Future Imperfect

by CharacterFiction

Summary

Feeling overwhelming guilt from her part in helping the alternative Chloe commit suicide, Max comes upon an idea to travel to the future and help solve the entire Rachel Amber mystery in one go. However, time travel is a finicky thing and she finds herself with more problems than answers.

Sometimes, tragedy doesn’t need a storm and time changes everyone.
When the blurriness faded from her vision and the nausea subsided, she found she has returned from the alternative world. That was when guilt comes in a torrent and she felt like utter shit.

She, Max Caulfield, killed Chloe Price.

A sense of bitterness mixes in with the guilt. Her using the photograph in order to change the past and save William Price's life was supposed to be a good thing. She did it entirely for Chloe – to save William, to save her life, and to ultimately make her happier.

Instead, she returns to find everything went wrong and to find out that the changed Chloe had waited for her. Waited for her to come so that she could ask Max help her commit suicide. Place an immense burden on her. A burden she couldn't refuse because of who asked it. Because, after all, she loves Chloe.

If there is nothing else she learned this week, at least she learned that she needs the other girl…and she knows the other girl needs her too.

But even if she did it willingly, even if she was begged to do it, she could not escape the intense shame and guilt from her own actions. Even before she had returned to this world, second thoughts had flooded her mind and filled her with doubts about her actions. Tears come to her eyes from the image of Chloe's final moment before the morphine overdose killed her.

The worst memory wasn't the closing of her eyes or the release of muscles from her face. It was the soft release of her final breath. It was like the final signal that death has occurred and it made an otherwise imperceptible sound deafening.

It took much of her remaining spirit to make it through the second journey to the past to rectify her mistake, but as that faded, the last of her willpower was sapped and she felt her heart and mind encaged in a dark place.

Wiping away the tears, she looks up in confusion. There is some kind of cardboard in front of her with photos and notes pinned to it. She stares around trying to gain her bearings and, as the lingering voices of the past disappear from her hearing, she turns around only to discover Chloe sitting in front of a laptop.

"Chloe, you're alive!"

Hearing this, she turns around and stares at her blankly. "You're surprised? I know we haven't talked for a few minutes, but that doesn't mean I'm dead." Max runs over and throws her arms around her. "Whoa, calm down. Seriously, what's up with you?"

Swallowing her anxiety down, Max glances at the laptop screen and notices a search involving 'Prescotts' and 'Dark Room'.

It returns to her. They've been searching for Rachel Amber, discovered her connection to Frank, and Chloe lost it. The last memory had been of her sitting in her room then transporting through the photo of her when she was younger.

The question then becomes how did she end up here? More importantly, Chloe seems to be
nonchalant about her presence.

So while she was in the other universe, the 'her' that was here possibly made up with her Chloe after their argument, then continued looking into the Blackwell conspiracy they were doing, and even went to Chloe's house? How? Did the 'her' here get switched with the 'her' from the other universe? That just creates even more questions.

"Max?"

She snaps back to attention. Seeing Chloe again, she couldn't help but give another embrace and even kiss Chloe's cheek and lips repeatedly.

"Whoa, whoa, calm down! Damn!" Chloe pushes her away. "I'm happy to see you too, but seriously, we've been together for hours now. Why are you so…touchy-feely all of a sudden?" She blushes. "Not that I don't enjoy it, but I would like to know why."

The sound of the other Chloe's final breath suddenly rings in her ears making her stomach drop and Max tries to shake it off, but couldn't quite do it. She tries to look Chloe in the eye. "I'm just…glad you're here with me."

Chloe stares at her. "That would be a lot more convincing if you didn't pale and started sweating when saying that."

She swipes at Max's forehead and comes away with a glistening hand. Swallowing, Max pulls away and goes to the door. Chloe quickly jumps up looking at her, but she waves her away.

"I need to get some space. I'll…be back. I love you."

"Max? Max, wait-"

She walks out shutting the door behind her and runs down the stairs. She makes it outside just as Chloe's door was opening. Jogging away as quickly as possible, she makes it to the bus stop, and gets on to return to Blackwell.

On the bus, she puts her face into her hands feeling somehow worse. The other Chloe's death followed by her running out on her Chloe. Why can't she seem to hold a relationship with Chloe without fucking it up or filling it with drama? Her Chloe probably thinks she lost her mind and wouldn't be far off.

What in the hell was she thinking? Why did she agree to kill Chloe?

William and Joyce will be devastated and the 'Max' she switched with will probably get arrested for murder. She easily ruined all three people's lives with what now seem like a careless decision. A decision that she has no right to make regardless of how much Chloe pleaded with her to.

There were so many people invested in Chloe's life and so many who didn't want to see her die. In that moment, she was the only one out of all of them who had the opportunity to persuade Chloe to continue living…and she didn't even try. All she could think of was either to accept or refuse the request and, of course, Chloe was prepared for that.

The thought that she could convince her to live didn't even cross her mind and she regrets it now. What if that was really what Chloe wanted inside? To hear Max say that she wants her to live even in her miserable state?

The questions and doubts pile up and she slowly comes to the conclusion that she made an awful
mistake. A mistake that, even if she could erase it through time travel, can't be taken from her mind.

The bus arrives at Blackwell and Max sludge off onto the campus. She stares at the chatting students around her and the bright sunlit lawn and it somehow makes her feel worse. As if she alone is unhappy. She decides she needs to go to her dorm room and sleep off today.

Along the way, her phone dings and she takes it out to find that she has several worried texts from Chloe. Not feeling up to responding, she ignores it.

"Max! Hey, Max!"

She stops turning to the voice calling out to her. Warren is there waving beside Brooke and Daniel. She really didn’t want to talk or find out whatever antics the group is up to, but figures she can go say hi before asking to be excused to avoid being rude.

Forcing on a smile, she walks up to Warren, "Hey Warren, Brooke, Daniel. What's up, guys?"

Forced smile or not, she couldn't hide the tone of her voice. Fortunately, only Brooke seemed to have noticed and she indicates it with a raised eyebrow, but keeps silent to Max's gratefulness.

Warren is oblivious. He raised his hands in a dramatic gesture. "The subject…is time travel."

"What?"

"Two days ago, you asked me about time travel, right?" He asks in a more serious tone. "Well, I've been thinking a lot about it…"

"And dragging the rest of us into it." Brooke says in mock exasperation.

"…and I've been coming up with theories. We all did. Like how would it work, the paradoxes, and how to make it more efficient."

"Make time travel more efficient?" Max asks hesitantly. "Is that possible?"

"Why wouldn't it? It has to be done through some kind of time travel machine so we were theorizing about what kind of design would make it easier. Daniel here has been helping us by drawing designs."

The mentioned boy nods. "It's all so tough, though. Not merely because I have no idea what a time machine is supposed to look like, but everything is completely theoretical, so I almost have to guess the design. It's like trying to draw an imaginary friend based off of traits that are also imaginary."

Warren laughs. "Yeah, so we started with a drawing of this..." He lifts up a well drawn image of the DeLorean car from the movie 'Back to the Future'. "...and has since upgraded to this."

Another image. One of what looks like the DeLorean crunched into an oval containing a single door.

"It looks like the space pod from Dragon Ball Z, doesn't it?"

"I…guess." Max says hesitantly. "Why does it have to look like that, though? Why not stay a car?"

This earns her a contemptuous look from Brooke. "The idea behind it is that a car is inefficient. A real DeLorean contains an instrument cluster and a dash. A waste of space. It has a steering wheel, emergency brake, and pedals. What for? To control the direction and speed of time travel? Ridiculous."
"Perhaps not so much in the movie since the idea was that they needed to drive a certain speed to activate the flux capacitor, and you need those things in a car. In our design, though, time travel is simply, well, activated. No need to go up to 88MPH like in the movie."

"Remember that was there to begin with only because the DeLorean had a speedometer that went up to 85MPH." Brooke says light-heartedly to Warren. "There's a number of theories as to why this may be. One is that it may be symbolism that time travel is impossible."

"True, true." Warren nods. "But there may also be a scientific reasoning behind it. Perhaps it's an indication that the time travel hole needs to be opened a specific length of time to work. The DeLorean is exactly--"

"Ahem." Daniel clears his throat pointedly stopping the two. He turns to Max. "These two do this constantly. I've had to stop them several times already."

Smiling sheepishly, Warren says to Max, "The point is that all of this is to simply explore the idea of what the best medium for time travel may be. In addition to all the other issues it faces. I think we had some great talks already. Since I know you're interested, I was wondering if perhaps you might want to join in the conversation?"

Brooke's face turns sour at this idea and Max wasn't too keen on joining herself. Perhaps on another day, it would have been worth it simply to get an idea of what she can do with her powers, but today, she feels like shit and didn't want to do anything other than sleep until she can get her mind together.

"Maybe some other time, Warren, but not today."

Disappointment flits across his face. "Oh, that's alright. Maybe we'll have more interesting subjects tomorrow anyway. Right now, we're mostly focused on using the time pod as we call it. It's the best idea we came up with so far."

"I don't really know much about that." She says. "If I were to think of a medium for travel, the idea of using a machine wouldn't even go anywhere near my head."

"You wouldn't think of using a *machine* to time travel?" Brooke asks in outrage. "Then what would you possibly use? What else is there?"

Max hesitates. "Well, I was thinking perhaps...a photo."

This makes Brooke even angrier, but Warren merely laughs. "That's my Max. Thinking of photography at all times. How would you travel through time using a photo?"

"I was thinking that perhaps if you had a photo, you could jump into it."

"Jump into it?" Warren muses. "Assuming there's nothing special about this photo and the person is not using a machine, that would mean whoever is doing the jumping already has the power to time travel within themselves?"

She nods. "Exactly. So to jump to a certain time only requires a photograph."

Brooke sneers at her. "That is ridiculous. There's so many unanswered questions. Now assuming this person travels back in time, how would they go back to the future? No, Warren. No jokes about the movie." She quickly chastises Warren when he began grinning, then turns back to Max. "After all, there would logically be no photograph of the time from which that person came from. So wouldn't they be stuck in the past?"
Max could explain that the travel backwards was only temporary, but then that would bring questions of 'why' and she wouldn't be able to answer. Mainly because she has no idea how her powers work.

"Well, perhaps she could use a drawing?" The question was asked by Daniel. Max's eyes widen and she turns to him. "Why not? A photo is just a more sophisticated drawing using light. Drawing was how people took photographs before the invention of the camera. Would that work?"

Max bites her lips. "I...don't know."

"Isn't this your theory?" Brooke presses. "How could you not know?"

"Well, uh, I...

"Chill, Brooke." Warren says causing a displeased look on her face. "She's probably just throwing ideas out there. I think it's a cool idea. Question is how elaborate would this photo have to be? Does it have to be super realistic? Or can it be as simple as a child's doodle?"

Brooke sighs and joins in the conversation. "It would have to be significantly realistic, I'd think. Because if not, then wouldn't too many things in nature activate the power? If the person saw a tree bark that looks too much like a place? Or a piece of bread that looks like a Victorian woman?"

Warren nods. "Plus, it must also contain enough detail to indicate time, right? Because if you drew a photo of the Eiffel Tower, how would the power know whether the photo is of the Eiffel Tower today or 300 years ago unless there was some detail to indicate it?"

"The Eiffel Tower isn't that old, Warren." Daniel says blandly.

"You know what I mean." He blushes. "I'm just saying it must have some indicative detail of the time."

As the three discusses the idea, Max finds herself rejuvenated. A strain of excitement goes through her as she too considers the possibility that this might actually work. Once she thought it could, another idea occurs to her.

"Is it possible..." She begins hesitantly. "...to use this power to travel forward? To the future?"

Daniel scrunches his face in confusion. "Use a drawing to travel to the future? But...how? Wouldn't we need to know what the future look like?"

"We can't in most cases," Brooke racks her mind. "but we can draw certain things to make it happen. Like Blackwell. Chances are it'll still be here in five years, right? Well, what if we had a drawing of the welcoming plaque except obviously aged a little."

"You mean with rust or cracks or something?"

Warren looks confused. "That would be really hard. I mean, we know the plaque will look worn and stuff, but we don't know how it'll happen. What if the cracks develop differently than how we drew it? Also, how do you get an exact time when you don't know when the cracks appear?"

The three falls into debate again, but Max didn't listen too closely. Another thought is flowing through her mind.

She and Chloe had been spending these past few days trying to find out what happened to Rachel Amber. What if she could skip the entire process and simply find the information out from the future?
She could make Chloe happy – *really* happy.

And if she does so, perhaps she can be forgiven for what she did in the other timeline.

So all she’ll have to do is travel to the future, find out what happened to Rachel Amber, then come back with the information. After all, the people of the future (if not they themselves) would have found out by then, right?

"What about a phone?" When the other three turns to look at Max, she continues. "A phone is easy to draw and it gives you the date. Wouldn't that work?"

"Well, that would be easy." Brooke snorts.

"No, wait, wait, it might just work." Warren says. "It's time travel so we naturally think that some overly convoluted process is needed to get it to work, but I don't see why this wouldn't. It fits all the criteria, right? It can be made – very realistically, if needed – and it would show exactly the information needed to indicate the time. It fits, right?"

Max hesitates a moment. "Daniel, could you please draw a photo?"

He raises an eyebrow. "Of a phone showing a future date?"

"Yes, please."

She takes out her own phone and hands it to him. As far as she knows, the photo or, in this case, drawing has to involve her somehow. If Daniel uses his own phone, it may not work.

He glance Warren and Brooke a bit unsure but takes Max's phone. Then he sits down and begins drawing. As with nearly every art student at Blackwell Academy, Daniel proves indisputably talented. His hands move in a blur and, within minutes, he has the general outline of the drawing down. Then he begins filling in the details.

Ten minutes passes, then fifteen. The three watches him the entire time mesmerized by the speed at which his creation took life. The only time he stopped was to check something on his own phone before getting back to work. Finally, he places his pencil down and gets up with the drawing he made in less time than it would take a single Blackwell class to complete. He hands it to Max.

It is, in a word, amazing.

To her surprise, he added in her right hand too and it is accurate considering he didn't even bother to glance at her hand the entire time he drew it. Did he actually draw her hand from memory? Without even taking a close look?

In the drawing, her hand covers most of the page and, in the few visible spots outside, there is well manicured grass. Obviously Blackwell's lawn. In her hand, of course, is her phone and it is no doubt the easiest part of the photo to draw. After all, it was only a rectangle with minor details here and there. In the middle of the phone is a simplistic lock screen. She is amazed that he drew in even the little details of her lock screen down to the battery bar, signal icon, and even the little transparent bar at the bottom that seems meaningless.

Right in the center of the lock screen is the time and date. Here, Max pauses in surprise.

"10:07 Monday, October 10, 2033?"

"Whoa." Warren awes. "Twenty years into the future?"
"I thought about using 1,000 years into the future, but decided twenty is safer." Daniel shrugs. "After all, Blackwell is unlikely to last that long and too many things will happen by then. I had to use my phone to look up what day of the week that would be."

Brooke nods appreciatively looking at the drawing. "That's good thinking and you got down the details. Jumping too far ahead might contain too many variables. For all we know, the entire planet could be underwater or full of radiation from a nuclear war by then. Things aren't likely to become disastrous in just twenty years."

Max glances at them, then looks down at the photo. She thinks of Chloe again. She is unsure of all this or if this would even work, but if there is even the slightest chance it would, she'll take it. She wants with all her heart to make Chloe happy.

Staring closely, she feels and hears nothing at first, but then...the sound of wind. She had almost thought it was from around her instead, but the wind is then followed by footsteps and people speaking. Then the familiar out of body feeling occurs and her sight distorts.

"Max? Are you alright?" Warren asks.

She ignores him. Just a little more.

The drawing seems to come to life and a series of color flits within it. Finally, the entire drawing turns into a blur and she knows this is the point where she must really concentrate.

She puts all her focus into it and does not blink. The feeling of her power stirring inside of her appears – like a dangerous but controlled swirling force. It starts inside her chest and slowly spreads outwards perceptibly gaining speed and power as it reaches her ribcage.

Here, it would normally feel strongest towards her arms but, as when she jumped into the photo of her and Chloe as children, the stirring spreads upwards traveling through her neck, her jaws, then settling around her eyes. Now the blurred drawing begins to clear as she concentrates harder.

When the blurriness drops away, the sound of wind, footsteps, laughter, and chatting grows louder and the drawing pops out becoming more lifelike. The flitting color now moves through the drawing rapidly then spreads outwards until it fills her entire vision.

Then things turn blinding.

When the mishmash of colors clears, she had to blink a few times to clear out the dryness and strain from her eyes. Feeling better, she looks up to find...Blackwell Academy. It had a series of students walking through it, talking, and playing games with each other.

"Did it work?" Max mutters to herself.

Feeling a weight in her hand, she is surprised to see that she's holding her phone. Was she just staring at it? Like in Daniel's drawing? Lifting it up, she tries to turn it on. It wouldn't. She keeps pressing the power button, but futilely.

"I don't get it." She says frustrated. "Is it out of battery? But it was half full a minute ago."

Putting it in her pocket, she stares around trying to see if anything significant changed. On a whim, she decides to walk inside Blackwell thinking there would be more major changes in there or, at least, she see the trophy case and note what sits there now.

As soon as she walks through the door, she stops seeing none other than Ms. Grant standing near the
intersection of the hallway handing out flyers. A…visibly older Ms. Grant. The woman is a little thinner now and there are streaks of white in her hair.

Figuring it would be simpler to talk to her to get an idea of what may be happening, she walks up making sure to put on a sincere smile.

"Hello, Ms. Grant. How are you?"

"Hm? While I'm fine, you polite little thing." Ms. Grant turns around smiling.

That's when things went wrong.

Ms. Grant looks at her and freezes. Her eyes furrow in confusion and stares at her closely, then it widens and she drops all the flyers in her arms. At that point, she lets out a bloodcurdling scream that stops the entire hallway and has everyone staring. Then she sways and drops to the floor.

Max tries to catch her but misjudges badly and exacerbates the problem by maneuvering her in a way that has her lightly hitting her head against the corner and causing a bit of blood to spurt out. Lying Ms. Grant on the floor, Max gets up with bits of blood on her clothes feeling shaken.

The other kids are now whispering and staring. Some are clearly shouting for security and she sees some running into the principal's office too. Panic overcomes Max and she makes a run for it rushing outside the front doors, through the lawn, across the street, and keeps running until Blackwell was out of sight.

She rushes into a fast food restaurant and into the bathroom. There, she pants clutching at her chest feeling like she's about to die from exhaustion. Falling onto the floor leaning against the bathroom, she takes a moment to sort things out.

For the life of her, she can't figure out Ms. Grant's reaction to her. What in the world would make her scream and faint like that? And just from the sight of her. Is seeing Max really that incredible in the future? Maybe she's famous now like she always dreamed of being.

Except she can't help that think that the scream that Ms. Grant let out and her expression was one of horror, not admiration.

Biting her lips, Max takes a deep breath, then gets back up. She takes off her hoodie which contains the traces of blood and shoves the whole thing into the trash. She pauses when something suddenly occurred to her.

She ran all the way from Blackwell. When she jumped to the past using a photo, her movements was limited to a certain area and, furthermore, the jump lasted for a set period of time. However, here, she ran far from Blackwell and it has been about an hour already.

This is a level of freedom and control is more akin to after she saved William already and came back to find the present had changed. Why does jumping into the future seems to work almost as if she changed the past already? Unable to think of an answer, she shrugs it off, and leaves.

Outside, she walks down the street – opposite of Blackwell, of course – trying to think of what to do. Her first, best, and only idea is to call as many people she knew as possible starting with Chloe. Problem is that her phone appears to be out of battery and she left her charger inside her bag which she forgot at Chloe's house in a rush to leave.

Walking along the street, an idea happens to come to her. Literally. Max sees an approaching man staring down at his cell phone as he walks along the road. A lot of indecision passes through her, but
as he nears, she takes the chance.

"Hello, sir?"

He stops and stares at her. "Yes?"

She tries to put on a cute smile. "I'm a little lost. Is it possible I could make a call on your phone to a friend of mine to pick me up?"

He hesitates a little, but giving her another once over, he probably figures that he could chase her down if she tries to steal his phone, so nods in agreement. Taking his phone, she enters Chloe's number which she memorized.

A voice returns announcing that the phone number is no longer in use.

Max's mouth drops a little in surprise. Swallowing, she smiles nervously at the man and asks for another minute. Then she tries for Chloe's house number instead. Thankfully, it rings. Once, twice, three times. She was about to be nervous that no one would respond when it gets picked up on the sixth ring.

"Hello?" A voice gruffly answers.

"Hello, I'm calling for Chloe Price."

Silence. "Who is this?"

After the incident with Ms. Grant, she feels it is prudent to not give out her name. "Oh, I'm her friend, uh, Brooke Scott. I was hoping to have a chat with her."

He snorts. "Some friend you are. You didn't even call the right number. Do you even know what happened with her?"

A cold feeling grips Max. "What do you mean? What happened with her?"

"I don't know if I should tell you. You seem awfully suspicious."

That voice and the suspicious nature. Why hadn't she noticed it before? She's talking to David Madsen, Chloe's stepdad. It's just…he sounds different.

"I'm not suspicious, David. It's just that…Chloe and I lost contact many years back. I'm calling because I was hoping to get into contact with her."

"How do you know…you know what, nevermind. Look kid, the problem here is that I don't even know Chloe's number anymore. The damn girl cut contact off years ago. All I know is that she left for San Francisco."

"San Francisco? Where-"

"That's all I know, alright? You want to find out more? Then go there and find her yourself. Now don't bother me anymore."

He hangs up. Numbly, she lowers the phone and hands it back to the man who is now staring crossly at her.

"Nice call with your 'friend' there." He mutters and walks off.
Oh, she forgot she said told him that. Max licks her lips and takes a breath. She can't work off this. She needs to find a way to get more info out of David. She raises her hand to rewind.

Nothing happens.

"Oh no…oh no, please, no. Please don't do this to me."

She tries again and again concentrating and struggling to pull her power out more and more. With some effort, she feels some kind of light tugging inside of her where the powerful swirl should be residing and the world distorted a little, but otherwise, nothing happens.

The panic returns. Her powers are still there – she can feel something inside of her and it has a small effect – but she can't seem to use it at will anymore. This…might this also affect her ability to return home?

She crouches down feeling overwhelmed, but tries to fight it back. Taking several breaths with many promises to herself that she'll figure it out later, she gets up and tries to plan her next step. There doesn't seem to be any real plan, though.

Max has no idea what to do, though. She has no phone to contact anyone. Even if she did, there are very few numbers she memorized. She didn't even memorize her own parents' number figuring she could always turn to her contact list.

So no one to call, nowhere to stay, and everything she owns is either in her dorm or bag in the past. She is literally a homeless person right now.

The thought occurs that perhaps she should head to the Price house and hope that she can convince Joyce and David into letting her stay. Surely they still remember her? The problem with this is that, as Ms. Grant shows, there may be some problem in that. How would Joyce and David react in seeing her? Would it be as awful? Would she end up giving one or both of them a heart attack?

Then a crazy idea occurs to her. She tries to correct herself calling it a 'creative' idea instead but her logical side rejects it completely. It's a crazy idea.

Her idea is to go to San Francisco and try to find Chloe who would absolutely remember her and welcome her with open arms.

Even the idea of being 'welcomed' sounds strange. If anything, wherever Chloe is right now, her future self must be with her too, and Chloe must be losing her mind wondering where she went. So her first priority should be to go to San Francisco and find Chloe.

This is a crazy idea, of course, because she has no method of getting to San Francisco. A car would be awesome, except she has none and she isn't reckless enough to try to hitchhike all the way to San Francisco. She could call Chloe to come all the way to Arcadia Bay to pick her up, except she doesn't know her new number.

Max bites her lips. A bus would work. It would take forever to reach San Francisco from Arcadia Bay, but it is cheap and accessible. Again, though, she would need money. How can she possibly get some now in a timely manner? Beg?

A thought occurs to her. There is a way she can get possibly enough money to use the bus. Making haste, Max heads off knowing where she is intending to go. Along the way, she sees a few signs that confirm what she's has been suspecting: that she is in 2033. The idea worked, God bless Daniel.

Arriving at her destination, Max lets out a relieved sigh to see that it's still there. The Arcadia Bay
Public Library.

She walks in and signs the register to be given a timecard for computer usage. From there, her hopes begin to be realized. She goes to her bank’s website and login. It takes a moment where she holds her breath, but then it works and relief flows through her. So her bank account still works even twenty years later. That means her future self is still using it.

Checking the account summary, her mouth drops. The summary states she has $73.09.

After twenty years, she has a measly $73? That's only a dollar more than what she had in 2013. So she's still poor even twenty years later? Exactly what does she do for work? …is she working at all? Or is she unemployed?

Well, whatever her future self is, she is going to be very upset when she tries to use her bank account one day only to find it empty because her past self essentially robbed her. The thought makes Max guilty, but it can't be helped. This is an emergency.

Plus, it's for all their sake anyway. Once she finds Chloe, she can tell Max what happened with Rachel Amber, then she'll travel back to the past and she can reveal everything. A momentary flash of the other Chloe's dead face appears before Max pushes it away. She can't let that affect her now.

She notes down the routing and account number, then opens the bus website and schedules a ticket from Arcadia Bay to San Francisco. The location is about an hour's walk and she would have to wait another hour there for the bus to arrive…then the trip itself is a numbing 18 hours with three transfers. She'll arrive there early morning of the next day.

Having no choice, she chooses the trip. At the end, the total comes to $69. Max is held back by a slight moment of doubt, then enters in her bank info and clicks 'Accepts'. A moment later, the ticket is processed and she prints it out using the library's printer.

