the center ring. The streets of the rings were deserted.

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The overwhelming grief in mom's eyes shatters the other half of my soul. "Mom." I whisper quietly before kneeling down to her side. Her eyes immediately cast up to my face and she finally looks me in the eyes. She smiles ex-haustingly at me, but she doesn't speak. I extend my left arm out in front of her to display my sleeve tattoo. While Rholanda was inking my left arm, I asked her to do me a favor and ink my mom's signature in her handwriting small and blue on a petal of one of the watercolored flowers, so I could always be reminded of her, because I missed her sickly. I didn't think I was ever going to see her again. I also asked her to do my dad's name, and she didn't, because she knew about his abomination. "I love you."

She speaks softly in a hoarse voice while resting a hand on my cheek, "You did good. I love you too, Eva."

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The borders of the first five rings were completely demolished. The concrete dust and debris of the destroyed buildings made the center appear like a sooted war zone. "I did this." The dictator would have been had my head if he were to come back to find his ring and chancellery in ru-

ins! Noah is probably cheering me on now. But knowing that I probably killed a lot of families and innocent citizens, I still feel like an infamous fugitive.

"Eva."

"What, Hunter? Eva, Eva, Eva, it's all you ever say. Will you ever not need me?"

"You keep disappearing when Rholanda needs you to stick around longer. I'm not sure if your wish will come true."

"How did you even get here so fast? Y'all are in another district."

"I'm the other half of your power, Eva."

"And what do you mean by that?"

"You are crystals, I'm stones."

"You have powers? How come the dictator didn't detain you?"

"Because my dad taught me how to control them when I was a kid."

That makes me feel stupid and guilty. My powers activated during the worst time possible. "Lucky."

"Can you see me right now?"

"I can't see anything as much anymore."

"That's good."

"How?"

"Because... you can't see me do this." He holds my head in his hands and I suddenly feel his lips press against mine. "I love you. You've been through enough, you cipher."

I heartily chuckle, "I love you too... cipher."

Chapter 6

"I don't know, Eva. I feel like it won't be easy for Noah to take control of Narita, you know, since his father is still alive. I can see his inherent of the power if Nolan was dead." Cheyenne lowers her eyes. "We'll all be fucked if he does get the power back by force. Especially you, Eva. And your mom and my mom."

"And your dad, and Hunter."

"He would repeat that past invasion on us."

"What past invasion?"

"I forgot you didn't go to school. There was a past invasion that happened before Tokyo Narita was peacefully united into four separate districts. Nolan's father's grandfather Niklas Victor ruled the districts in west Narita, which was the smallest. And how the Victors came into power since then was he unexpectedly invaded the districts of east, south, and north Narita by secretly recruiting soldiers from their districts and expanding his army."

"At least he was a better and smarter dictator than his great, great grandson! Dictator dickface created a law segregating hands! Who even plots a "top secret" to divide an already united citizenry? He fucked Tokyo Narita up!"

"Apparently, Nolan-III did. And mom knew. I bet his grandfathers and his father are spinning in their graves right now. He left Noah with a lot of repairing to do."

I hold a silent, fixed glare on her combat dog Stryker, snoring away all of his stress from the day.

"Why are you staring at my dog? He doesn't like when people stare at him."

"Huh?" Her question abruptly breaks me from an abyssal thought. "Oh, nothing. Sorry." Undoubtedly, Cheyenne would kill me for taking Stryker without permission.

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I wait for the soft sound of the house asleep to rise before preparing for my second deadly mission. I scurry on my sweatshirt, cargo pants, and sneakers, then quietly exit Rholanda's house into the hazy dead-of-the-night air. I'm

still an infamous fugitive. Just because the dictator is temporarily not in power anymore doesn't mean his real followers won't continue to work under his laws. And that means I'm still wanted for execution. I bolt a beeline from district four to the demolished center rings. Night guards in uniform patrol the border of the sixth ring Astrophe. The demolished rings are Tokyo Narita, Siphor, Idera, Brideon, and Austris. I abruptly clash into what I assume is an uncleared large piece of rubble in the blackness of the night. We both grunt. The LED light of a flashlight is shone in my direction and a guy speaks, "Eva?"

"Ivan?!"