Stuffing the printout in her pocket, she takes the first step of a long trip to the area where the bus will stop. She takes a deep breath knowing it will be painful.

As it turns out, 'painful' doesn't even begin to describe it. Walking to the bus stop wasn't bad, but the ride itself was torture. The seat was reasonably comfortable, but no amount of that could mitigate sitting in the same spot for hours, which was made worse by the utter lack of entertainment. She had nothing to keep her occupied.

The few times she got out for a transfer was actually a blessing as she could then stretch and move her body before subjecting them to sitting again. When possible, she grabbed any source of reading materials before forced back onto the bus. Even those stupid car and home sales booklets were taken.

By the time she arrived in the city, her mind felt like a hazy mush. Like she's been in an endless, restless sleep…which is exactly what happened. She found it impossible to sleep on that bus.

When it stopped in San Francisco and the bus drops her off in the heart of the city, she drags herself off feeling more and more exhausted with each step. She even had to sit down again at the bus stop to take a breather. She had to rest after an exhausting 18 hours of sitting and sleeping.

An hour later, Max feels enough of her energy and senses return to begin searching. It is early morning so she has plenty of time. Considering how massive this city is, she'd need it too. The sheer breadth of things she sees in every direction is enough to overwhelm her mind and make her lose hope, but she fights it enough justifying that every hard task begins somewhere. So she begins her hard task by choosing a random direction.
She tries to keep her mind focused, but couldn't. Frankly, she didn't even know what to look for. The best idea she had involved looking for anyone with a blue head of hair when, for all she knows, Chloe could be a different shade altogether. Or even went back to her natural blonde.

Plus this is her first time in San Francisco and the city is amazing. It reminds her of Seattle, though there is a noticeable difference in demographics. Max looks at the people around her in awe. There is a huge amount of Asian people here. It's a big difference from what Seattle looks like and is completely alien compared to Arcadia Bay.

Public transport dominates the streets or, at least, is much more visible. There are also parks everywhere and they're all huge and beautiful. Arcadia Bay has far more nature than San Francisco does, yet the latter seem to have more and much better parks. Arcadia's parks – the few there are – are small, dilapidated, and feels thoughtless.

Max splits her time between examining this new city she never knew before and trying to continue her mission of finding her friend. She travels in one direction, takes a random turn, then, some time later, takes another random turn. At times, she discovered she went in a circle. At other times, she comes to vaguely familiar areas. Then there are times when she is completely unfamiliar with an area and has to keep walking until she sees a street she recognizes.

This confused and disorganized mission continues for hours with small breaks in-between until, at last, she comes to one of the many parks and takes a breather on the grass trying to think of how to proceed. Plus she's hungry. She hasn't eaten since she got to the future and, the entire day, she's been hearing a low rumbling sound indicating her stomach isn't happy.

Staring around trying to distract herself, her eyes land on a black and white poster with a face on it. Remembering how Chloe used to search for Rachel when she went missing, Max pushes herself off and goes over to look.

Her hopes are quickly dashed. There is a face on the poster, but it is a simple drawing of a nondescript figure. The poster is not searching for anyone, but advertising. It appears to be an ad for an upcoming art exhibit.

Skimming down to the bottom, Max catches something significant. The place of the exhibition is a self-described 'art house' and what gets her focus is the name.

"The Victoria Space?" She whispers to herself. "The Victoria Space?"

It couldn't be.

Yet Max recalls that the Victoria she knew had parents who own something called The Chase Space in Seattle. Is it a coincidence that, in a major west coast city relatively close to Arcadia Bay and Seattle, there is an art exhibit with such a striking name?

She runs her eyes over the ad again. Another part of it states that 'pre-showings' are available and open to the public without charge for a week prior to the actual exhibition. Furthermore, complimentary dishes and drinks are offered.

Her stomach rumbles angrily again and Max couldn't help the images of burgers and hot dogs that comes to mind. It only takes a second longer before she decides to go to The Victoria Space and it doesn't take much to justify the decision.

To begin, it's getting close to the end of the day with no progress at all, and she has no clue where to go from here. Second, Victoria came from Arcadia Bay and Chloe has mentioned to her before that
she had clashes with her in the past, so they know each other. It wouldn't hurt to check to see if
Victoria might know where she and Chloe live or at least the general area where they may be.

If nothing else, this place is offering free food and she has no money to buy her own.

Checking the address, Max treks towards the destination using the free city map she gotten from the
visitor's office as a guide. Some half an hour or so later, she arrives at a site that instantly gives her
doubts that this place is run by the Victoria she knows.

The blonde is solidified in her mind as infinitely haughty, arrogant, and, more relevantly, high
fashion and high price. In short, the exact opposite of what this place seem to be.

The 'art house' she arrived at has 'The Victoria Space' in some weird font that does look a little neat
during the day…but would probably be very hard to read at night due to the way it's shaped and
colored. Beneath this proudly displayed title is what looks like a converted grocery store.

The front is glass and Max can see the entire place through it. Literally the entire place. She could see
one end to the other and there are only two doors and a stairwell leading up. One of the doors is
listed 'bathroom' – no gender differentiation – and the other door is listed 'Employees Only'. The
stairwell is also roped off with a sign saying 'off-limits'.

It doesn't look anything like the kind of place she can imagine Victoria Chase owning. It's not big
enough. Not expensive looking enough. Not 'showy' enough.

Perhaps she should have gotten a clue from the ad saying open to the public and offering free food.
When has Victoria gotten involved in anything that's not exclusive and only available to the
wealthy/talented?

Now filled with doubts, Max thinks that perhaps she should try somewhere else. Her stomach sends
her a sharp pain at the thought and, of course, that's when she notices the table of food inside the art
house.

Well, it can't hurt to try.

Max cautiously walks through the door. She stands at the front a minute waiting to see if anyone
pops up. When no one does, she walks towards the food table. There, she stops in confusion.

"What…is this?"

The table is a rainbow of dishes and she didn't recognize a single one. She looks down at a large
plate nearest to her to examine more closely. The dish is comprised of what appears to be nuts
assembled alongside a piece of cheese cut in the shape of an apple slice. The two are circled by some
sort of red fruit and all of them sit atop a leaf of what looks like strangely colored Napa cabbage leaf.

It's actually really beautiful, but Max is more concerned with whether it tastes good. Hesitantly, she
picks up a sample and bites into a part of it…then grimaces. It's not the worst tasting thing she's had,
but it's definitely an acquired taste.

Not wanting to waste the food, she finishes it off then moves on to try the other dishes. After some
time of this, she certainly feels fuller though she has yet to find a dish she really likes. She will give
compliments to whoever made it, though. Every single dish is beautiful.

The sound of a door opening grabs her attention from the food table. She turns and meets eyes with a
young brunette woman. Well, meet eyes only for a moment before the woman's clothes takes all her
focus.
She is wearing a dress where the design is split down the middle. The right side of the dress appears to be a simple, but classy beige design. The left side...is a complete mishmash of colors that resembles a Jackson Pollack painting except set to a floral design. The final jewel of this fashion ensemble is knee high leather boots.

The woman notices Max's stare and smiles pleasantly. "Like it? It has a message, you know."

"It...does?"

Nodding, she points to the right side. "See this? It looks nice, right? Good material, simple coloring, and flattering. This is the kind of clothes you can see any woman wearing. It represents control. This is what a person would consciously choose to wear."

She switches to the left side. "This, though, is anarchy. The coloring looks like something a kid thrown onto a canvas without thought and it's shaped like a flower for seemingly no reason other than maybe because the author likes it. It represents the chaos that can happen to anyone without rhyme or reason."

"Now my boots?" She gestures below. "My niece liked it and put it in my shoe closet without asking me. It indicates the effect other people have on our lives with or without us wanting it."

"The entirety of this represents life. The choices we make, the choices forced onto us, and the chaos that surrounds both aspects. All of these define us as a person and I wear it to show that visually."

Max blinks. She blinks again. "Oh, that's really neat. Uh, what brand is it?"

"The Emily Ruby brand." She grabs Max's hand and shakes it. "I'm Emily Ruby – well, my last name isn't really 'Ruby' but I chose it because I liked it and I made this dress exclusively for myself to wear. My personal message to the world. Now, honey, who would you be?"

"I'm Max Caulfield."

"Max. Caulfield." She repeats to herself. "I can tell already that you're an individual. You know how? Because you present yourself with that name. I'm guessing your real name is Maxine. Even if it wasn't, that's how an ordinary person would present herself. The fact that you willingly call yourself 'Max' tells me you are who you are and don't care what anyone thinks."

Oh, how Max wishes that was true.

"So Max, what brings you to The Victoria Space? Are you interested in our art pieces? Are you into art or know someone who is?"

She tries to smile widely not sure if she succeeded. "I am kind of an artist, I guess. I'm into photography and I attended a well known art school in Arcadia Bay called Blackwell Academy. I saw your flyer and-"

"This is destiny." Emily interrupts startling Max. "There is no other explanation for it. To think that someone else from my beloved alma mater should come here."

"You're a Blackwell student?"

"Class of 2025!" She declares proudly. "One of the happiest times of my life and the whole reason I got hired here. I came in with samples of my best clay sculptures, but Victoria – she's the manager here – was more interested in catching up with me about Blackwell. She gave me a chance based off of that."
"Truth is I never intended to stay more than maybe a year or two but I really fell in love with this beautiful art house." She touches her lips in amusement. "Perhaps Victoria knew me better than I knew myself."

"So Max, you look young. You're actually still in Blackwell right now, correct? How is school there? Are all my old teachers still there? Is Mr. Tomasz still teaching culture there?"

Sweat drips down her head. This is not good. She has no idea who Mr. Tomasz is and there's a chance many of the teachers she had as a student might not be there. She doesn't even know if Wells is still the principal or not.

"Well, Blackwell is...the same as usual. My favorite class is photography, but I think the teacher I like best is Ms. Grant."

"No surprise there. Ms. Grant is everywhere and she's a doll, ain't she? Tell me more. How's our favorite club doing? Still living it up?"

"Oh yeah, the Vortex Club still parties all the time. You know how it is."

Except she apparently doesn't. Emily's eyes furrow in confusion.

"The...Vortex Club? What? Is that a new club?"

"Isn't that what you were referring to?"

"No, I meant the Event Horizon Club. That is Blackwell's big club. What is the Vortex Club?"

Max's heart quickens a bit. The Vortex Club is gone today? From the sound of things, it's been gone for at least eight years. Maybe even longer if Emily's complete lack of knowledge about it is a clue.

"O-oh, the Vortex Club is a new thing. I'm guessing you might not be aware since you're not there anymore." Max laughs nervously.

Emily isn't amused. Her eyes narrow. "I've been there last week on a visit. I always get calls from some of my teachers regularly too telling me about what's happening there. Do you really go to Blackwell, Max?"

She swallows feeling pressured. "Well, not exactly. See, I used to go there, b-but-"

"And when was this-" Emily cuts her off. "-if you don't even seem to be aware of the biggest and only club at Blackwell? I think you're lying to me, Max."

"No, no, I'm not!"

"Really? So if I were to ask you who the principal is, you would know?"

Max smiles shakily. "It's Principal Wells."

Emily's eyes turn cold. "Principal Wells retired even before I graduated. It was due to stress and personal issues. Max, you are free to view the art pieces and partake of the refreshments as you wish. If you need my assistance, I'll be available."

She burns in shame as Emily turns to walk away. Before she makes it too far, though, footsteps come from the stairwell. A mature looking woman with spiky blonde bangs comes downstairs and looks at Emily who returns the gaze warmly. She turns to Max putting on a small greeting smile then freezes.
Her eyes widen in an almost comical fashion as she takes a deep hissing gasp. It takes Max a moment, but the features of the woman soon becomes familiar as she embeds it over a more familiar face in her mind. At that point, her mouth drops too. It's Victoria Chase.

A…very different looking Victoria Chase. Aside from her hair now in a short 'spiky bangs' style, her clothes is a stylish though more conservative white blouse and maroon blazer over matching slacks. Her shoes are a plain pair of red flats.

The biggest difference, though, are the eyeglasses she's now wearing. It's a sleek semi-rimless one that reminds her of the one Mr. Jefferson wears and, added to Victoria's aged face, it changes her appearance greatly.

The two stare at each other wordlessly trying to figure out how to proceed from here. Emily notices this immediately and she looks between the two in confusion. After a length of this, Victoria takes the lead. She puts on a smile again, though an uncertain one.

"And who might you be, dear?"

Max swallows unsure how she should answer. Victoria's reaction to seeing her didn't look all too good plus the memory of Ms. Grant's reaction is still fresh in her mind. Briefly, the idea to call herself Brooke Scott passes her mind, but that might not fly too well when she already gave her real name to Emily.

As it turns out, she didn't need to decide. Emily freely offers Victoria the information.

"She introduced herself as Max Caulfield." Emily says and adds blandly. "She tells me she's a Blackwell student, though she couldn't seem to tell me what it's like there or who works there."

Max thought that was a little unfair. She managed to get Ms. Grant right.

"Instead, she mentions a non-existent club and a principal that retired years ago."

Victoria cocks her head a little. "Is that so? Which club?"

"Vortex Club."

A strange emotion passes through Victoria's face. She licks her lips a little and smiles at Max more steadily.

"I see. Max, would it be possible for us to speak upstairs in my office?" This earns her a strange look from Emily. "I promise it won't be long."

Max looks between the two women then nods hesitantly. Victoria's smile becomes brighter and she gestures for Max to follow along. The two walk upstairs and turn a corner going into a room that looks more like an oversized closet than an office. She doubts it could have fit five people at once.

This is especially since it's packed with stuff. There were obviously work materials like folders of art samples and business communications, but there were also a lot of figurines, posters, and Blu-Rays. They were definitely not related to Victoria's work because they were mostly anime. In one shelf, Max spots a limited edition Blu-Ray of Star Trek. Star Trek. In Victoria Chase's office.

She wonders if she accidentally went into an alternate universe. This can't be the future where the Victoria she knows exists.

"Have a seat, Max."
She complies and, to her surprise, Victoria takes the seat besides her instead of at her work desk. The smile on her face falls off into apprehension as she leans in. It takes her a moment to get the words out.

"So your name is Max Caulfield?" Max nods in confirmation cautiously. "Don't be nervous. It's just…well, I'm wondering…gosh, I don't know how to say this."

Victoria pinches the bridge of her nose a little. Then she cups her palms over her mouth and takes a breath before continuing.

"Listen, this may sound a little weird but humor me, okay? See, I used to know someone named Max Caulfield and she looks shockingly like you." Victoria runs her eyes slowly over Max's face and body making her blush a little. "Extremely like you. I can't remember that well anymore, but I swear you even wear the same type of clothing."

"So seeing you alone hit me like a train, but what's more is the things you're saying. You say you go to Blackwell. Emily says you mentioned our retired principal – that means Principal Raymond Wells. What really gets me is that you mentioned the Vortex Club. Is that right?"

Max nods slowly. "Yes, well, I thought the Vortex Club was still around. I didn't know anything about this Event Horizon club."

"The Vortex Club…" Victoria says wistfully. "…was disbanded about two years after I graduated in 2013. After Nathan and I left Blackwell, it just had trouble running itself. After all, it was mostly run on alcohol and drugs, and we were the only ones who could reliably get both."

"The Event Horizon club is mostly just booze and teen romance in addition to the usual high school shtrick." Victoria laughs good-naturedly. "That's why it started up and how it kept itself running for all these years. It helps that it's also way more inclusive than the Vortex Club ever was."

Victoria leans back and sighs. After a moment of silence, she speaks in a more subdued voice.

"Max, would it be too much if I ask you to stay with me for a week? Or at least a few days?"

"What?"

"Don't run already, please. It's just…" She sighs again running her hand over her hair. "I'm having a bit of a crisis. I don't like to think of myself as a person who easily falls for anything, though I do like to presume the best of everyone I meet. You? If you are trying to pull one over on me, you're doing the best job of anyone who ever tried. More than a few times now, I…I honestly thought you were the Max Caulfield."

"I don't understand." Max says confused. "You think I'm, uh, the 'Max Caulfield' you know, so it's giving you a crisis? And you want me to stay over for this? Why? What for?"

Victoria withers a little. "I've done terrible things, Max. I've hurt a lot of people. Sometimes for personal gain, sometimes for no reason. For the longest time, it didn't bother me. As time passed, though, the regrets I've always held in the back of my mind built up and…I think I have to a lot to make up for."

A new light in understanding slowly dawns in her as to the person that Victoria Chase transformed into over the years. A person who, maybe, is actually really nice and has things she regrets and wants to make up for. Only problem is what does she have to do with it?

"I still don't understand, Victoria. How would I help you with that?"
"It's how much you resemble the Max I know. She's one of the people I want to apologize to and, well, never got the chance. I'm not so blind as to think there aren't people I've hurt worse, but I've always felt like I owe Max the most. Somehow, it's been a sort of mental block to me."

"I think it's because I centralized all my feelings around her. The regrets are the worst when I think about her. She was just such a better person than me and, I don't know, it's just like I can't help but feel I can't start…I guess you can call it 'redemption' until I start with her."

"Victoria...I'm- that is, she isn't a paragon of virtue. There are things she's done too. Terrible things."
A quick replay of her hand inching towards Chloe's IV dial plays in her mind. "Far, far worse things than you did. Besides, there are- might be people you owe much more to than her."

Staring at Max contemplatively, Victoria continues. "I'm not naïve, Max. I know Max – my Max – isn't a perfect angel. I also know there are those I've done far worse to. The situation with her is so much different, though. It's...just not easy to explain and nothing I've tried has allowed me to get through the wall in my mind."

Her eyes filled with wonder. "With you here, though, it's...it's like the block is slowly lifting. I've spoken about this problem to a select few people only. Most of which have been therapists or very close family members only. Now I find myself confessing all of this to a random girl who just walked into my gallery."

She clasps one of Max's hands and pleads. "So please, Max. Stay with me for a short while. Just until I figure a few things out."

Max remembers times when some people would give her things and it seems like such an overly kind gesture that she feels uncomfortable accepting the gift as it seems too much. She now has a woman in front of her pleading with her to stay with her.

She would be the one doing Max a favor, yet she's treating it as the other way around.

"Victoria, I'll seriously be happy to. I..." She swallows and decides to be honest. "I came here after riding a bus for almost an entire day straight using the last bit of money in my bank account. I don't have a car, I don't have anywhere to stay, and I haven't even eaten anything the entire time until I got to the free food here. It's you that's helping me."

"Say no more." Victoria smiles confidently. "I asked you to stay for a week, but trust me, stay for as long as you want. I'll be happy to be your frien- your host."

Max catches that slip. "No, we're better than guest and host. We're friends."

This earns a bright smile from Victoria. The blonde woman gets up and offers Max a hand.

"It's late. Let me take you back to my place and show you to your room."

Taking Victoria's hand to get up, she then follows the woman downstairs. Below, Emily was sitting near the front looking over sample portfolios when their appearance gets her attention. She gives both a curious look.

"Emily, I'm going home early tonight. Would you mind closing up?"

"No, I'm cool with that." She says giving Max a look. "Is she going with you?"

"Yes. She's a good friend of mine."
This throws Emily off but she remains silent. Victoria leaves the store and Max scurries after avoiding looking at Emily who stares at her openly. Outside, they get into Victoria's car – a tiny electric car that feels cramped even with only them two – and they drive off.

The house they pull up to is a small, cozy looking place. Victoria pulls inside a tight garage and Max had to struggle a little to get out.

"Here." Victoria throws her a set of keys. "The one you need is the teal key. Only the doorknob is locked. Go on ahead, I need to plug in my car."

She does as instructed throwing a glance back on her way out at Victoria wiggling around trying to get ahold of her socket extension. On the way to the front door, she stares in amazement at the eye-popping blend of color and beauty that overwhelms the area around the house and is visible even at night. The same can be said of every other house on the block for that matter. Does everyone here use the same gardener?

Going inside the house, she turns on the lights to reveal what looks like an extension of The Victoria Space. Art pieces are everywhere, though in much greater variety and of many more different cultures than what can be found in the art house. Behind her, Victoria steps in and closes the door.

"C'mon, I'll show you around. This is the living room."

She takes Max around the house showing her the kitchen, bedrooms – there were three in total in the house and Max's is to be the one besides hers – the attic and basement, and even takes her to the backyard proudly showing her carefully raised organic garden.

Afterwards they head back to the living room where Victoria slides onto her couch sighing in relief. "So are you tired or hungry? My home is your home, so take whatever you want."

"Thanks. You're too nice." Max glances around. "This is a nice place, but, to be honest, I didn't expect your place to look like this."

"Really? All my friends tell me that it fits me perfectly. I suppose that you, being Max Caulfield, would know a very different me."

Max raises an eyebrow. "Your friends say this fits you? Do you agree?"

"I decorated this place, Max. I can't help but agree." Victoria looks at her curiously. "I...think I changed a lot over the years. I like to think I did anyway. Tell me. Do you think I'm different?"

"Are you kidding? When I first came to The Victoria Space-" Victoria pats the spot on the couch besides her and Max gratefully takes a seat. "-I nearly walked away thinking this couldn't yours. It just screamed something completely different. Then when you first walked down the stairs, I didn't even recognize you at first. You changed so much."

Victoria bites her lips. "I'm definitely different physically, yeah, but I was asking more like do you think I change inside?"

Max nods. "No doubt. I can't even imagine sitting here chatting like this with the Victoria I used to know. Hell, back then, I don't think you would even let me into your dorm for a minute, nonetheless your house for a week."

"Yes, I remember this. I used to make fun of you all the time. I can't even remember all the things I said to you."
"I can't either." Max laughs. "The one I remember are just the ones you say the most. You like calling me loser, hipster, and I think I heard 'selfie ho' once or twice."

"I remember that!" Victoria grins. "I feel bad for joking about this. I feel like I shouldn't but you're laughing too…"

"It's okay. With you, it feels like I'm talking about a different person."

The woman's smile brightens dramatically. "I'm happy to hear. I've been thinking about this since I first heard the words Vortex Club from Emily. I haven't thought about it in so long that even hearing it brought memories flooding in. There's so much I forgot and so much I didn't want to remember."

"Can you even remember much if you wanted to?" Max asks cheekily. "Most of your time at Blackwell was parties. All alcohol and drugs."

"Don't I know it? But I've been clean and sober for years now. Well, aside from a small glass of wine now and then. Getting blacked out drunk is more of a young thing, you know."

Max scratches behind her ears. "I don't think I do. I've never been much of a drinker." She yawns a bit. "The worst I've ever did was sneak a bit of wine with my friend when I was a kid."

Victoria notices the yawn. "If you're tired, feel free to go to bed. I don't want to keep you up. We can always talk later."

"Well, I am a little tired. I've been walking nearly the entire day searching this city up and down. Then there was also that ridiculous bus ride."

Victoria perks up. "Why? Are you looking for something?"

"Well, more like someone. I'm sure you know her. Chloe Elizabeth Price? That's who I've been looking for."

She bites her lips. "The name is vaguely familiar to me, but it's not bringing up a face."

"Oh. Don't worry about it." Max says disappointed. She knows this means Victoria doesn't know where Chloe is. "It's been a search and I don't have many clues to begin with, but I will keep trying."

"I'm sorry. I really do want to help."

"It's not your fault. Don't worry." She tries to puff up a little trying to be funny. "I'm tough, Victoria."

"You are. After all, you're…" Victoria says a little breathlessly and wide eyed. "Max Caulfield. So unbelievable."

The look in her eyes made Max distinctly uncomfortable. There is something strange in it and it gives her the same feeling she got from Ms. Grant.

"Victoria, I have a question. When you first saw me today, your reaction was…really extreme. Thing is that I got the same reaction from others who know me too. Why, though? Everyone is acting like I'm a monster or something when they see me. What's going on?"

"Well, Max, it is only natural considering the circumstances around you. You can't blame us for acting so surprised after seeing someone we haven't seen for twenty years."

"What circumstances? Even if I decided not to visit for two decades, I still don't see why people
should scream bloody murder just from seeing me. Did I do something bad?"

The blonde woman furrows her eyes in confusion then they slowly widen in realization.

"You…don't know. My God, you don't know what happened twenty years ago."

Dread rises in her. "Victoria, what happened twenty years ago?"

The blonde opens her mouth then closes it again. She takes a deep breath and her shoulders slump heavily. At last, she whispers.

"On October 10th, 2013, Max Caulfield died."
The enticing aroma of pancakes wakes Max from her sleep.

She groans slightly feeling a strain of headache. Smacking her lips a little, she drags herself out of bed and goes to the bathroom to wash her face and straighten her hair a little. Feeling a little better, she goes downstairs into the kitchen where Victoria already prepared two heaping plates of pancakes.

The blonde woman smiles hesitantly at her then place one plate in front of a seat and gestures to Max before walking away. She sits at the table and Victoria returns with her own plate and two glasses of milk for them both.

She eats first taking a small bite from her own pancakes. Max follows shortly afterwards, but her heart wasn't really into it.

After Victoria's revelation about her…death, Max went into a sort of shock. She excused herself and went to bed, but much of her sleep was uneasy as the questions began to pile up. She attempted to use her phone to search for answers only to remember it wouldn't turn on. So that left having to find information through other ways.

"Victoria…" Max begins uneasily. "About what you told me yesterday."

The blonde looks at her sadly and pushes her plate away sighing, "I knew these questions would come up. No one can hear news like that and not have questions." She looks hesitant. "I…I was hoping you'd give me some time, though."

"But-!"

"Not a lot!" Victoria quickly adds. "Just…enough to gather myself. You have to remember that you bear an unreal resemblance to the actual article herself. Seeing you, talking to you, and just being around you is…it's hard to describe. It also doesn't help the way you act."

"What do you mean?"

"You act like you're her. Like you're actually Max Caulfield. You hear about her death and then you go into shock. I'm amazed you didn't even know it since you seem to know so much else about her."

Max blushes a little but doesn't say anything.

"And the problem is that I can't help but talk to you and think about you as really her when you do that. Yesterday, after you went to bed, I caught myself thinking it's sad that Max had to find out about her own death in such a way. I had to remind myself that...well, I'm sorry, but you're just not Max."

"Y-yes, I understand."

Max couldn't blame her. She can't help acting like, well, herself and Victoria can't help remembering that she should be dead.

"Don't get me wrong. It feels really nice to see you – like talking to an old friend you haven't seen in
decades. But it also unearthed a lot of unpleasant feelings and memories for me."

"Unpleasant?"

She bites her lips. "That's not the right word. It... it feels bad, but not 'bad' bad. More like the sort of painfulness that comes from doing something good. Like a good jog or applying hydrogen peroxide to a wound. Do you understand, Max?"

"I think so."

"Still, good or not, it's... a little painful for me too and I'm having trouble..." Victoria sighs unhappily. "I'm sorry for being like this. I should help you, but I'm doing the opposite. I'm not setting a good example either."

"Victoria... stop." Max sighs. "I get it. I know it isn't easy. I'm... I'm going to be here for a while anyway, so I'll just ask later. For now, it's more important for me to find Chloe."

That was only half the truth. The questions burns deeply inside of her and she wanted to know, but seeing Victoria so unhappy and ashamed – for reasons she can't discern – made her feel the need to comfort the woman. Hopefully, she'll get the answers she wants soon and if all it took to make the other happy is simply waiting, she can do it.

"Thank you, Max. I already owe so much to you."

Max looks uneasily around at the house Victoria is letting her stay in and at the large plate of pancakes. She can't really agree that Victoria owes her.

"Which is why I hope you won't hold it against me for what I'm about to ask." Victoria looks up and quickly adds. "You can say no and I won't be upset at all. It's just... I've wanted to show you this for so many years."

"You wanted to show me something for years?"

She blushes. "Oh, sorry, I meant, uh, the other Max Caulfield. I wanted to show her for so long and since you are a bit of her expy, I figure I could show you. Of course, that's if you're interested."

Victoria is so hesitant but also looks so excited. Max smiles a little at the sight knowing the blonde is probably trying her hardest to contain her feelings.

"What is it?"

Licking her lips, Victoria leans forward. "I'm holding an exhibit tonight. I've been advertising it for a week now and it's going to happen. You've already seen some of the pieces at my art house, but there's a few other special pieces. I want you to see my exhibition."

"The exhibition is important to me." She gets up and gestures around. "This is my life now. This is the person I grew up to be. I'm so much more than what everyone once know me as and I want the world to know that."

She lowers her arms. "At Blackwell, I didn't look at this – all of this – as anything more than a road. A road to wealth, power, and fame. I believed that you learn and explore for the sake of getting more things and becoming more influential. The art world is cut throat and I wanted to be cut throat enough to not just survive but succeed."

"That view worked for the longest time. One day, though, I spoke to someone I respected deeply and
he told me that he likes to anonymously create works for a small group of people he associates with mainly by letter. He also critiques their works offering advice. For a group that is entirely amateurs."

"Max, this man is renowned. He regularly gets paid huge sums just to give two hour speeches. The idea that he's doing this kind of thing in the little spare time he had was baffling to me. It didn't fit into my idea of how the world works. I outright asked him why."

She smiles proudly. "He shrugged and said because he loves it."

"Such a simple thing to say, but it stuck with me for years. Slowly, I began to ask myself why I did all this and, somehow, 'love' never came up as a reason. Never in the way it should anyway. Somewhere along the way, it became all about materialism to me."

"So I reached deep inside myself-" Victoria touches her chest. "-and I asked what I wanted that money and connections couldn't get me. The answer? I wanted everyone who knew me as an artist to see the real art I create from the soul instead of the mind. Because the one from the mind is just for money; the one from the soul is for love."

Max stares at Victoria in disbelief. The woman laughs slumping into a chair besides her. She grins uneasily after her speech falls away.

"It took a number of years for me to come to that conclusion, Max. Even to my ears, it sounds stupid as hell. Every time I do it, though…I walk away feeling a little more complete. As if the shell that comprises 'Victoria Chase' is slowly stripping away."

"This all started only seven years ago. Today, I've evolved into who you see now. I've shown a lot of people the art I created, that I've accepted from others, and that I pleaded to be shown at my art house. Some like it, others not so much. I'm happy they've seen it all the same, though."

"And-" Victoria glances at her a little. "-now I have the opportunity to show someone who I thought would never be able to see the real me. Or at least a very close simile of her."

"So Max, do me the honor of coming to my exhibition?"

There is a moment of silence in which Max is very indecisive. Truth is that she didn't want to do much more than continue her search for Chloe.

Going to an art exhibition does sound fun and it might be interesting as a casual trip. Thing is that Victoria makes this sound like anything but casual. It sounds like she wants to bare her soul to Max and have her pass judgment – something she's very uncomfortable doing.

On the other hand, the whole invitation to stay with her, the food, the truth about what happened to her. Going to the exhibition would be a way to pay Victoria back…

Right then, Max knew what her answer would be already. As much as her insides churn with anxiety over what Victoria may expect of her and whether she can provide it, the idea of refusing seem so utterly ungrateful that she couldn't do it.

"Of course, Victoria. I'll be happy to."

A bright smile lights the blonde's face. "I knew you'd say that! Well, I was a little afraid you'd refused, but the real Max would have said yes so, naturally, you would too."

Max smiles uneasily hoping she isn’t sweating.
"The exhibit opens at 7PM so feel free to stay here until then. When the time comes, I'll come back to pick you up."

"Actually, Victoria." Max says. "I would like to continue my search for Chloe, so I'll head out and I can walk to the exhibition later tonight."

The blonde gives her a concerned look. "Walk? Alone? Do you even have any method to contact me or the police if something happens?"

"Uh, well, I have a cell phone, but it's not working."

Victoria frowns. "You also told me you have no money. So no buses or taxis?"

"...no."

"Max, you are your own woman now and I respect you. However, please have concern for my feelings and do whatever it is you need to do safely."

"What do you mean?"

"Come with me."

Putting the plates away, the two head out and Victoria drives them around for an hour – why isn't there a damn Walmart in this city? – to go to a few specific stores.

The first is a mobile store where Victoria bought a smartphone along with a service plan. She adds the new number to her contact list before handing the phone to Max insisting that she keeps it handy at all times so that she can reach anyone if needed and Victoria can reach her.

Funny enough, the smartphone is a cheap $50 model…but it looks far better than the one Max actually owns that cost hundreds. She can actually use this phone to search the Internet and probably much more. Future technology is amazing.

Afterwards, they walk to a convenience store where Victoria buys her a Muni pass for an unlimited number of public transport rides. Finally, the blonde insisted on driving Max to a place she deems a safer area before allowing Max to exit the car and only after handing her a spare key to her house. Even then, she stopped Max again.

"Before you go, take this." She holds out a credit card.

"Victoria, this is too-"

"It's not too much. I insist on it. Unless you're planning to buy a car or something with it, I'll be able to handle the expenses fine. Without it, how else are you going to eat? Or if an emergency comes up and you need money, where would you get it?"

"Still, this is just...you're being too nice."

"Consider it payment for coming to my exhibition, which means a lot to me."

"Victoria..."

"Please, Max."

Uncertain and feeling overwhelmingly indebted, Max reaches out and takes the credit card. With that, Victoria nods in appreciate, then gets into her car and drives off throwing glances behind all the
while.

Max sighs wondering if this is also Victoria's method of apologizing for all the bullying or if this is truly how she is as a person. It is unbelievably generous, especially if she hasn't come to truly believe Max is who she says she is.

She takes the credit card and Victoria nods in appreciation before driving away. Tucking the card carefully into her jeans, Max walks over to the nearest bus stop and gets onto the first one that arrives. Seeing as she doesn't know where to go, going anywhere seems fine.

So she sits on the bus and stares out the window looking at everyone that passes. Several hours of this later, she curses the situation. She feels like she's back on that bus trip from Arcadia Bay to San Francisco and the results, so far, have proven about as successful as her walking search yesterday.

Not that she ever had much hope of success to begin with. If she were to do the same kind of search in Arcadia Bay, she would probably have little chance of finding a person too…and San Francisco is far larger than Arcadia Bay.

With this realization, she gets the idea to head to places that resemble hers and Chloe's favorite places in Arcadia Bay.

Using the city map she got yesterday as a guide, she uses the muni to travel to a number of potential locations. The first being a picturesque hiking area called Lands End situated beside the Pacific Ocean. The place bore resemblance to their favorite hangout at the lighthouse of Arcadia Bay, except, again, much larger.

Not seeing anyone resembling Chloe there, she then travels to an actual lighthouse. The guide points to a historic lighthouse with hiking trails called 'Point Bonita'. Getting there required a lengthy ride (that wasn't covered by the muni passport Victoria got her) plus a bit of hike. Once there, she smiles lightly at the fairly photogenic area looking towards the Golden Gate Bridge and the scenic views above the waters. She wishes she had her camera with her.

So Point Bonita, as promised by the map, offered great views. Unfortunately, it didn't offer Chloe meaning Max quickly lost interest and started the lengthy trip back.

Back in the city, she looks up at the sky, notes how late it is, and searches the guide one last time to look for one last type of location: a junkyard. Unsurprisingly, the map didn't list any junkyards for visitors to go see. So Max is consequently at a loss.

She ended up sitting down near a fountain watching the various street buskers that litter the streets of San Francisco. Her eyes lazily trail the crowds hoping to see a familiar face, but the effort is futile.

Lifting her right arm, she looks down at her hand. She hasn't thought about her powers since what happened yesterday in Arcadia Bay, but it now seems like another gigantic problem she doesn't know how to solve.

Hesitantly, she concentrates and tries to exert force. She shouldn't have to; before, her powers would come to life at will and with no effort. However, she gets the feeling that she'll need to try harder this time. So she concentrates.

Inside her chest, warmth arises. It is a slight, almost ethereal feeling which resembles the feeling of her heart being tugged at. It sends Max into despair. That is not how it should feel.

Under normal circumstances, the 'warmth' should be like a burn that grows more intense the longer she uses her power. It shouldn't also feel slight, ethereal, or like 'tugging', it should feel like
deceptively calm tsunami spiraling in place that, if not controlled, will explode outwards. Instead, contained entirely within her, it spreads through her body wreaking havoc, especially in her head.

This light tugging doesn't even feel like a shadow of her former powers. Instead, it feels like a poor imitation that fails miserably at what it tries to copy.

It also has little noticeable effect. The world distorts with various lights becoming blurry, but nothing is happening. Everybody and everything is still moving normally. She tries even harder letting out a sound of exertion. It makes no difference.

Her arm drops and she stares at the floor in a daze. Why aren't her powers working?

She would think it involves her time traveling to the future, but why? When she went to the past or even the alternative world, her powers still worked perfectly. How is traveling to the future different?

Max juggles the thoughts and theories in her head trying to figure it out. Eventually, though, a thought occurs to her as she realizes there is one significant difference. Every other time, she essentially took over the body of another her and used it. This time, the other her is dead.

Perhaps her powers require her to utilize a pre-existing body to work? Or…perhaps all that time, she hadn't actually used her powers but the powers of the body she took over? Is it possible that in all times and in all universes, Max has the power to control time and just didn't know it?

The questions, doubts, and confusion continue without answer and her powers remain useless.

When the sky begin to darken, Max checks the phone Victoria got her, and sees that it's nearing the time for the exhibition to open. The thought had lingered in the back of her mind the entire day but it had been pushed aside for her search.

With the day over and the search at an end, that thought comes to the forefront and the dread and anxiety that remained in the background intensifies appropriately. Max prays fervently that no one – especially no one famous and/or intending to put her in a newspaper – is going to approach her.

Glancing at her right hand again, she gets up and walks to the bus sign. One appears a moment later and she is on her way.

By the time she arrives, the exhibition had been opened for at least thirty minutes already. Even before it nears, she can see the front area is packed with vehicles and The Victoria Space is alight with light, music, and voices. It took some effort to get herself off the bus.

There is a small line leading up to the door which were guarded by two security officers and Emily Ruby sitting at a desk checking guest names against a register book. Outside the door is a clear sign stating 'private party' and 'invited guests only'. So unlike the pre-showings, the actual exhibition is only allowed to selected people. Even the front window where one can normally see the entire art house through has been blocked by classy drapes.

Max shuffles to the back of the line behind a few other people. She is soon joined by two well dressed men. Around her, the people were chatting between themselves about topics unrelated to the exhibition, though she does hear snippets involving it.

Not that she'd understand anything if anyone seriously get into the topic of art. She likes photography and those who know her says she's good at it, but, as Mr. Jefferson (and her grades) have shown repeatedly, she doesn't quite have mastery of the history, subtle techniques, and application of the field. She wouldn't be a good conversationalist or listener.
When her turn arrives, she approaches the check-in desk where Emily gives her a conflicted look uncertain on how to perceive Max after their encounter yesterday. Her clothing tonight is equally as bombastic as the one she wore yesterday. This one is a dress where the sides are a classy shimmering sapphire shade but the inside is a chaotic change. The inside contains bands of colors from top to bottom ranging from a bloody red to an inviting teal.

"Like this dress too, Max Caulfield?" Emily asks pleasantly though there is a hint of caution underneath her voice. "I also made it myself."

Max nods carefully. "Does this one have a message too?"

"Of course. See the sides that are a single, distinctly pleasant color that shines? That represents our public image and how we present ourselves to others. Calm, cool, collected, and always pleasant to be around. The insides – a multitude of varying colors – represent our true selves and how we're made of a complex series of thoughts and emotions. Most of which aren't pleasant to others."

Emily gives a light smile. "Considering the circumstances, I thought it is a fitting dress."

"My God." Max thinks to herself. "Does she dress like this all the time? How long does it take her to get ready to leave in the morning?"

"But enough of that. I'm glad you've arrived. Your name is not on the register, but Victoria specifically told me you were coming and to get you to come to her office right away. So Max, don't make me plead?"

"Oh no, I'll go immediately."

Emily smiles and nods to the security officers who parts to let her pass. Max quickly shuffles away feeling Emily's eyes on her as she leaves.

She was all too happy to get away. The moment Emily mentions how the owner of the art house seems to have made her some sort of VIP immediately got the attention of everyone within earshot and she could see them glancing at her curiously. She didn't need that kind of anxiety.

Walking past the chatting guests and up the roped off stairwell. As it turns out, Victoria's office is empty and she stops in confusion wondering if Victoria is actually downstairs. Hearing noises from a nearby room down, though, Max leaves the office and tries for the door where the sound is coming from.

Inside is a series of additional art pieces around the room. Victoria, off to the side adjusting some small sculptures, turns to look at her then jumps up in shock. She quickly rushes over and forcefully shuffles the both of them outside the room firmly shutting the door.

"No, no, no, Max, you can not go into that room yet!" She says distressed. "That room holds the showpieces and has to be shown appropriately. You didn't see anything, did you?"

"N-no, I was just looking for you."

Victoria sighs in relief. "Alright, good, that's good." She listens to the voices from downstairs. "The exhibition is three hours and you're only a little late, so we still have plenty of time." Her eyes widen a little. "Wait, your face is a little dirty. Hold on."

Before she can comprehend what was going on, Victoria pulls a handkerchief out, wets it with her tongue, then proceed to carefully wipe Max's cheeks. The sheer surprise of the situation keeps Max from reacting.
The blonde inspects her face, then nods in satisfaction. "Alright, come, I want to introduce you to everyone."

Max resists weakly as Victoria forcefully pulls her along downstairs. Searching, she finds who's she looking forward, and drags Max along. They walk up to a well dressed man and woman.

"Geri, Angie, how are you two?" The three greets each other warmly and chats a moment before Victoria pushes Max forward. "I want to introduce you both to a friend of mine. Her name is Max Caulfield. She's a phenomenal photographer who's still working on her technique, but shows a lot of promise."

'Geri' and 'Angie' awes and greets her, though Max is just trying to keep herself from running and hiding. They ask her questions – hard questions – regarding her presumed path to photography superstardom and Max is just barely able to keep from making herself look like a complete idiot.

Victoria thanks her friends then pulls her away to her immense relief. Problem is that the blonde woman takes Max to another group of people. Then another group. Then another. All the while introducing her using 'extremely talented', 'up and coming artist', and other wonderfully embarrassing descriptions.

It takes everything in her to keep from vomiting. She tries to resist more and get Victoria to stop, but her resistance weakens with each introduction until she's just barely above the level of a zombie. By that point, she notices numerous stares and catches snippets of conversations involving her name.

At last, the blonde pauses at the refreshment table to get a glass of wine and Max gratefully tries to get her breathing and heart under control. She thinks about informing Victoria that she's feeling sick, which is now true, and that she needs to head out.

When she turns to her, though, she sees Victoria looking off somewhere seeming like she's mentally not there. At Max's gaze, the blonde comes back to attention giving a small smile. Surprisingly, her figure deflates a little and her voice is weaker.

"Thank you for coming, Max. You're making this night much better for me. I know it's been tough for you. I would like to make one more introduction, if you'll just bear with me. This next person is really special to me, so try to be nice, yes?"

She points and Max follows her finger trying to locate who she's referring to. Her eyes stop on a single figure examining an artwork.

It is a woman with shoulder-length dark hair. She is wearing a dark blazer with an elaborate design. Possibly a business one? Her skirt is similar suggest they are a set. Max feels tension course through her at the sight of this woman. There's something about her that puts her on edge.

Possibly it's her face. Her lips are set in a tight line and her eyes are slim and narrow, though her upwards lifted eyebrows suggests she isn't actually angry.

The woman's eyes catch that of Max's and Victoria's. Putting on a smile, she saunters over nodding in acknowledgement at Victoria and giving a smile to Max. Turning to Victoria, her smiles widen a little.

"Victoria, this exhibition is something else. You've actually put effort into this one."

Max tenses at the backhanded compliment. She turns her attention to Victoria and is surprised to see she demurs offering a smile and nodding. There is no way she didn't recognize that for what it is.
"T-thanks, Katherine. I did put a lot of effort into this exhibition."

As the conversation continues, Max stays out of it but she slowly becomes more heated. Something about this woman rubs her incredibly the wrong way.

What's obvious is that she's very insulting. Most of the talk between her and Victoria is bland, but every now and then, she throws in a thinly veiled insult. Furthermore, there's the manner in which she acts. She hardly pays attention and has on a bored expression while barely listening.

At one point, she even rolls her eyes when Victoria describes how she likes to help upcoming artists and how they will one day contribute to the art world.

"Perception is one thing." Katherine nods in response to a comment. "I can't say one way or another I understand much of what these types preach. As you know, I'm more into literature than painting and sculpting. I don't get these at all."

"Art is something to be understood individually." Victoria insists. "Not everyone has to understand it the same way or understand it at all. Sometimes, it's just about being touched emotionally or intellectually."

"I get that. I have to think the same when writing." She nods. "But I find there's a tried and true formula for how to achieve it. I have a head for numbers, Victoria. I understand connecting a line to achieve an end result. Your exhibition is…cute, but I would only understand its value by its pricetag."

That makes Victoria upset. "Art is about the soul. You can't express that with dollars and cents. Some great works have sold for very little in the market before being recognized. If we let cash registers get in the way, we may never recognize some truly beautiful pieces. Money isn't everything."

The woman snorts. "We're in San Francisco, Victoria. Walk along Larking Street at night and tell me if the waves of homeless sleeping there agree with you. Art is great and all, but you can't be a charity case forever." Her lips twist a little. "After all, you wouldn't want to sleep alongside them."

"You're awfully rude for an invited guest."

Max cuts in heatedly at this latest comment. Victoria pales a little.

"M-Max!"

Katherine stares lazily at the little girl seething beside Victoria. Max returns the stare defiantly even as Victoria tries to subtly prod her. Katherine looks her up and down giving a conspicuously judgmental look. When she finishes, she merely continues staring silently, though the upward quirk of her mouth indicates her amusement.

Max continues, "Who are you to be judging other people's works? Or talking about other people becoming homeless like that? I'm amazed Victoria calls you special." Katherine glances at Victoria who looks away flushed. "You just seem like a bitch to me. Who the hell do you think you are?"

Her face remains unchanged. "Who am I? I'm Katherine Henley. Author, Socialite, philanthropist, and a bit of a multimillionaire too." She looks Max over again. "I'm well known all over this country but I'm not surprised someone of your, ah, 'means' does not know people like me."

"I tend to avoid assholes in general." Max bites back. "Maybe instead of spending your money on philanthropy and clothes, you should buy some kindness."
The insults are waved away without effort. Katherine looks to Victoria. "Are these the kinds of friends you have now? I didn't think you were putting in so little effort, Victoria. No respect at all, especially considering I'm a patron."

Max pauses hearing this. It occurs to her she may have cost Victoria greatly if she just insulted someone who supports her art house financially. Shame washes over her even as it is held back by the still burning anger.

"…do you not know who this is, Katherine?"

The woman's confidence slips just a moment hearing the tone in Victoria's question. Her face also has a curiously blank expression as if there is a certain expectation in them. Katherine quickly glances at Max again this time looking more carefully.

For a moment, she thought that the angry girl may have been someone extraordinary, but she is positive she doesn't recognize her. She looks like a kid, though. Could she be the daughter of someone?

"I'm at a loss. My circles tend to be exclusive." She says blandly. "So enlighten me."

Victoria turns Max. "Do you recognize Katherine, Max?" Shaking her head, she mutters a no. "Alright, I think I'll offer an introduction."

Her lips trembling, she begins, "Katherine and me go a long way back. We were classmates in the same graduating class from Blackwell Academy in Arcadia Bay, Oregon. We, uh, kind of know each other from some encounters." This earns her a withering look from Katherine. "You actually know her too, Max, from the same year."

Katherine scowls, "She knows me? From the same year? Have you finally lost it, Victoria? She's obviously way younger than we are. She couldn't have been with us at Blackwell."

This merely earns her another look from the blonde. Her composure loosens as she grows infuriated.

"She…I…treated her very badly back then. I treated a lot of people badly, but she was among the worst…and I feel horrible for it." Victoria continues hesitantly. "I can't say why. Not coherently, anyway. If you were to ask, all I could remember about myself back then was that I did not like her overly religious attitude and her abstinence campaign."

The art house and all its guests around them fade. Max snaps up staring at Katherine with horror. Seeing her eyes, Katherine becomes even more confused and she looks between her and Victoria trying to get a clue of where this is going.

"You…no…" Max chokes. "You're Kate Marsh."

"That's Katherine, thank you." She says immediately having grown used to correcting anyone who still refers to her by her old name. "I also haven't been Marsh for ten years now."

Her eyes grow cold and calculating. "This is funny. No one has referred to me by that name for a very long time. Even my own family – the ones who still speaks to me – knows to call me exclusively by Katherine. You, though…you talk like you know me. Personally."

"Who are you?" Katherine asks bluntly. No answer comes. "Victoria, who is she? What is her name?"

Victoria, however, is fixated on Max's increasingly distraught face. A wide range of emotions is
going through her eyes as she comes to the realization that the woman she disliked so much is, or used to be, a friend.

When she saw that neither recognized the other, she knew that something would happen when she introduce them. She just wasn't sure what. She now isn't sure it was a good idea to do so either.

"Wait a minute." Katherine's eyes open a bit. "Your face…I know you from somewhere. I had an inkling in my mind that you looked familiar when I first saw you, but I didn't think anything of it. Everybody looks the same to me."

"Now, though, it's like there's a voice in the back of my mind saying I know you. That I know you. Damn it, who are you?"

Max runs. Behind her, Victoria calls out as Katherine tries to argue with her. She makes her way through the crowds of people nearly bowling over a few people when she rushes out the door.

Inside the party, various people are staring at the retreating figure wondering what happened. Victoria swallows thinking how badly this all went. Normally, she would stay to try to get the exhibition smooth again, but she needs to go after Max. The exhibition is important, but that girl is a once in a lifetime event. She can't let this go lest she might live forever in regret.

She rushes up to the door stopping to talk to her shocked assistant. "Emily, could you lead the exhibition from this point on? Do the best you can. I need to go and I might not make it back until it's too late. Thanks."

Victoria runs out without waiting for a response leaving her assistant sputtering in confusion. At the other end of the room, Katherine seethes at being ignored, but her mind is also spinning. With each moment, that voice in her mind is needling her more and more.

There's something about that girl that seems to trigger a dormant memory in the back of her mind. She doesn't understand, though, as she's positive she never met her.

Yet the feeling of familiarity won't go away.

"Goddamn it." She hisses quietly.

Gathering her bearings, she leaves the exhibition. She wasn't really that interested to begin with anyway.

With her departure, the murmurs around the room seem to increase as everyone connects her, Victoria, and the strange new girl they've all been hearing about. Emily does a mad rush around the room telling the caterers to offer more wine and to try to get the subject back to about art instead of whatever rumors is popping up.

"Mr. and Mrs. Adams, would you like more champagne? Please, I insist." She smiles to them before departing. "Ms. Yarding and, oh, Less, is that you? I hadn't realized you both knew each other! Here, have more wine, both of you." Another smile before rushing to the next group.

She is mostly successful at getting people off the subject. With little information to go on about what happened, most guests soon gets back to more interesting topics. Just as she came up to a man standing together with a woman, she gets the idea to open the 'special area' early. Victoria wanted to wait for the right time, but, as far as she can see, the right time has moved up.