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"Eva. What are you doing here? I thought you were with Rholanda?" Hunter asks while rubbing the drowsiness from his eyes.

"I was."

"Why did you come here? You know they're still on watch for you, until the dictator resigns or something. All of the

borders are still red. You could've gotten caught by a night guard."

"I did, but he let me go. It was Ivan."

"The dictator's aristocrat! You got caught by Ivan! I thought you killed him?!"

"I thought I did too." I thought the man was fixing to turn me in as soon as he shone his LED flashlight on me, but he seemed in a rush, and told me to go before another night guard could approach! It was very impossible for me to leave his sight when he was my keeper before I hostilely blew a hole into his chest. But how is he still alive and well after that? "I can't sleep! I had a dream earlier, Hunter. My father is not dead."

"I slashed him, it's impossible for him to be able to survive in the blistering cold mountains with an open wound, Eva! Nobody will find him up there!"

"I don't know. I feel like my dreams are trying to tell me something—some things."

"Tell you what?"

"I don't know. Important things. Like, about what just recently happened."

"You sound a bit insane, but go on..."

"I'm not insane! I'm serious! My father, Victor, and now Ivan are still out there, and they're planning some similar invasion from the past on us... says Cheyenne, I did not say that."

"What do you want to do about it?"

"In the morning, I am going to the mountains and I'm going to search for his body. And if I don't find a damn thing, I'm going on alert!"

"I will go with you."

"I'm getting Cheyenne to come with us too, because I don't want Rholanda to have to leave my mom hanging while everything is still dangerous for us."

Chapter 7

"Look, I'll explain later! I ran into Ivan Andrade last night and I'm trying to figure out how the fuck is he still alive." I sigh.

"You ran into Ivan?!" I hear Rholanda abruptly exclaims.

"Eva, what were you thinking?! Going outside when you know the officials are still on your ass for destroying the center rings!"

"That's what Hunter said..."

"It doesn't matter what Hunter said! The fact is that Ivan will report that he spotted you around that area! They are still looking for you!"

"Ivan let me go."

"I don't trust him and you shouldn't either. Nobody should, as a follower of Victor, hell no!"

"Look Rho, before you get too worked up about this, Hunter, Cheyenne, and I have a plan. I had this dream last night

is why I decided to go out, I couldn't sleep anymore after it! It fucking scared me —"

"And you went to Hunter. You screwed yourself, and us, Eva! Not only Ivan spotted you, but soldiers and citizens spotted you in their apartment complex! You don't trust anybody in Tokyo Narita, they will report your sightings."

"Yes, because I had my plan and I need to let Hunter know."

"What is your plan?"

"Last night I had this dream that somebody recovered my father's body where we left him after I destroyed the center ring. Hunter slashed his arm, and we left him in the snow to bleed to death. And I have this feeling that he is somehow still alive."

"That's impossible... he would've died by the cold up there! Who would even —"

"That's exactly what Hunter said."

"First, was the dictator, and now it's possibly the abomination of a father that is still alive, and somehow survived blood loss in frigid temperatures."

"I went alone last night because I thought I need to go up there to search for his body myself. Just in case, I can't do it without y'all. We need to stick together, because for all we know Victor could take all this shit back by force if he wanted to."

"What do you need us to do?"

"I need you and Cole to stay here to protect mom just in case anybody isolated is coming after her. I already know that the dictator and dad is alive out there somewhere, plotting against all of us."

"And Ivan."

"I don't know about him. The real Ivan wouldn't have let me run off from him or border patrol like that. I have a feeling that he's on our side now."

"What do you mean?"

"Victor assigned Ivan to be my keeper since I was 16, he had to be with me, watching me wherever I went. I know

who Ivan is, he was pro-Victor as his aristocrat and he hated my fucking guts. I accidentally ran into him in the dark last night and he let me go before another border patrol guard could spot me. I feel like he alternated to be on our side. He must be against the dictator now, there's no other reason he would let me go like that."

"Don't trust him, Eva. I haven't even met the man yet and he already seems shady enough to have let you go when he knows how you are."

"Trying to say I meant to kill all of those innocent ciphers in Nicux?"

"No, of course not! It was wrong for Victor to assign him to watch you for something you had no control over. But, why would Ivan all of the sudden turn lanes after all the commotion lately?"

"That's what I'm trying to figure out..."