"Thank you. This wine is exquisite." The man smiles at her as the woman sips from her own glass.
"Of course. We tried to get quality wine for our guests." Emily smiles pleasantly. "Now if you'll hold on just a moment, a special area shall be opened soon and I think you'll find it very satisfying to the senses. A real cornucopia of artistic vision. Please look forward to it."

"We wouldn't miss it for the world."

Emily nods and rushes off. The man chuckles a little.

"Excitable girl, isn't she?"

"Aren't they all, Mark? I hope her 'cornucopia of artistic vision’ isn't a load of hot air either. So far, I haven't seen too many things of interest. I can't imagine someone of your stature was impressed."

"Even I get surprised now and then, Jen." He smiles mysteriously. "Sorry to leave you for the night, but I have to go make a call."

He nods to her and leaves. Exiting The Victoria Space, he leans outside quickly making notes in his cell phone. Once completed, he makes a call.

"Hello, Bergey's? This is Mark Jefferson. I- yes, that's the address. I need to rent some equipment again. No, no, this is a special project so I'll need the better equips this time. Yes, send it to the usual place. Thank you."

He hangs up and leans back for a smoke.

No, the exhibition hadn't been that notable. He hadn't expected it to be. When he received an invitation from Victoria, he had thought to ignore it altogether but decided on a whim to go out of sheer ennui. To think that he would find what he did tonight…

He pulls out his wallet and takes out a small, neatly folded photo. It is a photo that was forwarded to him from an application. A photo that he has stared at longingly for years with anger and feelings of lost opportunity.

"Max Caulfield. I thought I lost you forever that day. To think that I would find someone who looks so much like you and that she would fall right into my arms."

He had been staring at a sculpture nearly bored out of his mind when whispers begin to reach him of a special someone that apparently has connection to the manager, Victoria. He put a minor effort into searching this person out when his eyes landed on her. From the moment it did, he couldn't take his eyes away.

Mark saw her go upstairs, waited patiently for her to come back down, then watched her encounter with the ever abrasive Katherine Henley. When she ran off, he almost ran after her himself scared to death that she might disappeared, but held himself back when he saw Victoria go.

He can't procrastinate on this, though. He needs to start making plans and figure out where to go from now. Something is coming back to life inside of him and he knows what it wants. Getting into his car, he drives off.

At the end of Pier 1 by the bay, Max sits on the floor wrapped in her own arms as she stares listlessly up at the night sky. She had been sitting here for an hour now trying to sort out her thoughts.

After she ran out, she jumped onto the first bus she saw and rode it with aim until she decides to get off at the piers going to the one with the least amount of people. Victoria will be arriving soon. After ignoring her calls repeatedly, she finally responded and told the blonde where she is when she
wouldn't let up asking.

She did not feel good. The revelation that Katherine Henley is better known to her as Kate Marsh does not sit well with her. Her mind has been reeling trying to reconcile the girl she knew with the woman she just met. How did it happen? For what reason did Kate go down this path in life?

What bothers her is that she did not recognize Kate at all. Not even in the slightest.

There are certainly a lot of changes. She dyed her hair darker and uses an entirely different hairstyle, she dresses very differently, and her entire demeanor went through a complete upheaval. Even her face changed dramatically having become thinner and harsher.

All the same, Max felt she should have at least got a sense of recognition. It feels shameful that she didn't. It also feels frightening. She almost didn't recognize Victoria, she completely didn't recognize Kate. What if…what if Chloe is the same way? What if she had walked right past her during her search and hadn't even realized it?

She shivers a little. Wiping away at her face, Max then pulls her hand back to stare at it blankly. Without thought or expectation, she extends it outward.

Once again, the warmth inside rises. Nothing else happens. Max keeps her hand extended not even having the will to pull it back.

More tears slip down her face as Kate's…Katherine's harsh eyes flashes through her mind. Another memory simultaneously appears – a stupid, meaningless one. It is of her and Kate sipping two plastic cups of peppermint tea in her room and laughing while watching Alice, her rabbit, run around after being let out of her cage.

Then unbidden, Chloe's face appears in her mind. It is of her face after they reunited and, despite the years, her eyes looked at Max with barely contained love. This memory segued into the kiss she shared, well, 'stole' from Chloe. This time, though, Chloe did not pull away.

A pang that had been in her heart now pounds painfully when she thinks that she might never find Chloe.

Something catches her eyes. Something awfully bright. Max looks up through the tears and sees that the entire world is a blur. Every source of light – street lamp, stars, the moon – blurs with an intense brightness and light trails behind them as if she is seeing their motion through a high speed camera.

She lifts her still extended hand higher towards the heavens and, briefly, the light tugging inside her chest almost feels stronger and…and then another tugging. A second one in a different direction. The surprise makes her lose her breath and, in an instant, it all disappeared and the world returns to normal.

Max drops her now aching arm. Silently, she places her head against her knees as exhaustion overtakes her. It wasn't until the sound of hurried footsteps gets her attention that she lifts in head to look into the worried face of Victoria. The blonde leans down in front of her.

"Max, lets go home."

Opening and closing her mouth, she seems at a loss on how to respond to the simple request. Her head feels like it's full of cotton.

"Max." Victoria continues. "You just need some food. It'll make you feel better. Come home and I'll cook you something, alright?"
Tears leak out of her eyes again. She couldn't stop herself from muttering. "You...you're what Kate should be like. I don't understand anything. Why, why, why, why?"

"Stop it. Don't cry." Victoria wipes at her eyes calmly. "I'll explain everything. I promise. We just need to get you home first and into a nice, warm bed, alright?"

Victoria pulls her up and Max allows her to do so. Leading the way along the plank, the blonde keeps muttering words of comfort though neither knew how much it is helping.

Not for the first time, Max wishes Chloe was here with her.
Max somehow felt worse after waking up.

Her mouth and throat is dried out and her head aches like there's something trying to get out. She pushes herself out of bed groaning and trudges towards the bathroom to shower.

As the water washes over her, she hears the sounds coming from downstairs indicating that, again, Victoria woke up before her. She bites her lips knowing what will come up once she goes downstairs and a part of her is afraid. She still wants to know everything, but seeing Kate- Katherine yesterday has instilled in her a dread of what may have happened.

Max lifts her hand and stares at it. The dread has been amplified by a slowly dawning realization that she may have to live with this reality. Her powers, for whatever reason, aren't working. She can't control time anymore and, likely, this means she can't jump through photos/drawings either. If she can't do that... that means she's stuck here.

What about her family? What about her friends? What about Chloe? How will she survive in this world? Can she even get a job considering she has no documents whatsoever? Getting replacement legal documents would be impossible seeing as all of them would indicate she should be a 38-year-old woman, not an 18-year-old girl.

So aside from Victoria, she has no one to turn to and she may be in a situation where she can't even properly live in society. Not to mention all the possible changes that took place in the world over the last twenty years.

She's a stranger to this world and doesn't belong.

Max finishes the shower. Taking a deep breath at the top of the stairs, she heads down prepared to face Victoria. Below, the other woman looks at her cautiously and gestures to a table where a plate of eggs and fruits await her.

She sits down and eats a few apple slices, though her hunger is muted. A few minutes later, she is joined by Victoria with her own plate. The blonde takes a few bites glancing at Max now and then. When the silence continues to stretch, Victoria places her fork down and clears her throat. "Max, I'm ready to explain. I know I took too much time to do so, but I appreciate you giving me time to get ready. Well, I'm ready now. Let me start from the beginning."

"Twenty years ago on October 10th – I'll never forget that day – I was hanging around my dorm. I think I was with some friends. I received a text from someone in the Vortex Club telling me that something was up and I left the dorm to see figuring someone was embarrassing themselves."

She spoke in hesitant tones and the occasional stutter trying to recall the events as they happen. As the story continues, Victoria's voice became clearer and more assured as if the events were becoming more vivid.

"Even before I got to the front of Blackwell, there was a huge crowd and a few people were yelling about something I didn't understand. I still didn't really get it. I thought maybe it was a fight or a bad breakup or something. It only occurred to me that something was really wrong when I saw Katherine lying against a tree sobbing."
A look comes over Victoria’s eyes. "It struck me at the time when I saw that. Of course, I’ve seen people cry before but there was something about the way she was doing it that told me it wasn’t something normal. I've never forgot it."

Shaking off the memory, she returns to the story.

"Then the ambulance came and rushed into the middle of the crowd. I finally realized what was happening. They stayed there for a few minutes before a stretcher was brought out. In that stretcher, I saw her on it. Her face was white and she wasn't responding."

"No one knew why. Some people were saying heart attack, others said seizure, others said stabbed, some said she just suddenly collapsed. I probably could have heard every possible reason if I had listened."

Victoria takes a stuttering breath. "I don't think I really believe you were dead at first. I thought maybe in a day or a week, you'd be back to annoy the hell out of me. But then the next day, Mark Jefferson announced that she was pronounced dead at the hospital. I think I became pretty numb after that."

Max closes her eyes in pain. So that's what happened after she traveled through Daniel's drawing. Her body just lost its spirit – it lost her.

Regret fills her realizing what she must have put everyone through. Warren, Brooke, and Daniel must have been horrified. Kate must have been heartbroken. Even Victoria was hit hard and she spent twenty years in guilt until Max, er, her ‘doppelganger’ arrives to give her spiritual relief.

"Victoria, what happened afterwards?"

The blonde runs a hand through her bangs. "I don't know much of what happened. I heard that someone – a friend of hers, I guess – lost it at the hospital where you were at and she had to be physically removed by the cops, then her mom had to go get her from the police station."

"Our- my teacher, Mark Jefferson, took it especially hard. We all saw it during class and, when your funeral was held, he was there too and anyone could see how upset he was. After, he became more subdued in class and less inspired. Finally, after our class graduated, he resigned from Blackwell and left. All because you were no longer there."

"God, he loved you."

Max would have thought Victoria would be more annoyed. After all, Jefferson's obvious favoritism towards her certainly annoyed the past her very frequently. Now, though, the memory seems to amuse her if the small smile on her face is any indication.

Then again, it is pointless to be annoyed about the dead, isn't it?

"Katherine…" The smile falls of Victoria's face. "Katherine sort of disappeared for about a month. She didn't attend class and, aside from the odd ghostly appearance in the dorms, no one saw her outside. All Mark would say was that she needed time for emotional healing."

It bothered Max greatly how Victoria keeps referring to 'Kate' as 'Katherine', but she supposes Victoria can't help it. Katherine said she hasn't been 'Kate Marsh' for a decade and the blonde must be used to her current incarnation.

"Then, a month after she stopped coming to class, she reappears…and she changed. The first changes were obvious. She didn't wear her religious memorabilia anymore. Her face also became
less…” She struggles to think of the right word. "less open. Even her clothes lack the familiarity of who she was."

"We were all too afraid to approach her. Surprisingly, we didn't have to. One day, a friend of mine, I think Taylor, came to me and told me Katherine came up to her. She wanted to join the Vortex Club."

Max freezes. She looks at Victoria in disbelief. "Kate- Katherine wanted to join the Vortex Club? But…but didn't she hate it?"

"I thought so too. When I went to talk to her, though, she insisted and said it would help her healing process to be around people, especially people who did not remind her of Max. I jumped at the chance to invite her in. Within a week, I was already beginning to regret my decision."

"Why? What happened?"

"She…well…” Victoria struggles to find words again. "I really don't know how to describe it. I guess I'll start with the little things. She was appearing with us more and more often just talking and trying to participate. We were walking on eggshells around her so we all held back from doing too much thinking she couldn't take it."

"A few days after she joined the club, she came into my room to ask about an upcoming party, and surprised me when I saw she had a cigarette in her mouth. I asked her about it because I knew she didn't smoke and she said she asked for it from one of the other members."

"From there, things just seem to escalate. At our first party after your, uh, Max's passing, she was already heavily drinking. I remember being pretty nervous about these changes and wondered if they were a good thing, but I was also blinded because I thought she was improving in other ways."

"She was talking to people. Often and to a lot of people. She seemed like she was everywhere. She also participated in contests and was doing more to get her resume out. I thought all of this was a good thing."

"I only became convinced this was all wrong when she had a public fallout with her family right on social media. It was bad. I came to talk about it and I thought she came back to her senses promising to mend things with her family. She even later showed me texts and photos that showed they reconciled. I didn't find out she fabricated it all until much later."

Max covers her mouth. This can't be Kate. This isn't her Kate.

"I don't understand, Victoria. Why? What was happening?"

A sigh. "I'm as confused as you are. She managed to get an interview with a publishing company and some potential interest in her artwork a little. Once she graduated, she left without a word to anyone. I didn't hear about her until many years later when I saw a TV show where she was interviewed."

"She…” Victoria pauses. "Before she left, I remember seeing her go through changes and that she never seem to be the same person or even have the same opinions. Her ideas went up and down and she seemed to cater her words specifically to who she was talking to. Like a chameleon."

Victoria leans back to take a deep breath. Then she continues, "I'm the only other person I know much about. After your- Max's passing, it seems like a sort of judgment was passed on me too. It didn't hit me right away, but gradually."
"I would notice your empty seat in class. I would see those kids you hang out with and notice their faces. Your dorm was also right across from mine. They had the door sealed off. Everywhere I went, I saw reminders of you and I couldn't help thinking."

"I began wondering what you would be doing if you were still alive. The kind of things you'd say. The way you'd react. How we would interact. Thinking about that made me uncomfortable. One night, I sat on my bed and thought to myself and it occurred to me that the only memory you had of me the day you die was of mockery and abuse. We were at a prestigious art school, we were both young artists, and we were even competing to show off our art to our famous teacher. Somehow, though, I don't think you ever really seen a single one of my work despite the fact that I always considered you, well, as sort of my rival."

This is it. This was why Victoria wanted Max to come to her exhibition so much. She wanted Max – or at least someone who looks like her – to see her as an artist.

"I think I viewed life as a game without no consequences or, well, consequences not caused by me anyway." Victoria continues. "I definitely did not cause your death…but, somehow, remorse gnawed at me anyway. Back then, I had imagined that, in the future, I would be rich and famous. I would come into a tiny art house owned by you to laugh mockingly at your work. I would even fund you as a sort of charity case and to make myself feel superior."

"The idea that you wouldn't even be alive didn't occur to me. When it happened and I was filled with regret, I saw that I didn't have to directly cause something to feel the consequences for it. I realized that my life may not be going the way I want it to go."

She sighs. "But I already put so much into myself. I still wanted to be rich and famous so I continued on the path I was on. It sounds crazy, but people are sometimes that way, Max. When you put so much of your soul into something – even something you realize is not good – it's hard to give it up."

"It took many years and a lot of disillusionment and exhaustion before I finally got the courage to change. It wasn't until much later that I was willing to do things this way."

The conversation dies off as Victoria finishes the story. The described events play out in Max's head and she tries to make sense of it and sort it out. The consequences of her actions are becoming more apparent and she feels worse for it.

She still needs to know more, though.

"What happened afterwards? Where is everyone now?"

Victoria swallows. "Well, you know where I am. You also saw Katherine. I met her again some years after her TV interview and I actually begged for her contact information. I wanted to keep in touch because, aside from Max Caulfield, she is one of the many, many people I feel regret about."

"As for Mark Jefferson, he still does photography work, though he goes places to places. He is currently in San Francisco too. I had invited him to my exhibition, though I'm not sure if he came or not."

Max wets her lips. "There's one more person. During your story, you said some girl lost it in the hospital and had to be dragged away? I think this girl is Chloe. Chloe Elizabeth Price. Do you know anything at all about her?"

The blonde hesitates. "I just don't know, Max. After you first told me about your search, I've been racking my mind trying to remember her because the name sounds vaguely familiar."
"Yesterday, I finally remembered a blonde that used to hang around a girl I used to know. She got kicked out of school and, eventually, we only saw her at all because she came around looking for a friend that went missing."

Max's eyes light up in recognition. "Yes! Yes, that's her! Chloe Price!" She calms herself. "Do you remember anything that could help me find her?"

Victoria shakes her head. "I'm sorry, Max. I don't know anything about her. We hardly even saw each other during school. I even only remember her at all because she used to be friends with a girl I used to know. Ra…? Ro…?"

"Rachel Amber?"

"Yes…yes, that's right. Rachel Amber."

She was disappointed that Victoria didn't know anything about Chloe, but the reference to Rachel made her remember the whole reason she did this to begin with. She wanted to know if the mystery behind her disappearance had been discovered. Then she could go back and tell Chloe giving her the closure she needs.

"Speaking of which, do you remember what happened with Rachel Amber?" Victoria gives her a confused look. "In 2013, she had disappeared from Blackwell and no one knows where she went. Police did a search, I think, but they came up with nothing. By chance, did they ever discover what happened to her?"

The look in Victoria's eyes told her the answer already. The blonde shakes her head sadly to indicate that, no, she never learned what happened to the girl.

Max leans back feeling the weight of everything on her. She can't used her powers and may be stuck here, she can't find Chloe and have no clue where to even start searching, and, now, the whole reason she came here may have been futile to begin with.

"Max? Are you okay?"

She wanted to laugh. "No, Victoria. I don't think I am." The blonde's face becomes alarmed. "Don't look like that. I'm just saying…it's…everything is so fucked for me right now. I don't know what to do."

A pause. "Well, I still want to find Chloe, but…I just don't know how."

Victoria touches Max's cheek. "Hey, chin up. When I get overwhelmed, I always try to take it one step at a time. I have your back, Max. You want to find your friend? Just get out there and look. Even if you don't find her right away, she'll still be there the next day waiting for you to arrive."

Max lays a hand against Victoria's. "Thanks, Victoria. I really owe you for all of this. I wish I could have known this side of you at Blackwell."

The blonde laughs lightly causing Max to look up. "At Blackwell. Max, you…I swear to God that it really feels like you are the real thing. I can't help talking to you and thinking of you like you are even if I know you can't possibly be."

Max smiles sheepishly. Victoria sighs and gets up.

"I have to go to work now. Will…you be okay if I leave now?"
She nods. "Yes. I'm going to go out and continue searching. I won't give up now, Victoria. I can't."

Victoria nods smiling. The two of them clean up their plates and depart. Victoria drops Max off at the nearest bus stop before they bid each other good-bye.

There, she leans against a pole running a hand through her hair looking at the passing vehicles. Mindless, she stares at the stores, vehicles, and people with only a nice looking white Porsche and Halloween-themed liquor store catching her attention.

Max feels the increasing enormity of what she wants to do, but reminds herself that giving up is not an option. Even if it takes forever, she must keep trying. She just needs time. At this point, that's what she has in abundance.

The bus arrives. Sighing, Max gets on and takes a seat beside a few other passengers near the back. Normally, she would keep her eyes glued to the window hoping to see Chloe, but, this time, she decides to do some research.

She takes out the cell phone Victoria bought for her and starts searching for information on Katherine Henley. A biography appears showing a photo of a younger Katherine standing beside a handsome, older man.

As the woman had informed her, Katherine is, in fact, a wealthy author, socialite, and philanthropist. Much of her recent projects involve opening a foundation to help women escape abusive homes and cancer awareness. She is also apparently scheduled for a part in an upcoming major motion picture – the latest in a string of film roles.

Her earlier successes all involve books. She had made a number of connections during college and used those connections to become a well known author. She published a number of novels each more successful than the last.

Later on, she acquired enough funds to open her own publishing house which became successful after she merged with a competitor. After her marriage to a successful hedge fund manager, she went into the stock market too and she opened a financial management company using both their well known names to achieve quick success.

Max stares up in wonder. 'Connections'? Opening a publishing house? A financial management company with a hedge fund husband?

She never realized her Kate was so driven and capable of such a wide range of talent. The Kate she knew was shy and loved to participate in charity. She also had a talent for drawing artwork. Max had always figured that her future involved social activism and maybe artistic works.

Returning to the biography, she reaches the uglier section. The controversies Katherine Henley garnered over the years. There have been a number of accusations against her. That her charity foundations misused its donations to fund her private projects and enrich friends, that some of her side projects used slave labor in third world countries, that she engaged in heinous bullying of some people through her lawyers. The list went on.

The biography ends saying that Katherine has a celebrated history and is widely regarded as one of the most successful women of her day.

Max puts down the cell phone to think the information over. Kate- Katherine has changed so much over the years. She is no longer the person Max once knew. She wanted to believe that Katherine is still a horrible person and the controversies she read seem to back her belief.
Kate's smiling face then appears in her head, though. That face so full of warmth and love that it glows and enlivens those who are lucky enough to witness it. Remembering that face, Max can't find it in her to think of Katherine that way. It's hard to think angrily about someone that you know personally. You know their struggles and their hardships too well.

Max hated what Katherine has become, but, at the same time, she feels a sense of pride that she achieved so much. She returns to the phone searching for 'Rachel Amber' this time hoping something, anything, will pop up.

When the bus arrives at the upper east and Max steps off, she is once again disappointed. She had a very hard time finding any news on Rachel at all and the few articles that popped up were from Oregon newspapers which relocated Rachel's disappearance to a few small articles. There were never any updates indicating the mystery had been solved.

She doesn't understand it. How does a girl in a small town where everyone knows each other disappear without a trace? In a country like America? She doesn't understand it.

Shaking off the disappointment, Max stares around the area to get her bearings. There were a few stores and some people around, but much of the area was quiet. She pauses a moment when she eyes the vehicles and notices another white Porsche. Nothing that special considering there are an extraordinary number of expensive cars in San Francisco, but it looks strangely similar to the last one she saw. Beyond it having the same color and being the same type.

Shrugging, Max picks a random direction and starts walking. There are a ridiculous amount of hills in this area and, before long, she finds herself panting and wiping sweat off her forehead despite the temperature being a little chilly. She had to stop a few times to take a breath.

It is during one of these stops that she happens to notice a white Porsche.

Tension immediately flows through her as she begins to get the idea that she's being followed. She begins walking again this time paying more attention to her surroundings. Even after thirty minutes, including taking many random turns, the Porsche is never too far behind.

Trying to outmaneuver it, she takes some one-way roads and other narrows paths. Eventually, she dodges onto a one way street leading uphill toward some sort of tower. It is a steep hill and she walks quickly all the way up leading her to run out of breath. At the top, she leans against the wall gasping trying to get her breath back. Then the Porsche reappears from the other direction.

She had it. Max turns towards the Porsche putting on her most vicious face and pointedly glares at it. She and the car face each other in a stare down that seem to go on. She gets more nervous wondering what will happen and the only thing keeping her from making a run for it is that they're in a public place in broad daylight. Meaning whoever is tailing her is unlikely to do anything too bold.

Even if there is actually no one else in the area beside her and whoever is in the car.

Just when she thought the stare down would continue, the Porsche begins backing into a parking spot. It shuts off and, to Max's great surprise, Katherine Henley steps outside. She stares at Max her face showing caution before she casually approaches.

The tension inside Max worsens as Katherine comes up, but the other woman merely leans against the wall beside her. She looks down in distaste at her clothes as if they're now dirty, but makes no move to change position.

After a few minutes, she speaks, "Victoria didn't tell me who you are. She ignored me that night at
her exhibition then, later, when I called her, she still refused to say." Her lips turned into a sneer. "Most of the time, if this happens, I would just forget it figuring it's not that important if I couldn't remember."

"Except I couldn't forget you. Once I realize you knew who I was, something in the back of my mind kept whispering that I knew you. It gnawed at me endlessly." Katherine says. "Just when I was about to lose my mind, I remember Victoria said you knew me from Blackwell. On that hunch, I looked through the photobook of my 2013 class."

Max swallows knowing where this is going already.

"Problem is that your face wasn't anywhere in our graduation photo. I decided to look through every photo in the book. Eventually, I found it. In the section titled 'We Miss You'."

Katherine turns to Max glaring hatefully. "This is some really fucking pathetic shit by Victoria. I don't know if this is some bullshit art project or if this is how she gets her rocks off, but I don't fucking appreciate it. I'm going to chew her ass out then I'm going to cut off all funding towards her little gallery."

Max scowls. "Victoria had nothing to do with this. I showed up at her place. She didn't even know I existed before I arrived."

"Right. So if I were to ask your name, it wouldn't be…"

She seems to have trouble saying it, so Max help. "Yes, my name is Max Caulfield."

"Of course. You just happened to look like my dead best friend and have the exact same name. You weren't hired by Victoria to fuck with me? To make me feel guilty and like a bitch because she's pissed off at me?"

"No, I wasn't. If you do feel bad, Katherine, it's because of…of this." Max says gesturing towards Katherine. This only makes her angrier. "What happened to you, Katherine? How could you have become this way?"

"What way is that? Successful? Happy? At the top of my career?"

"An angry woman who revel in mistreating others. You should be a kind person who treats everyone like a friend."

Katherine laughs. "Those kinds of people are the ones who ultimately get stepped on and abused. Don't you know? Heaven rewards the strong and ruthless while punishing the weak. You want proof? Look at me. She gestures towards herself. "This is strength, 'Max Caulfield'. This is what the world wants you to be and it rewards you for being it."

"I don't believe that for a second!" Max yells. "You used to be great person, Katherine. You helped the poor, you tried to live right, and you treated me like a real friend. This is supposed to be better? The person I knew would have tried to make the world better, not chase money. She had goodness."

"Goodness?" Katherine repeats mockingly. "I've donated tens of millions to charity, 'Max'. I still receive letters every day from little kids telling me how much I helped their families. I do more good in a single day now than I ever did in years back then."

"But you don't have to change to do all of that. You used to tell me that your father taught you to live righteously above all else. You used to-"
"Why do you keep talking like you know me?" Katherine cuts her off harshly. "You are not Max Caulfield. You are an imposter. The real Max Caulfield died for no goddamn reason on our school lawn as if God struck her down himself."

"I was there when the ambulance carried her away. I was in class when her death was announced. I was there at her funeral where we all cried worthless tears as if it any effect on her corpse."

Max felt a little sting at those words.

"Meanwhile, the people who bullied me and her went on to become rich and famous. That's fucking justice. Righteousness? The righteous aren't the people who win. Who succeed. The people who do are the ones who are willing to do whatever it takes to. That is who will take control of the world."

Clenching her teeth, Max bites back, "What is the point in taking the world if you lose your soul for it?" Katherine pales a little at those words. "You like Max Caulfield, right? Imagine if the real Max Caulfield was standing before you right now, who do you think she would prefer? Katherine Henley or Kate Marsh?"

"She would understand." Katherine insisted. "She knows better than anyone what I had to go through. The hardships I had to suffer. She would understand why I had to change."

"I think she would understand…but she wouldn't like it. Because that meant she had to lose a friend."

Katherine hisses. "You don't know the real Max Caulfield. You may share her appearance and taken her name, but you aren't her."

"I think you believe I know more than you want to admit." Max parries. "After all, why else talk to me and get into an argument with someone who you say isn't in your exclusive circles? You feel inside of you that something is wrong. You know it."

"I know that most people would kill to be in my position." Katherine repeats in a low, angry voice. "I know what got me to this place too. You don't know, though, and you don't understand. You don't get it."

Max looks at Katherine and she remembers Victoria's words about how she felt remorse knowing that Max – someone she secretly respected – only knew of her as a bully before dying. Victoria wanted her last memories to be of her as an artist.

Knowing this, perhaps it is better that Katherine continues believing the real Max Caulfield is dead. That it is important for her to keep the happy person inside her heart rather than face the disappointed one now.

Max is so happy for Katherine knowing she did so much with her life. She just wishes it could have been done another way.

"You're…you're right. I'm sorry, Katherine. I don't really know you and I shouldn't judge. The real Max Caulfield would be proud of you now. Anyone would be." She sighs and turns away. "I shouldn't even be getting into these public arguments when I should be spending my time looking for Chloe."

Katherine's face twitches. "Chloe? As in the Chloe from Arcadia Bay?"

Max turns back in shock. A light of excitement rises in her. "You know Chloe? Chloe Price?"
"Price is her old name." Katherine says cautiously. "And yes, I know her. We met during Max's funeral and have since stayed friends. Why do you want to know?"

"She's my best friend. I've been searching for her this entire time. It's the whole reason why I came to San Francisco! I need to see her."

"Look, Chloe suffered just as much as anyone with Max's death. Now you're going to go up to her like this? And tell her that you're Max?"

"It's not like that! I wouldn't go to Chloe just to hurt her!" Max stops and takes a breath. "I'm doing it because I love her, Katherine. The whole reason why I'm here to begin with was for her. If you won't help me, then fine, I'll continue searching on my own. Chloe needs me and I'm not going to stop regardless of what's in my way."

Silence. Max stares unblinkingly at Katherine who returns the look. Slowly, her eyes furrow into something resembling confusion.

"I…can see why Victoria would play this kind of prank to fuck with me, but for my own life, I can't see why she would do it to Chloe. Hell, as far as I know, she doesn't even remember her. Why would you…?"

Katherine becomes more troubled. Max grows confused wondering what is going through her mind, but the woman remains silent. At last, she gestures for Max to wait, then goes to her car. She comes back holding a piece of paper.

Max takes the paper and looks down to see an address. She licks her lips in excitement.

"Is this…?"

"Yes. That is where Chloe lives. Her name is Chloe Slater now, not Price." Katherine looks at Max hard. "I still believe you are an imposter, though an impossibly good one. I'm still good friends with Chloe. I'm also very powerful and have good connections. If you hurt her somehow, I will make your life hell."

That threat makes Max smile. There is still a bit of the Kate she knows inside, after all.

"Thank you, Katherine. I promise you that you did the right thing and Chloe will be happy to see me."

Katherine didn't respond. She got back into her car and left. Max memorizes the address then carefully tucks the paper into her pocket. In a very short time, she will finally reunite with Chloe. They will be together again and she will help Max out of this situation.

In another part of San Francisco, Mark Jefferson finishes the equipment setup in his photography room and sighs in relief. These are all new rented equipment and he had to spend some time properly setting everything up. He normally has to anyway, but he took extra care this time. After all, he won't get a second chance.

Satisfied, he leaves the room and heads upstairs to pour himself a drink. He takes the photo of Max Caulfield out of his wallet and stares adoringly at it. He can't believe he finally found her. The perfect Max Caulfield substitute. Or, more accurately, Victoria did.

He still has no idea how she did it. After leaving Blackwell, he searched unyieldingly for years to find the one girl who could take her place, but it was impossible. He found girls who looked like her, girls that have similar hobbies, and girls that had artistic sense. He even found one that liked Polaroid
cameras like her.

*But not a damn one of them were right.*

There was always something off about the look, the mannerism, and the personality. Most might not have noticed, but, to Mark, they were glaring. They all lack two things: the combination of features that makes Max Caulfield who she is and that special *je ne sais quoi* that only she has.

He never gave up searching but he gave up hope. He failed after all these years, then one day, on purely a whim, he takes up a former student's invitation to see a new exhibition and discovers to his immense surprise that his student succeeded spectacularly where he failed.

Mark had grown curious when he first noticed her and his curiosity only intensified when he noticed the quirky and familiar behavior. Then he nearly had a heart attack when he heard her speak. Absolute perfection. She looked, acted, and sounded exactly like the Max Caulfield he remembered. Not even an aged version, but the version exactly before she died all those years ago.

He has no idea how Victoria found this girl or even why, but he could kiss her for it.

Fingering Max's photo, he murmurs to himself. "Max. Oh Max, what I had lost when I lost you. If only you knew."

He knew she was special the moment he saw her Blackwell application and the accompanying portfolio that seem to ooze with soul, heart, and humanity. Then she arrives on campus and he made a point to meet her as soon as possible. That meeting let him know then and there that she would be his masterpiece. His magnum opus. The ultimate expression of innocence and purity which is then lost in an instant.

The girls he had been photographing up until then were merely practice. Practice until that one special person who would change everything inside of him arrived.

When she died…it had frayed every creative nerve in his body. All the practice, studying, and work he went through then seemed meaningless. What was the point of photography anymore? What was the point of art? What was the point of anything?

So he left his teaching position and limited his work mostly to bland, distasteful photography for those who can't really recognize truly beautiful depiction of the human spectrum. Even two decades later, he never recovered from this abyss of inspiration.

But when that girl appeared…it was like the candle inside of him that burned out twenty years ago has surged back to life and it demanded his attention. Like before, he can't ignore it.

Destiny once brought him Max Caulfield and it is destiny that brought this girl. He can not wait and risk this supreme opportunity. The fire inside of him has reignited and he wants his last act as an artist to be the revival of the project that died all those years ago. He wants that girl.

The first step is to contact Victoria and arrange a visit.

Elsewhere, Max arrives at a brick apartment building across the street from a coffee shop. The building has a gate in front of the entrance, but, testing it, she discovers the lock is broke. Glancing around, she heads inside and up the stairwell towards the right apartment.

She knocks on the door and, a moment later, a man appears. He leers at her. "Hey there. Is there something I could help you with?"
"Uh, yes, hi. My name is Max Caulfield. I'm a friend of Chloe and I was hoping to talk to her. May I come in?"

His demeanor changes when she brings up Chloe. He looked annoyed. The man's eyes were also confused as he looks at her face. He moves aside and gestures towards her.

"Alright, come in. My wife isn't home yet but she should be shortly after she drinks herself stupid."

Max walks in looking around the apartment. The place was modestly furnished. It certainly didn't measure up to Victoria's house, but it is much more than the Price house in Arcadia Bay. Plus it's also situated in one of the most expensive cities in the world.

She sits down at a table and the man goes into the kitchen. His voice floats out. "Would you like water? Or soda? Or maybe wine? I have some really nice stuff straight from Napa Valley."

"Just water for me, thanks."

He returns with a bottle of water placing it in front of her while he takes a glass of wine for himself. Max discreetly examines him. The man is clean shaven and, she supposes, is a decently good looking guy. He's dressed well and doesn't seem rude. Still, there's something about him that puts her off.

"So you're Chloe's husband? I'm sorry we never met before."

He looks at her. "Yes. I'm Scott and, yep, we're married. We've been for a while now."

"Really? How long?"

"About…three years ago. I met Chloe while working at a temp place in-between jobs. She was coming off a terrible divorce – her second one, I think – and, somehow, we got to chatting and hit it off. We went on some dates, got together a few times, and I eventually convinced her to get married again."

He lets out a tired sigh. "There were problems from the start, but…well, you probably don't want to know about that."

"No, no. I do. Chloe hasn't seen me for years now, so I don't know much about her current life."

Scott looks at her curiously again and Max realizes her slip. She's obviously very young and Chloe is 39-years-old now. It must be strange for the two of them to be such close friends and for 'years'. Luckily, he lets it go.

"Alright, if you insist. Most of the problem involved Maxis not liking me."

Her eyes furrow in confusion. "Maxis?"

"Maxis. Chloe's daughter."

She starts. Chloe has a daughter? When? Why? What does she look like? What kind of person is she? And that name…did she named her daughter after Max?

"She keeps saying she wanted her real father." Scott continues. Here, his face turns into a sneer. "Damn if I know why. Her father is a scumbag. He was physically abusive – to both Chloe and her. Still, Maxis loved him and she kept forgiving him. It's crazy."

He takes a long drink of wine. "She and her mother didn't have that great of a relationship before, but
when she said she was marrying me, their relationship just fell apart. She was only 15 at the time, so I figure she would get over it, but it's been three years and most of our conversations are still fights."

"She doesn't even like her little sister. Christ, how bitter and small can you be?"

Little…sister? There's another child? How many children are there? Or are these two all there is? What does the younger one look like? What is her name?

Max had to force her thoughts away, though her mind was rapidly formulating images of little Chloes. More importantly, she senses some kind of discord inside of Scott and it makes her wonder if the marriage is going well. Plus she didn't like the way he talked about Maxis. That's Chloe's daughter.

She had to repress the feeling, though. "So how is the marriage nowadays? Is everything alright?"

He snorts. "I guess it's as good as it's going to get. I'm happy enough now, so I don't want to do anything to ruin this. Chloe seems happy enough too. So I guess that's how the marriage is. Happy enough."

Max scowls. The conversation is surprisingly candid considering Scott hardly knows her, but she appreciates the information nonetheless. To think so much changed with Chloe.

Still, she doesn't understand a marriage where the state is only 'happy enough'. Chloe deserves a hell of a lot better than that. Her previous marriage was also abusive? She can do so much better. Why hadn't she?

A noise from another room gets Scott's and Max's attention. They turn to see a brunette head peeking around a corner. Max's eyes widen a little.

"Oh, Rochella. Come over here, honey."

The little girl shyly comes around the corner and wobbles over to her father. He picks her up and she nuzzles into him staring at the stranger curiously. Max returns the stare entranced.

The little girl had brunette hair and brown eyes. In that, she more resembles her father than Chloe. However, in the nooks and ridges of her face, Max can see her mother…and she couldn't help but feel a tinge of warmth creep into her.

"Scott, may I…hold her?"

He stares between them hesitantly, but nods. Max reaches out cautious and wraps her arms around Rochella who accepts quietly staring wide-eyed. Max returns the stare entranced.

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He stares between them hesitantly, but nods. Max reaches out cautious and wraps her arms around Rochella who accepts quietly staring wide-eyed. She embraces the little girl and, looking down into her eyes, she feels herself falling in love. This is Chloe's child. A part of Chloe is inside of her. Max couldn't help but fall in love.

"Rochella…" She lulls the name. "Hi there. My name is Max. I want to be your friend."

The girl merely stares at her silently. The door opens behind Max and Scott's face becomes annoyed. She turns around to see a girl with her back to Max. She had dyed violet hair and is wearing punkish clothing, including a metal wristband.

"Chloe?" Max calls hesitantly.

The figure stills, then turns around to stare at Max. Immediately, she realizes that it's not Chloe. The face resembles her, but is too different. The eyes are harsher and clearly don't even recognize Max.
"Hmph, do I look like my mom from behind?"

It is now obvious who this is. None other than Maxis – Chloe's first child.

Max gently places Rochella down where she rushes to hide behind her dad now staring at her older sister. Getting up and dusting herself, Max tries to put on a big, sincere smile. She really wanted to run up and hug the other girl, but stops herself and remains in place.

"Hello, you must be Maxis. My name is Max. I'm really happy to meet you and I hope we can become friends."

"Max?" She repeats confused. "Are you from my school? I don't remember seeing you before, though."

She is confused at first as to why Maxis thought they were classmates, but it soon hits her. They're actually the same age, so it's natural she believes they go to the same school.

It makes her frown a little. She never really thought deeply in it, but, yes, she's the same age as Chloe's first daughter. That means Chloe is now old enough to be her mother too. The thought disturbs her a little and the fact that it disturbs her is also a source of disturbance itself.

"Maxis, what are you here for?" Scott asks tersely.

She turns to glare at Scott. "I live here, jackass. Or did I get kicked out without being informed?"

He scowls hard. "No. It's just that you don't come home this early. You even beat your mom home. I just wanted to know."

"What I do is none of your business. If you must know, though, my fiancé is busy tonight, so we couldn't go out. I decided to just head home instead of going out."

"Fiancé?" He laughs. "When the hell did you two get engaged? Where's the engagement ring? Oh wait, you're the man in the relationship, so she's wearing it, right?"

"For your information-" Maxis bites back lifting her wrist to show the metal wristband. "*this* is the engagement ring and we're both wearing one. It is our own proof of our love instead of some stupid thing everyone thinks we should have."

"What love is that? You two have been together for three months. You're just about due to drop this skank for another one."

"Hey, fuck off, douche! Don't talk about my girlfriend like that!"

"Can't you watch your mouth? And cut off the fighting already. We have a guest and your mom is about to come home. She doesn't need this shit. I don't either, for that matter."

"Then don't start shit."

Max stands to the side as the argument between the two continues. She feels vaguely uncomfortable. Not because of the argument itself, but by the sheer familiarity of Maxis. She feels as if she's looking at a copy of Chloe itself, except this copy doesn't know anyone named Max Caulfield.

Looking down, she notices Rochella shivering behind her father frightened by the argument. Max wanted to run over and scoop her up protectively and tell her everything's going to be alright. She wasn't sure how Scott and Maxis would react, though.
Just as she was about to go ahead and do it anyway, the door opens again stopping all arguments. The figure this time is obviously an older woman.

It must be Chloe. Something bothers Max, though. That something is that the figure is less familiar to her as her Chloe than she would have thought.

"Scott. I'm home." She slurs her words a little and there is a smell of alcohol from her. "Did you cook dinner?"

"Yes. Hope you like stir fry vegetables and beef."

"Not really, but I'll eat it."

"You're probably not hungry." Maxis says mockingly. "All that beer filled you up."

Chloe sighs. She turns around to stare at her daughter with exhaustion in her eyes. She places her hands against her hips shaking her head.

"Please don't talk to me like that, Maxis. Show me a little respect, young lady."

"You get shitfaced more than me, mom. I'm supposed to show respect to that?"

"You didn't much show me respect before my drinking problem either." Chloe says blandly. "And if I get a little drink here and there, why is that such a problem? It's not like I'm passing out in alleyways or nothing. I'm still working and taking care of you, aren't I?"

"Just barely. I hardly even see you anymore, mom. You think it isn't a problem because you can still handle it, but it's getting worse, you know."

"You don't see me because you come home late all the time, Maxis, not because I'm not here." Chloe says weariness creeping into her voice. "I'm also trying the best I can and it's difficult. I need your support, Maxis, not your aggravation."

Max watches this display as Chloe has not yet noticed her. She examines the figure and tries to find who she wants in it. So much has changed. She...reminds Max so much of Joyce.

Chloe looks much older. Well, that's because she is but she also aged more than either Victoria or Katherine did. Her face has more wrinkles and she lost a lot of her sheen. She kept her hair short, though it is now back to its natural blonde. If Max wasn't intimately familiar with Chloe as a person, it might have been hard to recognize her even with the knowledge of who she's looking at.

But being that she does know her so well, she can still see Chloe...and she wanted to run up and kiss her. At last. After much effort, time, and anxiety, she finally found her. Her Chloe.

Max smiles and step forward getting Chloe's attention. The woman notices movement and turns then immediately steps back in shock nearly tripping over herself. Her reaction causes surprise in Scott and Maxis who then look at Max with greater curiosity than before.

She continues coming forward until they are beside each other and Max looks up into Chloe's eyes smiling warmly.

"Found you." She says.

Chloe seem to hold her breath a little before releasing audibly. Her face then ages a little more and she looks longingly at Scott's glass of wine on the table. Sighing, she returns her gaze to Max.
"Are you who I think you are?"

"Yep."

A bit of giddiness is slipping into Max's voice, but she didn't care. This is it. She finally achieved her goal and things will go up from here.

Chloe stares at her a little longer, then walks up and wraps Max in an embrace which the latter returns eagerly. Without meaning to, tears begin to slip down Max's face as she couldn't feel happier right then. The rest of the family watches this display in silence.

Max leans up planting a kiss on Chloe's lips. The older woman quickly breaks the kiss and turns away. Confused initially, Max blUSHES realizing she may have made a faux pas doing that in front of Chloe's family.

Chloe breaks up the embrace, glances at her family, then back at Max. "I think…we need to talk. Somewhere private, though."

"I want to come along." Max cuts in.

"No." Chloe immediately refuses. "You will stay put."

Chloe pulls her along out the door even as Max was protesting. Outside, they get into Chloe's car and she drives them along without indicating where they were going.

To Max's amusement and also annoyance, she drives them to Lands End – one of the places that she had gone to look for Chloe without success. They walk along the path until they came upon a quiet scenic area facing the ocean with the Golden Gate Bridge to the side.

There, Chloe sits on a stone slab facing this scene groaning trying to fight off the liquor. Max takes this opportunity to sit against her then lean in for another kiss. This time, Chloe accepts it without moving. Max notes to herself giddily that her Chloe even taste the same – like alcohol and cigarettes.

The kiss goes on until Max leans back feeling heat on her cheeks. Chloe is blushing a little too.

"So…Max Caufield, am I right?"

"I'm not going to believe you forgot me, Chloe."

The woman nods. "I didn't. Forgive me, honey, but I needed to ask just to be sure when I see my friend coming back from the dead."

She looks at her. "Wait, so you believe it really is me? Your Max from Arcadia Bay? From 2013?"

Chloe smiles a little. "There isn't going to be anyone on this planet that resembles you this much. I was tempted to disbelieve it anyway, but when you kissed me, that sealed it. Same clumsy kisser."

Max slaps her arm playfully. "You ass. I'm happy, though. Everyone else I met don't believe me at all. When Ms. Grant saw me again at Blackwell, she screamed bloody murder and fainted. Everyone else thinks I'm an actress or something."

"Give them some slack, Max." Chloe says in amusement. "They have good reason to disbelieve. Me, though, I have a little help. I know a little more about you than most. I'm assuming that this whole resurrection deal somehow involves…your 'powers'?"

Max nods. "Got it. Thing is that it's not really a resurrection. I never really died to begin with."
"Then you're going to have to explain why we had to bury you."

She nods and takes a few deep breaths to gather her thoughts, then begins her tale. She explains how she discovered her ability to do such a thing to begin with letting Chloe in on her connection with the Chloe in another world. The connection which then motivated her to find a way to 'repay' her own Chloe by trying to solve the entire mystery around Rachel Amber in one fell swoop after accidentally discovering a method to travel to the future.

Then how everything went wrong. How she caused trouble at Blackwell and nearly got stranded, how she lost usage of her powers with no idea how to get it back, coming into contact and being helped by Victoria, reuniting with Katherine and experiencing loss of a friend, then finally arriving at this moment wherein she finds Chloe.

Chloe takes a cigarette out mid-way through the story to smoke, but otherwise remained silent and still. When Max finished, she leans back a little staring up at the sky.

"So that's what happened." She chuckles sardonically. "It looks like you went through the trouble for nothing. We all went through it for nothing. You came here to learn about Rachel Amber and finally solve the 'mystery', but the mystery was never solved. We never learned what happened to her and never saw her again."

There it is. If there is one person who would keep up on news of Rachel, it would have been Chloe, and she just confirmed that Rachel Amber remains lost to time. Max swallows the disappointment bitterly.

She came here with the intention to help, but all she really did was caused so much pain and misery. How Chloe, Kate, her parents, the Prices, and all her friends must have felt at her funeral. All for nothing.

There is only one thing to do then. She must now head back and prevent this from occurring.

"Chloe, come with me. Help me. I have to get back home and fix this entire mess."

The woman levels a gaze at her. "You told me you can't use your power. How do you intend to restore it?"

"I don't know, but I have to try."

"Do you even know where to start?"

"I…I will practice. I will practice and keep trying until I can use it again."

"What if you can't restore it, Max? What then?"

The thought has already occurred to her many times. That she may genuinely be stuck here with no way to get back home and that she will have to find a way to make a new life here. That idea had filled her with despair, but looking into Chloe's eyes now, she feels as if she can make it.

"Then we will build a new life here. Together." Chloe gives her a blank look, but Max continues. "I'm so sorry I left you all those years ago, Chloe, but I'm back now and we can be together again. We can be happy together."

Chloe sighs running a hand through her blonde hair. "Max, I'm happy where I am now."

"I don't believe that." She fights back. "I saw how much trouble you're having right now. I also
know about the problems you had in the past with your asshole ex-husband." Chloe gives her a glance. "Don't tell me you're happy because I don't believe it."

"But I am happy, Max." She insists. "Yeah, you're right. I went through a lot of hardship in the past. I made a mistake with my second husband and an even bigger one with my first, but that's all in the past. Regrets and remorses."

"My home life isn't perfect either, but whose is? Fact is that I've been married to Scott for three years now, we have a daughter together, and I have another one that I have my hands full with. I'm slowly building my life into something resembling stability and real meaning. I love my family and I love what I have now."

"At one time, you loved me too."

"That was twenty years ago."

"And I bet it still hasn't changed. You need me just as much as I need you. We're too close and we're connected, Chloe. After all we've been through as kids and at Blackwell, how can we not?"

Chloe laughs a little. "Max, you forget but I've been alive longer without you than with you. I've been living longer than you've been alive! It's been two decades since I've even seen you, Max. If my memory is right, you're 18 right now."

"That doesn't matter! Our love transcends time!"

An amused smile comes onto Chloe's face. She remarks, "You sound like Maxis. Maybe it's right that I named her after you. It's funny, but, a long time ago, I might have thought your words would be romantic."

With each second, Max feels her insides twisting and her heart shriveling. Her eyes burn though she tries to fight back tears. Chloe must have noticed this one her face because the smile comes off and she tries to be more sympathetic.

"Max, you're young now. You still have time to create a new life even without me. I'm sorry but what I love is my family and I need stability in my life, not romance and adventure. I'm too old now and I went through too much already. I...I just can't deal with you anymore. You're too hard on me."

A cold feeling in the pit of her stomach. "Can't deal with me? Too hard on you? What do you mean?"

Biting her lips, Chloe tries to speak kindly, "I'm sorry, Max, but being with you is hard on me. You keep disappearing and it always happens when I need you the most. Being with you means being afraid of losing everything at any given moment. I can't take your disappearing act a third time."

Trembling a little, Max tries to gain her voice to explain herself, "It's...it's not like that, Chloe. The first time, my parents moved and I had to go along. I couldn't-"

"That's all fine and dandy, but you also cut me off, Max." Chloe interrupts a little resentfully. "I tried to keep in touch with you by calling and texting, but you never returned the favor. Do you have any idea what that was like for me? If it hadn't been for Rachel, I would have been lost."

Max opens and closes her mouth. Swallowing, she tries to explain again, "The second one was also unintentional, Chloe. I told you that I didn't intend for all of this to happen. I didn't know that my body would suddenly fall over and be dead."
"Does it matter what you intended? You always have a good reason for disappearing, Max, but what does it matter in the end if I can't depend on you?"

Desperation begins to overwhelm logic. Max didn't know how to respond or how to convince Chloe though her mind runs rapidly in random directions just hoping something would come to her.

"You…you still love me, Chloe. I made mistakes, but you still love me. It's just buried deep inside."

She tries to lean in for another kiss hoping to reawaken Chloe's feeling so for her, but the latter dodges and roughly pushes Max away. She falls off her seat landing hard on her side. Tears begin flowing down her cheek as Chloe sits there watching her.

There is a way to fix this. She just has to rewind and convince Chloe. She extends her hand all too aware that it never worked before. It has to this time, though. She has to make it work.

The warmth reappears in her chest and the tugging is once again felt. The rays of sunlight in the area turns into a blur and the ocean seem to begin moving strangely. However, Chloe does not react and continue staring at her waiting.

Max clenches her teeth until it begins to ache. She has to get it to work this time or all may be lost.

The second tugging appears in her chest. Then a third. Then a fourth. It began to feel like there were numerous strings attached to her heart trying to pull it apart. No, that's not right. It feels…more like there is something inside her heart trying to get out and the only way it could is through small cracks.

Does her power need her heart to be cracked open? If so, that's simple to give. All she has to do is replay Chloe's words in her mind.

The tugging multiples rapidly. The world becomes a complete mismash of blur, light, and motion. Thing is that it's actually uneven. Some parts were blurred and some exhibited strange motion. As if her powers were just reaching out in random directions and is only able to take ahold of parts of the outside world instead of everything.

However, for a brief moment, the effect Max wanted was achieved. Chloe's body began to move in reverse. Her mouth and face moves as if repeating the words she had just said.

But it didn't last. Only seconds after the effect was achieved, it slowed down dramatically. Max tries to hold her breath to exert more effort, but it didn't work. When she simply couldn't keep up the effort any longer, she releases the strain breathing heavily.

At this point, Chloe actually fast forwarded through the conversation again until she was back at a point where she is silently sitting and watching Max again. As if nothing ever happened.

Max lies back onto the ground sobbing pathetically. Powerless and hopeless.

A sigh is heard then arms lift her off the ground. Chloe takes out a napkin and wipes at her eyes drying off the tears before helping Max up to sit down again. Silence falls over the two saved for the sound of Max's hiccups and wheezing sobs.

"Are you still staying with Victoria?" Chloe is the first to break the silence.

She thought about lying so that Chloe would then invite her to stay at her house. It only took a moment to discard the idea and reprimand herself. Chloe doesn't want anything to do with her anymore. It's stupid and petty to still try to insert herself into her life.
So she responds honestly, "Yes. She told me I could stay as long as I like."

"Let me drive you back to her house. C'mon now."

Wiping off her face, Max follows along behind Chloe who never turns to look at her or even check if she's following. They arrive at the parking lot and quietly get into her car. Max quietly tells Chloe the address and she drives off.

When they arrive at Victoria's house, the two of them sit in the car not moving. Max wipes away the last of the dried tears on her face and tries to gather herself and keep whatever dignity she has left.

Chloe sighs, "Max, I'm sorry I can't give you what you want. You have to see it from my view. I worked so hard and went through so much. I've had so much heartbreak. In the end, I managed to carve out a little niche for myself and get a semblance of happiness. I can't just give it up like that."

"To you, whatever it was we had is still fresh and bright, but for me, that was a lifetime ago. I still consider myself your friend…but I'm just not your lover anymore."

Max didn't say anything. She leaves the car and walks inside the house using the spare key Victoria gave her. Walking upstairs, Max falls into bed feeling drained of life.

She genuinely has no idea what to do now. There's nothing left for her.
Victoria became extremely concerned when Max didn't show up for breakfast. She knew the girl arrived home as her shoes were near the front door. Plus, she swears she heard some noises in Max's room when she passed it earlier. Normally, she would leave it alone thinking Max overslept but she feels a little anxious.

Yesterday, while at work, she suddenly received an angry call from Katherine demanding answers about Max. As before, she simply insists that Max is a friend and, when she demanded to know her name, she also insisted on using hints instead of just outright saying.

It seemed wrong somehow – that Victoria should recognize Max immediately but Katherine could not even after all the hints. Even if it seemed silly, Victoria wanted for the other woman to remember herself and refused to simply give her a name.

That stance, however, only made the woman angrier. She eventually ended the call by shouting that she'll find out herself. Now, the next day, Max is holed up in her room without coming out. Did something happen?

In a snap judgment, Victoria decides to walk upstairs and knock lightly on Max's door. When there is no response, she opens the door and peeks in.

"Max? Are you awake?" Staring at the bed, she feels a little relieved to see Max lying there. She tries whispering again. "Max, wake up. It's breakfast time."

"Leave me alone, Victoria."

The clear voice informs her that Max is fully awake after all. More confident now, she walks inside and turns on the lights earning a groan from the younger girl. She turns over to stare at Victoria angrily.

"I said leave me alone!"

The look startles Victoria. Her eyes are red – clearly from crying – and her face looks haggard as if she aged a decade overnight. It is obvious now that something did happen yesterday and whatever it was wasn't good.

From experience, she knows lying in bed is no cure.

"Max, get up now. Go shower and come down for breakfast. I will not take 'no' for an answer."

She responded by turning around and wrapping the blanket over her head. Victoria walks over and yanks it off making Max sit up and glare at her. Victoria returns the glare with calm.

"All I'm asking is some of your time. If I can't cheer you up by the end, you can go back to bed and sleep in for the entire day. I won't feel right if I leave without trying, though. Give me a chance? Please?"

Max sighs and mutters 'fine'. Victoria thanks her and walks downstairs needing to make some changes. She takes the glass of milk she had prepared for Max and uses it to make a glass of creamy
smoothie mixing in vanilla ice cream and fresh berries. She also pours more syrup on the plate of waffles and then sets out some candles.

When Max trudges downstairs looking barely better after her shower and sits down, she sniffs the air in confusion. "Why…does it smell like Christmas in here?"

"The candles." Victoria points out sitting across from her. "Like them? Try the smoothie I made too. Tastes like heaven."

She does as instructed and Victoria smiles lightly seeing the uplift in Max's mood already. The great method of removing depression: Comfort food, comfort scents, and, most importantly, comfort friends.

"So Max-" Victoria takes a small bite of her waffles. "-want to talk? What happened yesterday?"

It takes a moment for her to open up. "I found what I've been looking for."

Victoria blinks. "You mean…you found Chloe Price?"

"Yes. It didn't end well." Max's shoulders slumped. "She…didn't want to see me. She thinks I'm a burden and I'm hard on her. She doesn't love me anymore."

"Max, stop. Did she really say all that?"

"Well, not exactly that, but-"

"If she didn't say that, then you're reading too much into it." Victoria cuts her off. "Even if you claim she did and even if she really did, I wouldn't have believed it. You're not the kind of person one comes to dislike, Max Caulfield."

"Apparently, the one person who should feel that way about me doesn't agree." She retorts.

"Tell me the whole story."

Max hesitates, but slowly does so. Victoria listens the entire time sympathetically not saying a word, though she winces at the recollection of what happened between the two at Lands End.

When the story is done, Victoria sighs. "I…don't think Chloe hates you, Max. Perhaps she doesn't love you, not like she used to, but she doesn't hate you either. I think, in reality, she really wants to be your friend and reconnect. Inside, she might be just as upset and in pain as you are."

The brunette grimaces. "Even if that is true, what difference does it make? One thing she definitely made clear is that I wasted my time. The entire reason I came here to begin with is all gone. She…she has her own life now and I can't be a part of it. Not the way I want."

"There's more than one way to be a part of someone's life, Max."

"But those other ways aren't acceptable." Max bites her lips. "I don't want to be angry at Chloe. I understand. Now I do. It's just too hard, though."

Victoria swallows. "I won't say I understand completely…but I want to help. Take all the time you need to heal, Max. If you need anything else, I'll try my best to help too."

Max pause. Then she glances at her. "Victoria, how good are you at drawing? I need a drawing done really badly."
The blonde becomes confused. "Well, I can draw a little but not the best. Emily is really good at it, though, and I can ask. What can I get her to draw you?"

Max lays out the details. She describes to Victoria a drawing similar to what Daniel made for her insisting that Emily draws as realistically as possible. Most importantly of all, she puts emphasis on how the lock screen must show a certain time and date.

With each detail, Victoria becomes more confused. "I honestly don't understand the purpose of this drawing. Instead, all I need to know is will it help you?"

"I don't know. I'm hoping it will."

A pause. "Max, that time and date it has to show. '10:10 Monday, October 10, 2013'. October 10th is the day, uh, Max Caulfield died. I don't remember the time it happened, but I get the feeling that time is it. Is this drawing somehow related?"

Max nods. "Yes, it's related."

The blonde frowns. "I really don't understand, Max. However, if it will help, I'll get it for you."

"Thank you."

"It's not for free, though. I would like for you to do something for me too." Max looks at her. "Trust me, you'll like this. See, yesterday, I received a visit from a very special friend. He heard about you and says he is dying to meet you."

Flinching, she demurs. "I don't know about this, Victoria."

"Don't say that already. I'm not saying his name because I want it to be a surprise, but you'll definitely want to meet him. He's a renowned photographer and he says he would like for you to come see a private exhibit."

"Besides, Max, I think this would be a good way for you to cheer up. By the time you get back, I'll have your drawing ready for you."

She goes back and forth internally for a moment before relenting. "Well, I guess it couldn't hurt. I have nothing else to do anyway. Not now."

"No more of that. I want to see you laughing again before the end of today…and I get the feeling the man you'll meet will help with that. Here, take this." Victoria hands her a card containing only an address and phone number. "Now then, eat up to start your day."

Max bites into her waffles not feeling nearly as optimistic as Victoria. Instead, her mind wanders onto others things. Like what kind of job she can get to support herself if she can not get her powers to work.

The tremor that goes through her makes lessen her appetite.

A door opens into a lavish master bedroom and Katherine steps in. She walks past her lounge sofa heading towards a door she hasn't approached for many months now. Taking a key out of her drawer, she unlocks the door and head inside. The room is essentially a spacious closet and there is where she stores some items of questionable value.

To the left in a worn, enclosed cardboard box is some sets of plain, bland, and conservative clothing. The kind she used to wear – a very long time ago – which she wouldn't now be caught dead in.
Above that box sits a large, well marked bible and above that sits a necklace. All three items are extremely dusty.

On the other side sits a cabinet containing various memorabilia. Photos of friends and family she hasn't seen or talked to for years, movies and cartoons in a medium that isn't even available for purchase anymore, CDs and cassette tapes of Christian music that is equally worthless, and more.

She opens the cabinet and searches. Despite her long absence, she already knows where to look and, soon, her hand touches a photo. She pulls it out and stares at it silently.

It is a picture of her and Max Caulfield. She is holding up Alice – a pet rabbit she used to own but gave away to a shelter – and Max is standing besides her with her arm outstretched holding up the camera for a selfie of them both.

She places the photo back inside the cabinet and slumps onto a nearby footstool.

"Max…how did I forget your face?"

Katherine Henley is a woman facing an existential crisis. For twenty years now, she has been on a path with absolutely no desire to look to her right or left. The path only led her forward and she was not willing to veer off it for any reason.

It worked. Her success is indisputable proof of that. Her face appeared in *Forbes*, *Fortune*, and much more. She has considerable wealth, influence, and friends. Every day, she receives letters from innumerable people thanking her. She has succeeded in life – this fact she never doubted for a second.

Then a little girl appears out of the blue and, suddenly, she's questioning everything about herself.

When Victoria refused to tell her about this girl, she went on the move intending to stomp on her not once questioning why she was putting so much effort into something so meaningless. Then she finds this girl and gives her a piece of her mind thinking it would be easy, but she fights back and she hit much harder than Katherine could.

The problem is that she genuinely seemed like she knew Katherine. She talked about her father and about her past self. Then she makes Bible quotes and Katherine reeled feeling as if her own voice was coming out of that girl's mouth.

After that meeting, she finds the words coming back a lot, and she genuinely wondered that, if Max was alive, would she be happy to see Katherine now?

Then a sinking feeling hits her stomach when she remembered that she couldn't even recognize that girl's appearance at first despite her incredible resemblance. Even Victoria saw this and the woman mocked her repeatedly with stupid hints instead of just telling her the answer.

She tried to remember Max's voice – the same voice she often replayed to herself – only to then question if she remembers correctly. She questions it because the imposter's voice doesn't sound like the voice in her head.

The voice inside her head is mature, extremely self confident, and sophisticated. By comparison, the imposter's voice is whiny and childish which is often made worse by how hotheaded she is because she stutters and misspeak when she's upset.

But how does Katherine know the voice inside her head is the correct one? How accurate is the imposter? If she got the appearance down (even to the little details like the clothing), could she have
accurately gotten the voice too? It seems unlikely, but everything about her seems equally unlikely.

Katherine clenches her teeth. Well, even if she may have forgotten Max's face and voice, she didn't forget their struggle. This imposter failed in that. She dared to chastise her for being rude to Victoria without ever knowing how she and the real Max struggled against her. If she is ill mannered to Victoria, it is still far less than everything the blonde did to her. This is simply payback.

Unbidden, a bible quote, long forgotten, recites inside her mind. *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

The memory causes her to pause, then become even angrier feeling attacked. Betrayed by her own mind. She ignores it knowing that she is simply being manipulated by the imposter into feeling this way.

She has done good. Far more than Victoria and far more than her old self. She is a great philanthropist and has committed her own funds to solving many of her country's and the world's problems through her many foundations.

Things haven't always gone to plan, but they are hardly her fault. If her foundation's funds were misused by poor managers, it could hardly be called her fault. She only picked them because her friends praised them as good money makers. When she finds out, she always puts them through the ringer leading them to personal and financial ruin. Some of them even killed themselves.

…another pause. That last thought used to comfort Katherine. A sort of inner knowledge that no one would dare messed with her knowing her wrath is too great. But it feels wrong now. Why does it feel wrong now?

Glancing over, Katherine gets an urge to pick up her old bible. Careful to place the necklace aside, she wipes off the book and leafs through it. She sits there in wonder noting just how often her old self had highlighted phrases involving 'mercy' and 'kindness'. She tosses the book aside not even caring if it gets damaged and places her head in her hands.

Victoria insists she does not know the girl and the imposter also insists she was not hired, but Katherine is absolutely convinced she is now up against the greatest scammer to have ever lived.

She is not a fool, though. She knows that, sometimes, it's simply better to pay regardless of whether you're right or not. In this case, she'll be happy to pay whatever the imposter wants to make her go away.

Katherine needs to talk to Victoria again.

Long before Max reaches the building, she knew it is going to be impressive. There were a lot of clues letting her know this is going to be the case.

One clue is simply the fact that nearly everywhere in San Francisco seems overly beautiful, but another clue is that the area she is walking in is exceptionally so. Plus it has more space than a lot of other places. Space here comes at a premium.

However, perhaps the biggest clue was when she called the number on the business card given to her by Victoria and Mark Jefferson answered. Twenty years later and the man sound exactly the same. She can't say she knows her teacher super well, but she certainly knows enough to recognize he's not the type to settle for less than the best.

Upon realizing who called him, he became audibly excited. He insisted that he will be happy to make time to meet her and invites her to come to his house to see the many works he has
accomplished over the years.

Victoria was right and she does become tickled to know that her teacher and photography hero wants to meet her. She is also a little worried with how excited he is to meet her wondering what Victoria may have said about her. She just hopes his expectations aren't too high.

When she rings his doorbell and he opens up, her feelings ease considerably seeing his smiling face. Much like his voice, his physical appearance changed very little in the years.

He traded his Blackwell suit for a more formal grey suit, though he still refuses to wear a tie. His hair is cut a little lower for tidiness and his facial hair is much better trimmed than before. Even his eyeglasses have been traded in for something sleeker and more stylish.

The man seems to have traded his slightly off-beat look for a more conventional attractive style.

As soon as Mark lands his eyes on her, he coolly assesses her for a moment making Max blush, then claps his hands together. "I don't think any description would do you justice. Now I've heard plenty from Victoria to make me excited already, but would I be too presumptuous to think that your name is…?"

Max giggles. "Yes, I'm Max Caulfield. Nice to see you, Mr. Jefferson."

"Oh." He mock gasps breathlessly. "You even call me mister Jefferson. I haven't been a teacher for twenty years now, so that's a real blast from the past. Please, though, call me Mark. Even Victoria doesn't call me Mr. Jefferson anymore."

"Oh, alright. Thank you, Mark."

"Please, Max. Come in."

She steps inside taking her shoes off at the door. Afterwards, Mark takes her through an astonishingly beautiful home. Every inch of every wall is papered in a classy vanilla caramel with leaf designs peppered here and there. The floor is a smooth hardwood, but nearly all furniture has a fine thread carpet underneath.

Tables meant to hold drinks or relax beside were strictly all glass and decorated with flowers pots and glass figurines. Tables meant for eating and conversations were marble and held little decorative ornaments to ensure those sitting would see each other clearly.

Every inch of the home was designed to synergize with each other and be as utterly appealing as possible.

She could have gone on about the rooms she saw and even the final room Mark leads her to, but something else there caught her eye. There were numerous canvasses containing photographs. The walls were lined with photographs too – some small and grouped together while others are enlarged and stood by themselves.

"This is my private exhibition. What you see here is all that I consider my best work."

Ignorant as Max is, she could see it. The photographs comprise of a large range of subjects, but each show that a masterful set of skills were used to capture the image. In some, she could see techniques that Mark tried to hammer into her during class (to varying success). In others, she is merely stopped by the striking appearance of otherwise mundane images.

"These are beautiful, Mark. I'm honored to be one of the few that you let see this."
He chuckles. "One of the 'few', Max? You are the only one."

"What?" She stares at him in disbelief. "I'm the only person you ever shown this to?"

"Two days ago, Max, this exhibit didn't even exist." He gestures around coolly. "Oh yes, I've had exhibitions before. Almost all of them private. However, I haven't had one in years. You are the first and probably the only one who will see this particular one."

Max blushes hearing that she is so privileged. Her own interest in photography gives her a natural love of the subject and she knows that this is a rare opportunity to hear, see, and learn.

Her host misses this, though, as he walks off to the side and returns with a bottle of wine and holding up two glasses. "Would you care for some, Max?"

She blanches not being much of a drinker, but didn't want to look immature in front of him, so she nods in assent. He expertly opens the bottle and pours both of them a glass handing one to her.

Max takes a slight drink and…it's actually kind of sweet. She glances at Mark who casually drinks from his own glass. Did he know she wasn't a drinker and intentionally chose an easy to drink wine?

"Now then." Mark clears his throat. "Let me show you some of what I did upclose."

She nods and follows behind him. He leads her through a number of photographs explaining their history and *raison d'être*. Most of the time, the reason is experimental. He saw a look he liked, thought the subject could present an interesting perspective, or he wanted to try a new technique.

Other times, he did it for laughs. When he led her to one portrait of a woman whose nose was so big, it took up nearly the entire photograph and she has a cross-eyed look, Max couldn't stop from letting out a giggle. She tries to apologize.

Mark smiles in turn, "No, no, you responded exactly as I'd hope. This woman is named Maya Lapine. She approached me wanting to do a commission saying she believes her face deserves to photographed. I examined her a moment and agreed. I said I would do it for a lower price so long as she allows me to keep her photos for my personal collection."

"I took several. The one I gave her showed her in the most flattering light. The one I'm showing you is my favorite. I got her to look like that by using a large lens. When she asked why I was using it, I explained the larger lens allowed me to capture more of her face."

Max giggles more. "Well, it's true."

"The best kind of true too." Mark smiles.

The next one he showed her is literally a bowl of sugar on a table. The photograph is designed to exclude any outside element save for the bowl against some sort of wooden table. Max stares blankly knowing this one is lost on her.

"The title of this is 'A Down Trodden Man's Bathroom'."

That caused even more confusion. Max tries to place the photograph into such a context and, for the life of her, can't figure out exactly how it fit in. She even tried to break down the individual elements of the picture to try to see how it even related to a bathroom.

"Don't try too hard, Max. This picture is intentional nonsense. See, it was a prank against a man named Elwood Diedrich. He published in a magazine this *ridiculous* photograph of a random tree in
a random park and called it *Long Lost Love*.

"I made this photograph and sent it to the same magazine with this title and it got published too. I wondered at first if he realized what I did, but, a week after the magazine was published, he sent me a two word letter. Can you guess what those two words are?"

Max covers her laughter. "Yes."

So it continues until they covered many of the photographs in the exhibit. An hour later, Mark stops the tour and offers to make dinner using a rather delicious sounding dish called *coq au vin*, which he describes as a braised chicken cooked with wine, mushroom, and onions encircled by freshly made pasta. Max's mouth watered just at the description.

"I suppose that's a yes then." Mark pokes fun at her hungry expression. "Please head to the dining room *that way* and I'll join you later with a freshly cooked meal. Don't worry, it won't be long."

She nods and heads in the direction he points. Before she leaves, though, she gets a familiar urge to take a photo. Quickly positioning herself against the neat looking wallpaper, she takes a selfie using her phone.

Looking up, she catches Mark grinning good-naturedly at her. Blushing, she makes her way towards the dining room. That room is – like everything else here – utterly immaculate in cleanliness and design. Almost like something that might be displayed in a home magazine.

Nearby the dining table is a glass door overlooking a beautiful hill and Max couldn't resist sliding up to stare outside. The dwindling daylight outside provides an amazing multicolor view that she quickly takes a snapshot of.

The dining room is lightly decorated. Mostly little things like paintings or potted flora that dot the area here and there, but they have an outsized effect on the ambiance of the room. It feels classier and more comfortable.

It's a big difference from Victoria's home. Hers is very beautiful too but there's a chaos to it. The blonde woman takes her work home with her and spread through her house is pieces of art that often don't mesh well together. Instead, Victoria has to pick through them for exhibitions to ensure a particular theme which doesn't exist at her home.

It gives a feel that one is entering a place that may be…well, someone's home. In particular, the home of someone with an artistic soul.

Mark Jefferson's home isn't like that. It's extremely comfortable and beautiful, but, thinking on it, Max feels there's an almost sort of sterility to it. Like it's an entirely planned design with none of the chaos that normally comes from the heart. Everything has a purpose and an aim to achieve. There's no spontaneity.

It makes sense in a way. He's probably using this place as his place of business too and this kind of effect is probably very impressive to potential clients. It certainly blew Max away when she first witnessed it and she continues to be amazed. The immense amount of work that must be required to keep a house like this…

Hearing footsteps, she walks over to the dining table and takes a seat. A moment later, a wonderful aroma floats into the room making her stomach jump in eagerness. Mark appears carrying two steaming plates of beautiful looking chicken breasts resting atop of well cooked fresh mushrooms, thinly sliced onions, and carrots marinated in a light sauce. Surrounding this feast is, as promised,
fresh pasta.

He places a plate in front of her and pours a glass of some kind of white wine with a difficult to pronounce name that flies over her head. He sits down with his own plate and gestures for her to enjoy. No need to tell her twice.

She easily cuts into the chicken breast using just her fork and eats it with a cap of mushroom. Her eyes involuntarily close in pleasure. It tastes heavenly.

"This is amazing, Mark." She swallows a bit more. "This whole time has been wonderful so far. Thank you for inviting me here."

He smiles lightly. "I'm glad you enjoy, Max. Also, no, thank you for coming. You don't know what it means to me." He sips a bit of wine then places the glass aside. "Excuse me for being forward, but…are you what one might call an imitator?"

She pauses blushing slightly. "I…wouldn't call myself that. I think that I just happen to be a modern day Max Caulfield."

Max takes refuge in that the statement isn't entirely false. She is herself in a modern day setting. A modern day Max Caulfield.

"Oh, no! Don't think I'm bothered either way. You could be an imitator, a fan, or perhaps just a walking mass of sheer coincidence. I'm just utterly fascinated by your very being." His tilts his head a little. "I don't know how much of Max Caulfield – the one I know personally – you are aware of, but you match her to an unbelievable degree."

"Oh, don't flatter me."

"I never flatter anyone." He laughs. "I'm being completely honest, Max. Your appearance is so like her that it's breath taking. Your voice, your manner of speech, and your facial expressions – all perfectly similar."

"That selfie you took previously? Any normal person might try to include one of my photographs in the background. You decided to get my wallpaper instead. That is just like her! I dare say you are outright a reincarnation of my Max Caulfield."

"O-oh, thank you, Mark."

"I'll be frank, Max. I've spent a long time hoping that, one day, I might see my former student again. Sometimes, I encounter a model that might resemble her a little, but never to any real level. To think that Victoria would find someone like you. How did she do it?"

She sips a bit of wine. "It's more the other way around, really. I came to San Francisco and had been wandering aimlessly for most of the day when I just happen to see a flyer for Victoria's art house. I, uh, decided to visit and, when I showed up, Victoria saw me and she was an amazed as you are!" Max laughs nervously. "She told me the same thing you did! I actually feel really privileged to have met and spoke to so many amazing people just because of the way I look."

That last part is completely true. Even if, in reality, she really knew everyone she met so far, the thing is that they – at least not the people they are now – don't know her. If not for the fact of who she is, they probably wouldn't spend a minute with her.

Instead, she now lives with a famous artist, got stalked by a big time millionaire author, and is now being wined and dined by a renowned photographer all because of her looks. This is probably the
closest she'll ever get to being famous.

Mark's smile deepens. "Max, I believe that, sometimes, things happen for a reason. My former student, Max Caulfield, was an incredibly talented person and I had always believed she would go on to great heights before her untimely demise."

"Her death really crushed me, you see. I attended her funeral, consoled her parents there, and it nearly killed me when I had to announce it to my class. Well, even if I survived it, my passion didn't. I've never felt about art quite the same way since."

Max stared wide eyed. From what Victoria had told her, she already knew her 'death' hit him badly, but to hear him say it and with such obvious stirring of emotional turmoil underneath...

She long knew that Mark Jefferson liked her. He would repeatedly call on her in class, push her endlessly to submit work, and openly complimented her. His favoritism towards her is obvious…and baffling. For the life of her, she never knew what he saw in her.

As far as she could see, there were many students much more driven and talented, but it's as if he thought she had something special no one else did. She did find it flattering and frightening in equal measure. To know such a wondrous man believed so much in her but also expect so much too.

Mark takes a deep breath. "Had she lived…I always felt that a day would come when we would eventually work together on an art project. One that I think would have turned out to be my masterpiece."

"Of course, that will never come to fruition now. However, seeing you…has stirred something in me. With your consent, Max – and I do beg you to say 'yes' – I would like for you to help me work on my next project. It will be magnificent."

There is the terror he inspires in her.

Mark Jefferson is a genius photographer and artist. She, by comparison, hasn't graduated art school yet. Now Mark doesn't know that, but surely he can tell she doesn't have much experience just by her age alone? Yet he expects her to contribute to what sounds like his first major art project in years?

"M-Mark, I would like to, but, you know, I'm not exactly very good at photography. Not at your level. I don't know what help I can be."

Her answer somehow seems to make him happier. "Max, I assure you, you have absolutely everything that is needed to be a major part of my next project. In fact, it can not happen without you. I need you. Please."

What exactly is he going to do? Is it some kind of dedication or memorial to her? Is that why she's such an important part?

She bites her lips. Why not? If he insists she can help, she might as well. With Chloe now out of the picture, she has no aim anymore.

"Alright, Mark. I'll do the best I can."

He jumps up and claps his hand blissfully. "Merci. This calls for a celebration! One last drink for the night? From my special bottle?"

She laughs a little. "Lets do it!"
Mark leaves the room and returns a moment later with another two glasses. This time, it is red wine. He delicately hands her a glass and holds up his own indicating a toast. She accepts it, of course.

"To a new venture."

"To a new venture."

He takes a big drink this time and she follows taking a similar gulp. The wine – being red – is less easy than the other ones he's been giving her and is noticeably more bitter. She valiantly fights down any gagging on her part, though, not wanting to look immature.

Afterwards, Mark places his glass down, and nods at her. "Max, thank you for this."

She tries to reply but the words wouldn't form correctly and her knees begin to tremble unsteadily. Baffled, she tries to fight off this sudden weakness, but any attempt to control herself seem to send the wrong signal through her body and it doesn't act as she wants.

Her thoughts become a haze and incoherent. She blacks out.

Emily looks down at her phone and compares the image to the drawing she created so far. Her eyes flit back and forth repeatedly trying to get down the right details. Normally, she wouldn't need this much concentration to draw a simple phone, but Victoria insisted on a particular outdated model that doesn't even exist anymore.

It took a few tries but she eventually gets the details right. She had to restart a few time due to something small – the bezel, the notification bar, or something other little detail – being incorrect.

This whole thing is strange to begin with. When Victoria came in, she requested a 'personal favor' and asked Emily to draw something for her. She had been happy to, but was baffled at the details. Of course, she knows who the drawing is for – the fact that Victoria specified a hand holding the phone being that of 'Max Caulfield' gave it away.

Over the past few days, the mysterious girl has really captivated Emily. In the beginning, she was convinced the girl was a poser and false, and her instincts told her to distrust her. Her instincts are usually right.

But doubts grew. Victoria's obvious affection towards the girl is a big indicator that she may not be as false as she seems. Then something amazing happened yesterday that added a whole layer to this whole mystery.

Mark Jefferson appeared and asked to see Victoria. Being a Blackwell alumnus, an employee of Victoria Chase, and just a member of the artistic scene, she simply can't help knowing who the man is.

She did not rudely listen into their private conversation. Of course. However, she certainly didn't tune out when they came back downstairs from Victoria's office and she caught snippets of their talk. Talk which revolved around Max Caulfield. She did not understand everything, but she heard enough to know that he wanted to see her.

So whoever this Max Caulfield is, she is simply not an ordinary person. Ordinary people do not have west coast elite artists fawning over them.

But then who is she? It's almost a certainty that she's not really a Blackwell student as she claims. She simply knows nothing about the school. However, Emily now realizes it may very well be a cover to disguise who she really is…and she must be someone incredibly extraordinary. How much more
proof does she need to know that?

Sighing, she refocuses her attention on the drawing. She's been at this since morning now and she's close to completion. She just needs to put a few finishing touches on it. The opening of the door interrupts her thoughts. She quickly puts on a smile.

"Hello-" She pauses in surprise. "Mrs. Henley. What can I do for you?"

Katherine briefly ignores her to scan the area, then turns to look at her. "Is Max Caulfield here?"

Emily paused for a long time. "Well, no, she isn't. However, I'm sure I can find a way to reach her for you."

"No, no, don't. It's better she's not here. Is Victoria here, though? I need to see her."

"Oh yes, ma'am. She is in her office right now. Feel free to head on up."

The woman rushes upstairs before Emily even finished talking. Katherine actually is familiar with this gallery having been given a tour by Victoria before and, as a sponsor and 'friend', the blonde has told her before that she's welcomed anytime. Well, welcomed or not, she wouldn't have been stopped.

Katherine throws the door to Victoria's office open without knocking startling the woman who is behind her desk doing paperwork. Shutting the door, Katherine sits in an available chair unceremoniously.

"Who is this Max Caulfield, Victoria?" She makes her voice as firm as possible. "I want the truth now."

Victoria blinks. "So you know her name. Did you finally remember?"

She snorts. "Yeah, I finally remember. After looking through my old school photobook and seeing her face there. I also had a clash with her yesterday."

"Yesterday? When was this?"

"Around noon. I followed her until she noticed me, then we had it out near the Coit Tower." Katherine levels a look at her. "Now she tells me she just showed up at your place, but I don't believe it. I want the damn truth, Victoria."

The blonde sighs. "But it is true. She literally just showed up blue a few days ago surprising even me."

"So you did not hire her to fuck with me?"

"No. Don't be ridiculous. I would never do something like that, especially something that distasteful."

"But it doesn't make sense otherwise." Katherine insists. "Her face, the way she talks, the things she knows. I'm supposed to believe there's a random person out there like this?"

Victoria licks her lips. "You don't know the half of it. Even I get unsettled several times around her. Do you remember the Vortex Club?"

Katherine glares at her. "Yes. I do."
"Most don't. We both know it's been disbanded shortly after we left Blackwell. Emily graduated from Blackwell almost a decade ago, but she had no idea what I was talking about when I brought it up during her interview."

"What the hell does this have to do with anything?"

"Max knew about it. When Emily asked her about Blackwell, she mentions a long forgotten club that hasn't existed for even longer. More than that, guess which principal she brought up when asked?"

Katherine hesitates. "It's not that annoying Christine Reichart?"

"No, Emily said she brought up a long retired principal. That means she brought up Raymond Wells."

"And yet you tell me she's not a paid actress."

"I said I didn't hire her, I didn't say she's not some actress posing as someone we knew from the past." Victoria leans back. "I'm not convinced she isn't either. She's just too perfect. You can't just randomly look like that and know these kinds of things."

"Anyone could find this info about Blackwell with enough searching. It wouldn't be difficult. The personal touch, though."

"There's more. It's the little things she says and the way she talks. You know she's staying with me, right? Well, whenever we talk, especially the first day, it's…it's just the way she says things. She talks like she knows me personally." Victoria takes a breath. "She makes remarks that send me spiraling into nostalgia. She says things that wouldn't be public knowledge. Things not easily found out."

"Still, it doesn't make sense to me." Victoria's eyes become hazy. "I wouldn't be surprised if she is an actress…but, if so, why? What's the purpose?"

Katherine hums. "Well, she is now living alongside a fairly famous and moderately successful artist." She says grudgingly. "Plus she also riled me enough that I'm willing to pay her anything she wants to leave."

"But did she ask you for money?" Katherine shakes her head. "And, so far, she hasn't wanted anything from me either. If she really was a struggling artist, she wouldn't really need to either. I'd probably be happy to show her work."

"So what are you saying? She's doing it for shits and giggles?"

"If she is, then what is the end goal? What's the point where she stops all this and admits she isn't really 'Max Caulfield'? Is there even an end or does she intends to do this permanently?"

"How the hell should I know? I came here hoping to find all this out from you."

"But I don't know either. Hell, Katherine, I sometimes wonder if…if maybe she's not actually acting, but it's something else."

"Like what? What are you trying to say?"

Victoria paused as if confused by her own words. She tries to gather her thoughts and stumbles a bit. "I don't know. I don't know what I'm saying. I don't know what I'm getting at."
Katherine bits her lips in frustration. What a completely fruitless exchange. The whole conversation only added more questions and didn't answer a single one she had. Glancing at Victoria, she decides to ask her something else. The same question that afflicted her earlier.

"Victoria, how strong is your memory of Max Caulfield? The memory of her you have in your head... does it match the one walking around with her name?"

The blonde looks at her a moment then turns away. "I've asked myself that a few times. The one in my head is actually kind of different. After meeting her, though, I've been wondering to myself if it is my memory that's wrong and not her. It's just she's so damn believable."

Now Victoria gazes at Katherine questioningly. "Why are you so curious all of a sudden? I wouldn't imagine you would be so interested in such a thing. Less so enough to come here just to ask me. What is the reason?"

Katherine clenches her teeth. Another question unanswered. She still does not know whether she remembered correctly or not. Instead, she finds out another person who should be familiar with the original also doesn't know how accurate the portrayal is.

"I'm a woman in turmoil, Victoria. That damn girl said some really annoying things to me." She gives a hard look at the blonde. "I want to know something. Why were you such a bitch to me at Blackwell? Why did you hate me?"

The question made her jump a bit and her face loses some color. Victoria's shoulders slumps a little, but, shortly after, a sort of life grows in her. She lifts her head up and looks Katherine directly in the eyes.

"You know, I've long imagined this moment. I replayed it over and over in my head coming up with talking points for every argument. I never had the courage to start the moment myself, though. Now that it's here, I also wished it didn't happen. All the arguments I've practiced in my head doesn't seem to be helping either."

She sighs. "I don't really know why, Katherine. I had a dozen reasons and they're all about as meaningful as the other. In the end, I think it boiled down to because I could and I liked the feeling of power and control it gave me."

Victoria looks at her. "Does that sound reasonable to you? Because it doesn't to me. I regret it all, Kate." Katherine glares at her for the name. "But I'm trying to make up for it. I don't want to have to pay for my past mistakes the rest of my life."

Katherine leans back and breathes deeply. "Victoria, if Max was alive and right here, do you think she would prefer the me now or the me back then?"

"I don't know. I don't have the right to make that judgment."

A bit of emotion seeps into Victoria's voice causing Katherine to sigh in disgust. "Stop that. If you don't like your past mistakes, you can always do what I do. Bury it and forget about it. Then change as a person. That's what I did - for better or worse."

"Now enough, are you sure there's nothing you can tell me about this imposter?"

Victoria shakes her head. "Like I said, she showed up one day out of nowhere. I literally know nothing about her other than that she's here to search for her friend Chloe Price."

"Chloe..." Katherine starts getting to her feet. "My God, that's right. She revealed the same thing to
me and I gave her the info to find her. Why didn't I think of it?"

"What? What?"

"You don't remember her, but Chloe used to go to Blackwell. You were even her classmate for a short time."

"Yes?"

"After Max's funeral, she and I became friends. I learned that she's probably Max's closest friend by far. They were childhood friends and practically grew up in each others' homes." Victoria still looked confused. "Don't you get it? If there is one person on this planet who could tear apart an imposter, it would be her. She probably knows the original down to her very core."

Not bothering to explain anymore, Katherine runs out the room. Shortly after, the sound of running steps behind indicates Victoria following along. Downstairs, Emily hears the two women and stands up unable to hold her curiosity.

"Emily." Victoria calls. "I'm going out for a little while. If I don't get back by closing, do you mind locking up?"

She nods cautiously. "Sure thing, Victoria. Do you, uh, want to take this with you then?" She holds up the now finished drawing. "It's all done now."

Victoria nods folding it into her purse. "Thank you."

Then she rushes out after Katherine just barely making it into her car before the woman drives off. Traffic is poor which is normal for their area, but that doesn't stop Katherine from growling and muttering curses along the way until they managed to get to the less busy areas.

The blonde remains silent most of the way feeling a little silly. Partially because she now realizes she could have helped Max from the beginning and saved so much time, but hadn't even realized that Katherine apparently kept such familiarity with this Chloe Price.

She also feels a tad childish now. She – a 38-year-old woman – is now driving across the city to hunt down and question a stranger about a girl who might be pulling some kind of scam. She imagines the best case scenario being that she looks like a complete halfwit.

Katherine parks in front of some coffee shop. Victoria almost thought she was getting a coffee at first, but then she walks across the street and into some apartment complex. She goes up, stops suddenly in front of a door nearly causing Victoria to run into her, then pounds on the door with a fist.

A moment later, the door opens to reveal a man. His eyes widen in surprise. "Katherine? Are you-"

"Is Chloe here, Scott?"

"Oh, uh, yes, she is…surprisingly enough."

Victoria furrows her eyebrows. "Why is it surprising? This is her home, right?"

He nods. "Yes, but she's usually out about this time having a drink. She's been acting a little off, though. She came home early today and has been in the kitchen holding Rochella the entire time."

"She hasn't even argued with Maxis today." Scott opens the door wide letting both in. "Not for lack
of trying from Maxis either."

"Huh." Katherine makes a noise being familiar with the poor relationship between mother and daughter. "That is strange. They usually can't resist a good row."

"Did I hear my name?"

The aforementioned girl swaggers in stopping as she sees them. Her eyes narrow in disgust at Katherine who returns the look none too gently, but she looks more favorably at Victoria.

'Hey, I know you. Victoria Chase, right? One of my friends loves you. She went to that Khmer exhibit you held a few months ago."

Victoria smiles. "Oh, I'm flattered to hear that. I really liked that exhibit too."

Scott looks between the two of them. He suspected Victoria is someone notable if she's arriving with Katherine, but Maxis' and Katherine's taste in people are as far apart as utterly possible. Yet she apparently likes the woman Katherine brought along.

Katherine walks past Maxis ignoring her and into the kitchen. Maxis scowls and follows along with everyone else. In the kitchen, Chloe is drinking a small glass of wine and caressing her young daughter's head as the girl sleeps in her mother's arms.

She looks up at their arrival and her face remains expressionless. Almost as if she had been expecting them. Her eyes slowly look over the both of them hardly registering any emotion.

"Katherine." She nods at her. "And that is, I believe, Victoria Chase. Ladies, to what do I owe the pleasure?"

Normally, she might greet and speak to Chloe first, but Katherine did not have the patience for pleasantries tonight. She takes a step forward and clears her throat putting emphasis on what she says next.

"We're here to talk to you about Max Caulfield."

To her annoyance, that garners no reaction from Chloe. Again, it's as if she already knew. Beside them, Scott and Maxis clearly did not have the same forethought and the subject of Max gets their obvious interest.

"Several days ago, a girl calling herself Max Caulfield and bearing a remarkable resemblance arrived here, and met up with Victoria. Since then, she put on one hell of an act, and she put me more out of sorts than I'd like to admit."

Katherine said that last part bitterly.

"You recently met up with her, right? Out of any of us, you of all can most see through her, and you must have. Chloe, who is that girl and what the hell does she want?"

A snort of laughter. "You're talking like she's some imposter after money or something."

"Because she is. What the hell else would she be? Who is she?"

"Max Caulfield. She's Max Caulfield."

That stops Katherine dead and Victoria didn't look too steady on her feet. After a moment where no one speaks, Katherine takes a deep breath trying to cool herself.
"Chloe, you and I both know Max Caulfield is dead. She's been dead for twenty years now." Scott and Maxis stare at her silently. "For fuck's sake, we saw the body and we buried her. There is no fucking way she is Max Caulfield. No one can fake a death like that."

"She doesn't have to fake anything." Chloe mutters dismissively. "She can do this even when she dies for real."

"Have you lost it, Chloe? Is that what this is?"

Chloe gives her a hard look. "She is Max Caulfield, Katherine. I know this for a fact. She looks exactly like the real Max. She told me several things only the real Max would know. She came to see me for a reason only the real Max would and it isn't money."

"What did she want?"

She didn't answer for a long while. When she spoke again, it is in a trembling voice.

"Something I won't give her." She clutches her little daughter tighter. "Something I can't give her."

"What?"

Chloe wouldn't respond making Katherine more frustrated. Maxis, seeing the scene before her, grow unsettled. Her mother is genuinely distressed. She knew something had been up since her return yesterday when she didn't respond to Maxis' prodding like she normally would, but this confirms it.

The two women, Katherine and Victoria, don't seem too well either. All their problems surround this one single girl and the worst part of it is that Maxis has no idea how. Insofar as she can tell, they don't even seem to know who she really is…with the exception of her mother who insists she's somebody who sounds like she should be dead.

Katherine is slowly losing her temper, but Victoria places a hand on her shoulder to calm her.

"Chloe, lets be reasonable." Victoria tries to sound assuring. "You might have made a mistake and think it's the real person, but it's not. It can't be. Like Katherine said, innumerable people seen her died that day. The hospital she was taken to confirmed her death. Her parents arranged her embalming and funeral."

"I know it's tempting to think it's really her and we can end up believing it, but it's simply not it."

"If you really believed that, Victoria, then you wouldn't be here." Chloe retorts growing angry. "Both you and Katherine are here exactly because you believe it really is her. You won't admit it. All the cells in your brains won't let you. You can't stop it, though."

"Chloe…"

"You think I don't know why you came to me? I'm the childhood friend. I know her longer than anyone. You believed that she's an imposter, but she wouldn't be good enough to fool me. I would have seen through her instantly and got her to confess, am I right? Then I would have let you both in on the secret and calm your hearts."

"Well, I hate to tell you, ladies, but I knew it was her instantly."

"Bullshit." Katherine hisses.

"You don't have to believe me. Why don't you verify it yourself? Ask her anything. Get her to
confirm the deepest secrets shared between you all. She'll be able to tell you. Why? Because she's Max fucking Caufield!"

Katherine steps back. "You know what? That's what I'm going to do. I'll get down to the bottom of this as soon as I find the conniving little bitch."

"I think she's with Mark Jefferson." Victoria says. Seeing Katherine's surprise, she elaborates. "Mark came yesterday asking to see her. He said he is amazed by her appearance and wanted to speak to her."

Victoria tells her the address she saw from his business card and, without a word, Katherine took off. The Slater family watches them go silently. Afterwards, Maxis turns towards her mother.

"Mom, who is this Max Caulfield? Why did I never hear of her?"

Chloe stares at her daughter tiredly. "Max Caulfield was my childhood best friend. We were extremely close before and, had she been around, you might not exist today."

"That girl that looks the same age as Maxis was your childhood friend?" Scott asks skeptically.

Maxis ignores him. "My name is…?"

Chloe nods. "Yes, you were named after her. I wanted something special to me to have something of hers and the only thing I had of her to give was her name."

The way her mother spoke about this girl…that feeling in her voice. Inside, deep inside, Maxis begins to suspect what it was that Max wanted and her mother refused to give. It stirred something inside of her. Something confusing and unpleasant.

She looks around her home then at her mother again. She wonders if – given the chance to retry things – her mother would have taken another path. A path that involves that girl instead of them. Instead of Maxis. That this life is an imperfect one and the one she really wanted had, perhaps, died twenty years ago.

She turns and happens to catch sight of herself in the mirror. Inside, she feels as if the answer isn't what she would like to hear.

"I'm leaving. I'm going to see this girl."

Chloe's eyes widen and she jumps up. "No, you're not. You're staying here, Maxis. You stay out of this."

Maxis scowls. "Mom, in all the years I've known you, few people had this effect on you. I don't even have this effect on you anymore. This Max sees you for one day and now you're talking like a crazy person."

"What the hell are you talking about? I'm perfectly fine."

"You only play with Rochella like that when you're depressed, mom. Really depressed." Maxis pointed out. "You can't tell me that you're fine when even Scott here knows something is wrong with you."

Chloe clenches her teeth. "Maxis, I am your mother and you will listen to me. You will stay inside and not go anywhere without my permission."
Ignoring her mother, she walks out. Chloe shouts after her waking Rochella in the process who begins sobbing in fear. Maxis ignores her little sister too. Outside, she recalls the address Victoria blatantly said out loud, and decides the bus would be the quickest way.

It won’t be too long before Katherine and Victoria gets there too. She wonders what will happen when all five of them confront each other.
Max's eyes open before she is even aware she is conscious.

She roams her vision from place to place not registering what she is seeing. As her head clears – and gives way to a pounding headache – she begins to recover her senses. At that point, she notices that something is wrapped around her mouth. She tests a few words only for it to come out muffled. She's also having trouble moving her arms and legs. They're held together by something.

Fighting down the rising panic, she tries to assess her surroundings. She's in…some kind of photography studio. There's camera equipment everywhere and not a single one of them looks cheap. There isn't any indication of where she is or how she got here.

Trying to recall, she remembers being with Mark drinking wine when things suddenly turned black.

Pausing, Max looks towards the floor and note that it is made of a familiar hardwood. She then checks the wall and also sees a familiar design. She's still at Mark's house. So then this is his studio. She's bounded and gagged in his studio.

A deep sense of betrayal and anger fills her being. She struggles again trying to break free, but only manages to thrash about on the floor. Frustrated, she looks around for something sharp or just a way to get out.

The studio has nothing. There aren't windows or even phones around. Instead, there is only a single door. She might have to take her chances.

Just as she was going to try to wiggle her way to the door, the sound of incoming footsteps alerts her. She quickly closes her eyes and tries to even her breathing. A moment later, the door opens and footsteps come in. Mark Jefferson's voice is clearly heard muttering to himself.

Max wanted to open her eyes and shout at him. Demand to know him why he did this to her, but she suspects it would end badly for her if she did so. So she remains silent waiting uncomfortably and trying to control her breathing to prevent him from knowing she's awake.

This continues unbearably long. The man remains in the room muttering to himself and occasionally adjusting some of the equipment. Max flinches every time he passes near her.

She only got a reprieve when the doorbell rings. Mark ignored it initially but when it continues to go off for the third, fifth, seventh time, he lets out a series of curses then angrily stomps out. At that, she takes several gasping breaths and calms herself. She also looks at the door and sees that this is her chance to escape or free herself somehow.

Uncomfortably, Max starts by propelling herself forward with her tied legs. The smooth hardwood floor makes the friction not so bad, but it is slow. She swallows the frustration down and continues.

Mark quicksteps towards the door feeling very heated and his disposition is only made worse when the doorbell rings for the eleventh time. No doubt whoever is there spotted his car and knows he's home, but one would think they would get the hint that they're not welcomed.

Normally, he has some very acidic remarks for someone who bothers him like this, but, today, when they’re taking him away from a very important project, he just might go the extra mile and really cuss
them out.

Any insults or remarks he might have had in mind died when he opens the door and sees Katherine Henley and Victoria Chase. An especially uncomfortable tinge goes through him at seeing the latter. Now he's more concerned with them leaving.

"Katherine, Victoria, I hadn't expected this visit. Not that I don't love it, but is it possible we could do this another time?"

Katherine ignores him. "Actually, I need to speak to Max."

Mark suppresses the scowl. "I'm sorry. The artist currently known as 'Max Caulfield' left nearly an hour ago."

"Max left?" Victoria asks. "Did she go home? Did she say?"

"I assume that's where she's going, but I hadn't asked."

"Damn it, now we'll have to-" Katherine begins, but then stops and turns to look at him. "Actually, before we go, I was wondering if we could speak with you a moment, Mark?"

"I'm really tied up right now, could we-"

"It'll be quick."

Despite his protests, Katherine butts in past him and takes a seat at a nearby sofa. Mark can't stop the displeased scowl from appearing on his face but finds he has to relent. Victoria blushes and apologizes quietly before, of course, coming in too.

As Mark comes near, Katherine asks bluntly, "What do you think of the girl claiming to be Max Caulfield?"

He stares. "In what way do you mean?"

"I mean do you think she resembles the real Max? Does your memory of her matches up with this new one?"

He raises an eyebrow. Humming a little to himself, he goes to pick up a bottle of whiskey, and pours a glass. He sips it letting out a breath, then returns.

"She's a fantastic imitation, of course." He says blandly. "Something which I'm sure you both agree on already. Honestly, I haven't thought about Max all that much over the years – it's my method of letting her go – but just being around her and hearing her brings back memories I've even forgotten."

The first part is obviously a lie as he thought about her endlessly, but the second part is true. He had forgotten that childlike anxiousness and introversion she often expresses, especially in his presence, and this new Max actually reminded him of that.

When she had taken a selfie, that had fit into his expectations. What didn't was her quirkiness. Had she taken one against one of his exhibits, he might have only found it cute. She did one against his wall pattern, though, clearly revealing what she found most memorable. He had forgotten how Max's photographs so easily show her inner being and it reminded him that it was, in fact, one of the very reasons he helped to get her admitted to Blackwell.

He loved that.
"If you were to contact her parents," he continues, "they'd probably think their daughter came back to life."

The two women glances at each other disappointment clearly in their eyes. Katherine abruptly gets up.

"Then I suppose it's best we get going. Maybe we'll get back to Victoria's house the same time as her."

In almost any other circumstances, he would have gladly seen them out, but their arrival and questions raised curiosity in him. He wanted to know what was so important that they had to see the girl in question so quickly.

"Before you leave, would you mind explaining what the point of those questions was? Questions which you must have certainly known the answer to? Almost anyone would think she's the real thing."

Victoria blushing. "Well, that's sort of the problem. She seems too much like the real thing. We've been spending the entire day going over the details over and over trying to find some kind of flaw, but we couldn't."

"We just went to see Chloe – her childhood friend and probably the person who knows her best," Katherine adds. "She…thinks it's Max Caulfield. The Max Caulfield. The one we all knew."

Mark rolls his eyes. "Oh, how I wish. Lets be real, though. She's a random girl who happens to bear an unbelievable resemblance to the one we knew. There's no way around it. Allow me to lists the reasons."

He clears his throat. "First off, she's too young. Max went to Blackwell the same time as both of you, so, if she was alive, she should be in her late thirties now, not a young girl."

"Second, we all witnessed her coffin being lowered into that grave in Arcadia Bay. This includes me, the both of you, and her parents. She's not digging herself out of a coffin from six feet under nor could she survive the inevitable suffocation."

"Lastly, I believe she spent a considerable amount of time searching for someone here in San Francisco? And she also happened to find you both by chance? She expressed genuine surprise, right?"

Victoria glances at Katherine and nod.

"Alright, now let's assume she somehow been alive all these years. What are the chances she would not devour every inch of news regarding her old Blackwell classmates that she's hiding from? Wouldn't you?"

"Stop it." Katherine snaps. "We already know how little sense it all makes. However, what does make sense?"

Mark gives a dismissive shrug. "Ladies, it is simply and utterly impossible for this girl to be anything but a great actress."

"But then, what's the point?" Katherine retorts. "She hasn't demanded money. Victoria said she hasn't wanted anything from her either. Why do this?"

He gives her an unimpressed stare. "Look at the three people in this room she got to know so far.
Furthermore, Victoria here," he gestures, "introduced her to a series of good connections during her recent private exhibition. I'd say she got a lot of benefits."

Katherine shakes her head. "But that doesn't explain-"

Victoria stares between the two of them. Despite her protestations, Katherine seems more upbeat and happier. Mark is finally giving her what she wants to hear – reasons as to why this new Max is a fraud. However, Victoria still wants to know how she could have gotten so much information on all of them.

She holds back a sigh. Internally, she wonders if she really wants to find out if this new Max is a fraud. Even if she was, would she care? Sometimes, it's hard to let go of the past even if it is a lie.

Outside Mark Jefferson's house, Maxis stares discretely at the building from across the street. When she got off the bus and walked here, she realizes she was already too late when she notices Katherine's car in the driveway.

After a few minutes of indecision, she nonchalantly saunters up to the house and peeks through the window where she sees three people talking.

If the house by itself wasn't a big enough clue, his appearance certainly indicates that Mark Jefferson is another one of Katherine's rich asshole friends. One that gives her the same vibes as the creepy old men who hit on her at clubs.

She circles around the house hoping to try the backdoor, but stops upon seeing a slightly opened window. Thank goodness for warm Cali weather making some fools unguarded. She glances around, then quickly slides the window open and climbs in then closes the window back to her former position.

Inside, she can now hear the three clearly.

"What about Chloe, though?" Victoria's voice asks.

Maxis had no intention of bothering to listen to the three prattle on, but the mention of her mother stops her.

"What about her?"

"Chloe is just a regular person. She's not a major artist, she's not wealthy. However, she's the one Max spent the entire time looking for. Why?"

"That's the person she says she was looking for. I can't help but notice she found you two first. A bit suspicious, no?"

"But she continued to look."

"Perhaps to complete the performance. I don't know how she thinks."

"I just can't believe it." Katherine. "Even if what you say sounds right, I can't get over how she met me. You would think someone who wants something from me would be, well, more of a suck-up. Instead, she-"

As the subject moved away from her mother, Maxis lost interest. Instead, she's been wondering where the hell this Max is.
Noticing a door slightly ajar, she goes in for a peek. The door leads downstairs and there are a few rooms. At the end, one door is completely open and she looks inside. There is a large amount of photograph equipment – very expensive looking ones – and several enlarged photographs all around, but otherwise little things of note. Certainly not what she came to find.

She walks back and was about to look through a closed door when she hears some kind of thump behind her. There is another door slightly opened and, inside, it looks like some kind of old fashion dark room.

Maxis cautiously open the door and steps inside only to bump her leg against something soft. She looks down and freezes seeing a pair of eyes stare back up at her. Max. She mumbles something against her gag and wiggles her body to try to communicate to Maxis.

The girl couldn't stop herself from letting out a sharp scream.

Katherine, Victoria, and Mark all snap their heads towards the direction of the sound. The blonde woman is the first to rush towards the noise and, with a scowl, Katherine follows after. Behind them, Mark curses himself repeatedly for stopping them from leaving earlier, but it's now too late. He quickly locks the door and runs after them.

Maxis stops screaming but knows it's already too late. Getting it together, she leans down to try to untie Max. She only just managed to remove her leg bounds when Victoria and Katherine rush in. The four of them freeze staring at each other.

Victoria's eyes widen dramatically when she realizes who Maxis is helping. Katherine is equally speechless. Before anyone could get a word out, the sound of a gun cocking is heard. They turn around to see Mark aiming a pistol at them.

"Alright, women and...girls." He says the second part glaring at Maxis heatedly. "Please step out of the room slowly. Any wrong moves and I'll shoot the intruder here."

Katherine looks at him in disbelief. "What the fuck is going-"

"Ah, ah." He shushes her. "No talking as of yet. Everything will be explained in due order. For now, do as I say."

He backs out of the room and a bit away from the doorway. A moment later, the women slowly walk out and pause in front of him. Some throws him hateful looks. Max walks beside them, though her hands and mouth remain bound.

Mark nods appreciatively. "Now walk backwards until you reach my studio room."

It takes another moment for them to do it, but they complied. They move slowly towards the back of the hallway entering into a well lit studio. Mark gestures to them to keep moving until they're all situated inside and he closes the door.

He sighs, "Well, this didn't go according to plan."

"You son of a bitch." Katherine shouts unable to hold it in anymore. "You've done this before, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have, actually." He replies blandly. "Not for a long time, though. The last time was at Blackwell." She and Victoria look at him in horror. "Yes, at Blackwell. Yes, to the students. In fact, you were one of my catches, Katherine."
The woman pales. "My God…My God…you mean that night I woke up outside my dorm and couldn't remember anything…?"

"I suppose that must be it. I wasn't the one who brought you back."

Her eyes downcast becoming unfocused. "My God…I thought about that night for years afterwards. I was always suspicious, but I never knew…what the hell did you do to me?"

"Now calm down. It wasn't rape or anything crude like that. I actually just took photos of you in much the same position you see Max here in. You weren't the first, but you were the last. After you, I stopped."

"You fucking cocksucker." Katherine regains herself and hisses at him. "You're not making it out of here."

He rolls his eyes. "Oh Katherine, threats? The only reason you're alive now is purely on my own mercy. Some less lucky students ended up missing."

Here, Max begins making noises, shaking her head, and stomping her feet. Mark stares at her curiously before gesturing for Victoria to remove her gag. With it off, she takes a deep breath and glares at him.

"If honesty is what we're doing, then I want to know something. Does the name Rachel Amber ring a bell to you?"

He raises an eyebrow. "A student at Blackwell. Also one of my projects. I only remember her because we were sleeping together. She eventually died because my idiot assistant accidentally overdosed her and I had to bury her in the town junkyard."

Max closes her eyes conflicted. There it is. The answer to what she's been searching for. She now knows what happened to Rachel Amber.

It is far worse than she could have imagined. The idea that Rachel may be dead was always there. Even murder was on the table. However, she never once thought it was done by her own teacher – one she admired – after he slept with her then made her one of his 'projects'.

And the same thing could have happened to Kate…

"If honesty is what we're doing…" Jefferson repeats mockingly. "I have some questions of my own. First, the one I'm more curious about. Who the hell are you?"

He points his gun at Maxis who looks at it and him in contempt. She makes a face and doesn't answer. When Mark lifts his gun slightly, Max jumps in.

"Answer him, Maxis."

"Shut up. Don't tell me what to do."

"He has a gun. Just do it and save the risk. You have a family to return to."

"He's going to kill us anyway."

"Maxis…"

"Just do it, you bitchy little brat." Katherine hisses. "If you're going to die anyway, try to save a few extra minutes instead of dying now."
Maxis glares at her, but she swallows the anger down. "Alright. I'm Maxis Hiller."

"Alright." Mark returns blandly. "How and why did you come in here?"

"How is through your window. Why is because I wanted to talk to Max." This earns her a curious look from the named person. "I wanted to ask her something."

Mark chuckles. "My, aren't you popular, Max? That brings me to my next question: Who are you, really?" She stares at him blankly. "Everyone is dying to know. Victoria and Katherine came here just to ask my opinion on that. I want to know too."

"In this situation, there is no need to keep up the act anymore, is there?" Mark smiles. "So make us all happy, 'Max'. Who are you?"

She scowls. "You're right. There is no more need to lie. I am Max Caulfield."

This didn't just get her a look from Mark, but also Victoria and Katherine.

"Oh? The real Max Caulfield?" He adds snarkily. "She should be dead, though. Am I to take it that she has the power of resurrection then?"

"I do have powers. Not of resurrection, but...time travel." No one seems to know how to respond to this. "If you wish, I can prove it to you. However, I need my hands untied."

Mark's amusement is endless. On a whim, he decides to go ahead and see what she has up her sleeves. He gestures for Victoria to remove the rest of her bounds and the blonde quickly does so happy to comply.

Released now, Max rubs her wrists a little just buying time. She licks her lips knowing that there's almost no chance she can do it. However, the stakes are considerably higher now. If she can just get it to work for even a few small seconds, perhaps she can quickly run over and grab the gun.

She takes a deep breath and raises her hand. Mark takes a step back and is on guard.

It is different this time. Almost immediately, all the light in the room – and the room had a lot of lighting – blurs and the warmth appears in her chest. When the tugging came, Max felt numerous tugs at once instead of just a single one.

Her power has advanced. This realization sends a shockwave of bliss through her as it means that, with practice, she may be able to reclaim her ability to manipulate time.

Then her knees buckle. With the advancement of her power, it also begins to take a greater toll on her physically and mentally. It feels almost like the first time she started using her power again.

An intense headache tears through her skull and she loses her breath forcing her to disperse her power before it could really do anything. She falls to her knees and Victoria rushes to her side.

"Max? What's wrong?" A wetness slides over her lips. "Max, your nose is spilling blood!"

Victoria desperately empty her purse and grabs a napkin out of the pile stuffing it into her nose to prevent further blood loss, but it is soaked through in seconds. Max, trying to focus through the daze and pain, suddenly notices a drawing in the pile.

"Well, that was anticlimactic." Mark says blandly. "Your time travel looks more like a bloody nose. I
"Guess we'll never get the truth from you." He looks at all of them. "Alright, enough games. I think it's time we get a move on."

"What are you going to do to us?" Katherine demands.

He smiles. "Ever heard of ketamine? All of you are going to take a pill or two. You will all forget about this in the morning and I'm going to have some nice new photos of Max here." He pauses glancing at the rest of them. "Hm, this is new. Maybe some photos of Max posing with all of you? Her old and new friends? Huh, I wonder if I can work your age difference into a special theme."

"Bullshit." Maxis calls.

"Excuse me?"

"What you said is bullshit. Ketamine can only wipe out so much memory. This went on too long so there's no way you can apply it now and make us forget the entirety of the night." She narrows her eyes. "If you've done this before, you know this too. I'm thinking what will happen is that we take the pill, pass out, and then never wake up again."

He remains silent.

"You can't do that." Katherine says breathing heavily. "You won't get away with it. How the hell do you think you're going to kill someone as well known as me and Victoria and get away with it? Plus, Maxis' family will look for her...and they know about you."

Victoria looks up. "They also know Katherine and I came here too, so the police will definitely check here too. Mark, there's no way around this. Let us go and your punishment will be less severe."

He ignores them. His eyes turn to the only one he cares about. "Max...you don't know how long I've waited for this moment. My life really became dull after the death of my former student, so when you showed up – it was like a shot of adrenaline. You brought my spirit back to life."

Max feels sickened to her stomach. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying I don't give a damn what happens. I finally get the chance to complete my folder on you. I'm not giving it up for anyone or anything." He turns away. "Now Victoria, there's a spool of dense, twisted rope behind you. Tie everyone up, won't you? And make it strong."

She hesitates not wanting to leave Max's side, but complies when Mark points the gun at her. She gets up and trudges slowly towards the direction he indicated. Just as she passes Maxis, though, the girl makes a sudden move.

Rushing forward and pulling some kind of object out of her pocket, she takes a swipe at Mark's abs causing a thin, reddish slice. Mark, in turn, reacts at the maneuver and blindly shoots towards Maxis' direction. He misses.

Emboldened, Maxis makes a jump towards his face but he quickly shoots again. The shot hits her neck spurting blood everywhere as her body falls to the ground.

Time seem to freeze as Max stares at the twitching body of Chloe's daughter and the blood pooling around her. Then things return to normal and she lets out a blood curling scream. Chaos erupts all around.

Katherine tackles Mark before he could recover from the shock and manages to knock the gun away.
He is able to easily manhandle her and tries to reach for it, but Victoria jumps on him and begins biting his shoulder drawing blood.

Max should have helped them. She should have gotten the gun or jumped on him too. All she could see is Maxis, though.

She runs over and bends down to hold the girl against her trying to staunch the flow of blood, but her hand is soon soaked red with the plasma spilling through. She whispers words of comfort even as the girl doesn't respond at all. She begs and pleads with her to be alright not just for Chloe's sake, but her own too. Max wouldn't be able to take it if she allows the girl to die.

"Maxis? Sweetheart, darling, honey, please say something. Please, say something. Anything. Just say one word. Please."

She repeats these words over and over to no avail. Maxis' eyes are open but unfocused and her twitching body is becoming more still. Desperation overcomes Max as she realizes Maxis is dying. Without thought, she raises her hand.

The familiar traits of her power reappears, but with a frightening force. The warmth that normally shows up feels almost like molten lava and the lights around the room blocks out everything with a blinding white. The tugging now feels like there are a thousand holes directly in her heart exploding outwards.

Max wants to believe that this means something is happening, but she still feels Maxis in her arms and there's the sound of struggling and yelling in the background. So she keeps trying. Even as her head feels like it's about to crack open and the pain is so intense that she couldn't even hold a single thought, she keeps going knowing Maxis' life is at stake.

Then there is a sharp piercing pain inside her heart feeling like a stab and then it all stops. The blinding blur and distortion of the lights dies down until she could see everything again.

There is blood – hers – all over her clothes and Maxis. A bit away, Katherine and Victoria are still struggling with Mark with the former two being clearly injured and slowly losing.

"Wha…what happened?" Max whispers to herself. "Why didn't it work?"

But something did happen. It started slowly at first. Some of the equipment began moving by themselves. They edge back and forth randomly picking up speed until they were slamming into each other. One of the cameras on a tripod suddenly flew up and smashes itself right next to them stopping Katherine, Victoria, and Mark in their struggle.

Then the camera rebuilds itself, moving in reverse, and returns to its place on the tripod.

"What the fuck…" Mark stares at the scene disbelievingly.

Some of the tables also begin to move by themselves. Their drawers open and close. They would break apart only to repair themselves right afterwards. Some would disappear and reappear in a different spot across the room.

Subconsciously, Katherine and Victoria get up and back away. Mark is so shocked that he remains lying on the floor staring at the scene. Noticing rapid movement, he lifts up his wrist to look at his watch. The hour and minute hands are moving in opposite directions at a ridiculous speed.

The walls aged, grow cracks, and breaks down into pieces as if they aged a hundred years and the outside can be seen. To all their surprise, it is now daylight instead of night. The world has become a
monstrous place.

Mark Jefferson pushes himself onto his hands and knees staring out in horror. The roads are splitting and the sidewalks are full of people randomly walking backwards and forward. Cars would drive by sometimes missing half of themselves or entirely in pieces. An airplane flying overhead actually breaks apart in midair and shows the passengers calmly sitting in place before the pieces rearranges themselves back in order.

In the midst of this, of them, a wind tunnel begins to materialize. Its appearance hailed by a whistling sound which grows in volume as the tunnel also grows in speed. Before long, it is large enough to throw equipment and furniture around like little dolls.

It lifts up Victoria who screams for help and Katherine rushes to her aid just barely weighing enough to hold the two of them down. They crawl along the ground and huddle against a wall holding onto a heavy trunk. Mark jumps to the side and grabs onto one of his furniture.

The vortex grows in girth until it covers the entire room and the wind deafens all of them. Lesser items are smashed to bits while the sturdier items are thrown around.

Max clutches onto Maxis. The girl's body has become still and cold, but Max holds on anyway unwilling to admit to what she sees. That Maxis has died and she let down Chloe again. No, she can still fix this.

She stares around her at the chaos. She still has no idea what has happened.

It's as if the fabrics of reality has become unraveled and is now trying futilely to knit its own strings back together. It is hopeless, though. Time no longer flows straight. It folds into itself and swirls and turns and lifts and falls.

Did she cause this? Are her powers corrosive? What...what will happen if she uses it too much in her own time?

All around, San Francisco is crumbling. Buildings age, disappear, or fall apart only to reverse. The people are equally affected. Some notice, most don't. The ones who don't notice are affected the worst. They sometimes disappear and reappear much like the buildings around them. Some walk with missing parts of their bodies. All exists on an ethereal level ready to flit in and out of the world with no fanfare.

Mark loses his grip and gets tossed against a broken off wall letting out a silent shout of pain. He grabs onto it for safety. In another area, Katherine and Victoria are holding onto each other and whatever else around them to prevent being taken away. They shout words, but their voices are drowned out and, even next to each other, they can't hear what is being said. The vortex rages in the room unabated.

Out of the corner of her eye, Max spots a familiar piece of paper blowing against a fallen camera. The drawing.

Swallowing, she drags herself and Maxis over to it her fingers trying to protect them against any flying debris. She reaches the area, grab the drawing, and lean down. She looks into the drawing and notes that it is exactly what she needs. She doesn't know if enough of her power has returned – assuming it actually did at all – for her to attempt this, but she has no choice but to do so now. San Francisco 2033 is a dying city. Max has to reverse it.

Max looks down at the calm face of Maxis and tries to memorize all the features in her mind taking a
mental snapshot. She wishes badly she could take a photo of her and take it home so that Maxis could stay with her forever. She thinks of Chloe, Rochella, and even Scott apologizing to all three for the death of their family member.

She has killed yet again. Should her power work, she'll also kill the rest of Chloe's family. Max wishes she could hold Rochella once more.

"Maxis, I'm so sorry. I'll...take care of your mother. Either here or in another time."

Leaning down, she kisses Maxis' lips and bids her a final good-bye. Then she holds the drawing open with both hands and begins to focus.

There is no effect at first. Max continues focusing praying that it will work.

"Max?"

Her head lifts a little, but she didn't turn away from the drawing. It is hard to hear against the howling and destruction in the background, but she swears she heard someone just called her name. She didn't recognize the voice as anyone in the room, though.

Then...then the drawing begins to distort. Unlike Daniel's drawing, this one is black and white. It traded color for vastly more details. Nonetheless, color comes to life in it. Parts of the drawing start to show bits of green and blue.

Emily did not draw the photo accurately as she did not model directly from Max's phone like Daniel did. The phone wasn't entirely right and the drawing of her hand had marks that did not actually exist on her real one. That didn't seem to matter, however.

As the drawing slowly distort, her power fixes the details on its own. The marks that shouldn't exist shift or disappear. Symbols on her phone that were in the wrong place or doesn't belong does the same.

She feels nothing inside of her. Nothing of her familiar power or even the feelings of the new one. No warmth, no expanding force, no tugging. However, the area around her changes. A sort of protective dome from the events around them.

The chaos in the area near her stops and the forces controlling it float towards the drawing. Max could somehow see a light, transparent haze reaching towards the drawing and coating it into a bright sheen. The drawing turns into a blur.

"Max? C'mon, dude!"

She ignores the call this time, though it is becoming clearer and sounds more familiar. The blur is her cue to start concentrating and she doesn't want to blink. The haze sheen coating the drawing vibrates and brightens hurting her already strained eyes.

The drawing becomes more lifelike. The chaos in the background deaden and fades giving way to a different background noise – a calmer, more relaxed one with voices talking in happiness instead of terror. The drawing pops out and the sheen's vibration turns into more of a beat. It begins to expand outwards even out of the paper's bounds and begin to superimpose itself onto the world.

Max looks up. She catches sight of the Mark Jefferson – now bruised and bleeding – struggling to hold on. Victoria and Katherine clutch each other trying to protect themselves. She stares especially long at them feeling fondness for both and a sense of sadness that she might never see them – not like that – again. She silently apologizes for intruding into their world where she doesn't belong and bids
both good-bye.

The world turns brighter and brighter and block out everything taking Victoria and Katherine out of sight. Mark too disappears. As even Max gets swallow in this, she takes a last look down into the face of Maxis. She hopes she gets to see her again one day.

The world turns white and all fades away.

"Max?"

…

"Jesus, we have to call an ambulance. She isn't waking up."

"Why the hell did she just pass out like that?"

…

"Hold on, guys, I'm calling now."

"Wait, I think she's moving again."

"Are you sure? I just don't see it."

"No wait. I think Brooke is right. Look at her hand. No wait, her eyes are opening."

"Max? Please wake up. Max, please."

Max slowly comes back to her senses. Each blink of her eyes wipes some of the blurriness and strain away and her vision begins to clear. Above her, several of her friends are staring down in concern. Warren, Brooke, Daniel…and even Katherine is there.

She groans and tries to pick herself up. Warren and Katherine quickly help her lifting her up onto her feet where she has to steady herself.

Rubbing her head, she groans, "Did I get knocked out?"

"I guess so." Daniel says cautiously. "For a moment, though, you scared the hell out of all of us. You weren't breathing and Brooke couldn't hear a heartbeat."

"Three minutes." Brooke emphasizes. "Your heart wasn't beating for three minutes. I had my head practically glued to your chest. You had no pupillary response. I blew air into your cornea and there was no reflex."

Brooke continues listing off the physiological signs until she ran out of breath and had to pause. Then she stares at Max hard.

"I was ready to give you CPR with little hope that it would do anything. The fact that you're alive right now and perfectly fine is baffling to me."

Max is suddenly embraced by Katherine. "I'm so happy you're alright. I was just sitting a bit away when…when I heard a commotion and looked over. I nearly screamed when I saw you lying like that. I was so frightened."

"Hey now…don't be worried. I'm perfectly fine." She embraces her back. "Everything is alright, Katherine."
A pause. Then the blonde laughs a little. "Did you just call me Katherine? Max! Only my grandma ever called me that! And she did it as a joke!"

"Oops." She smiles sheepishly and made sure to mentally change the name in her head.

The situation lightens now that Max is back up and moving again. A smile slowly returns to everyone's faces, though some of their eyes still clearly show concern.

"Max, if you have some strange condition, please tell us next time." Daniel laughs nervously. "You were just staring at the drawing when you stopped hearing us then suddenly dropped to the ground."

Breaking the embrace, Max turns to all of them. "Guys, I'm sorry for causing trouble. I don't know what came over me." Her eyes moisten a little feeling happiness soar inside of her. "Thank you for being worried about me. Kate, I especially want to thank you too."

"For what?"

"For just being you." She takes a few steps back. "Sorry for being in a rush, everyone, but I have to go somewhere real important right now. Thanks, again!"

She left them all looking confused. Max rushes to the nearest bus stop and hops onto the next one that arrives. It takes her through Arcadia Bay and she stares at every scene she passes by lovingly. No large buildings or beautiful expensive houses here, but she didn't mind. This little town – in this particular time – is her home.

At her stop, she rushes off and makes a run towards her destination. The Price household. She opens the door knowing it wasn't locked and skips upstairs barging into Chloe's room without knocking.

She is inside smoking a cigarette and jumps in surprise when Max burst in. They stare at each other silently for a moment. Max with a brilliant smile on her face and Chloe with a confused but slowly burgeoning smile on hers too.

Then Max closes the distance and lines Chloe's face with kisses.

"Back again already?" Chloe laughs weakly fending off the other girl. "And for this? You just can't resist me, can you?"

"No, I can't." She kisses Chloe on the nose. "I love you, Chloe. Please say you love me."

"Of course I do. Max?"

"Say it."

"Alright, alright. I love you, Max Caulfield. There, happy?"

"Very."

Chloe looks confused. "Max, is this about what happened before after…you know, Frank and Rachel?" She said that with some pain. "I didn't mean to be angry at you."

"Hm? No, nothing like that." She pauses. "Well, not entirely. I do have something to tell you about Rachel, though. You may want to sit down for this. We might have to get the police involved after too."

Max will tell her about Rachel Amber and her fate. However, she will change the story and say she saw it on the Internet instead of learning it from Mark Jefferson.
She will not tell how she met the wonderful Victoria who helped her so much and how amazing she became. She will not tell of Katherine Henley who has become so immensely successful but also suffered so greatly becoming lost.

She will not tell of Scott – Chloe's husband – and especially not of those beautiful girls, Maxis and Rochella. Of Maxis' spirit and likeness to Chloe and of Rochella's loveliness. Of how much Max wants to see both of them again.

One day, perhaps, she will reveal everything to Chloe and let her decide what to do with the information. Hopefully, she will stay with Max and they'll build a future together. One where Max has a place and belongs. One where there is a family that loves her and waits for her to come home. Perhaps, somewhere off in that far away future, they'll have their own children.

If so, she already knows what she wants to name them.
Author's Notes

I had loved writing Future Imperfect.

The premise was extremely interesting and the setting gave me a wide berth to reinterpret the characters in a new way. I also intentionally tried to keep the story compact in order to retain good pacing, though my success is questionable knowing my history of being overly verbose.

Nonetheless, the way Future Imperfect came out made me very happy. The story went through very little editing. Much of the original writing remained intact with changes mostly being things that streamlined the story or helped to make the plot more sensible.

Easy to write and easy to edit. My favorite attributes.

However, it wasn't entirely a smooth thing, though. This is primarily because the story was written in the midst of Life is Strange: Before The Storm's (BTS) release. Of course, it was published much later, but I actually started writing in October 2017 and the story was conceived even earlier.

So the story was written alongside the game's gradual rollout. BTS released a truckload of information regarding the game's universe so it changed a lot of my ideas about what happened with character backgrounds.

Thankfully, Future Imperfect is set far enough into the future and with enough changes to characters' lives that BTS didn't have too great of an effect – I only had to make edits to certain areas. If only my other fics did as well.

Anyway, moving aside, overall, I think the story turned out excellently and is, by far, my favorite Life is Strange fanfiction (that I wrote).

To all the people who read this latest fanfic from me, thank you and I hope you had enjoyed!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!