From the Depths

by secret_stories

Summary

It has been six months since the footage from the hospital spread over the globe, leaving in it's wake the whisper of something more. Casey finds herself dreaming of blue eyes and warm hands while she sleeps close to her jacket from the zoo. It is a cold grey day that Casey turns eighteen and finds a woman watching her, a woman who shatters Casey's barely build stability with her words. Kevin is alive.
The embroidered logo on the front of the Philadelphia zoo employee jacket was the first thing she saw as she opened her eyes on her eighteenth birthday. She must have fallen asleep holding it close. Casey had dreamt of him again. It had been a good dream, a Kevin dream. His clear confused eyes searching hers, his consciousness swimming towards her from the depths. She absentmindedly let her thumb rub over the embroidered lion before her, silhouetted between the letters. It wasn’t always him in the dreams, Patricia slipped into them sometimes, pursed lips and raised eyebrows admonishing her. Dennis’s cautious bulk, a brick wall of barely controlled anger loomed often, and sometimes Hedwig would whisper into her ear as she slept, his childish lisp fearful and excited of what was to come. When the beast came for her in the dark, she no longer ran from him as she had in those days after her initial release from the depths of the zoo. Now she ran towards him, never fast enough to save him, to stop the carnage, to hold him close and feel his huge body heaving beneath her slender arms. But the best dreams were the Kevin dreams, that broken man, brought forward three times by her words and her touch. Casey squeezed her eyes shut and scrunched the embroidered lion in her fist. It was time to get up and face the day, her first as a legal adult in this world where superhumans truly existed.

Casey’s foster family were sweet and had acknowledged her birthday with a pancake breakfast and lots of hugs from the other kids. It still felt like she was living in a dream, to be away from her uncle, to know that she was free. The television was on in the corner of the busy kitchen as she poured syrup on her pancakes and surveyed her hand drawn cards. It had been nearly six months since the footage from the hospital had spread across the globe like wildfire, but Casey’s head still snapped up at Kevin’s name being mentioned on the TV.

‘Oh, I’m sorry sweetie, let me turn that off. It’s impossible to get away from it at the moment.’

Casey’s foster mother reached for the remote, understandably assuming that any mention of her kidnapper would be unwelcome.

Casey looked up at her, ‘No, it’s ok, I want to hear.’

Casey smiled at the kind woman to show she really was fine. The TV was set to a chat show, it was a discussion about the authenticity of the footage, and not the first one. Many seemed to think this was nothing more than a hoax and the number of big news companies suggesting it was fake was more than a little frustrating. No matter what they said though, the believers were creeping through the cracks, all over social media the world was believing, believing in something more. Casey finished her breakfast and thanked her foster family before heading out to one of her last days at school, the image of the beast heaving the car over like a piece of furniture fresh in her mind. The zoo jacket her constant protection over her shoulders.

If Casey had been an outsider before, now she was infamous, her association with the beast singling her out amongst strangers and acquaintances alike. It was fine. It really was, she had never needed friends, or wanted them. The risk of people finding out about her home life was gone now, the truth of her twisted brutal childhood had seeped out through the school. It was fine, it didn’t matter anymore. None of it mattered any more. Her uncle was gone, but she was still here, stronger than ever, thanks to Kevin, thanks to them all.

Casey’s eighteenth birthday wore on. It was a grey day but crisp, and Casey found herself glad to be leaving school on time, happy to head back to her foster home, no need to hide, no need to eek the hours away in detention. There was nothing to fear now. As her classmates milled about at the bus stop, their mundane words washing over her, Casey drew her jacket a little closer to her body. She
could feel something. A creeping sensation prickled across her skin, ghosted up her neck like a whisper. Someone was watching her. Slowly, Casey moved a hand up to her ear, inching her curtain of hair away. It swung down easily, concealing the side of her face. It was a simple shield, but effective. Through the dark strands, Casey glanced around her. People walked down the street, scarves around necks against the biting wind. A child held a mother’s hand. A young couple walked arm in arm. There, behind the railings over the road. A figure in a white jacket stood still. Casey raised her head to look more clearly, her curtain of hair falling back. She was certain, a woman, staring right at her. Casey sat up more fully to take her in. A flash of light hair and dark eyes and the woman turned and walked away, lost behind the red brick building.

Casey stared at the empty spot for a moment, the wind moving her hair across her face. It could be anyone, someone who knew she had been a captive of the Horde, a fan of the macabre perhaps. It was probably nothing, Casey looked up to the sound of the bus approaching, splashing the puddles at the edge of the road. Those around her stood and moved to the opening doors, chatting and laughing, looking at their phones, living their lives. Casey remained seated, her eyes still on the space where the woman had been. Standing, Casey moved her hair back behind her ears, hitched her rucksack higher on her shoulder and moved forward. Her eyes flicked to the waiting bus once more, before she stepped down into the road, passed the vehicle full of life, her feet moving her determinedly to the space by the fence behind the red brick building, to whatever awaited her. The bus doors closed with a hiss.
Across the road, up the step of the pavement, through a metal arch, into the alley behind the fence, behind the brick building. There. Walking ahead, the woman in the white jacket. She had turned the collar up against the cold and was walking with her hands in her pockets, heels clicking lightly against the tarmac. Casey stopped for a moment to take a breath. What was she doing? She forged forward. The woman turned a corner and made her way across a road, headed into a small park, bare trees swaying in the wind. Casey watched as the woman found a bench and sat, waiting. Casey frowned. There didn’t seem any harm in following, there were children in the park, cars driving past, they had a couple of hours until dark, her foster family wouldn’t worry for some time yet.

The cold of the bench seeped through her dark jeans as she sat down, rucksack slipping off her shoulder onto the wood. Casey didn’t look at the woman next to her, instead, let her eyes travel to the playground through the trees. A child had fallen over and his mother was comforting him with gentle words and soft kisses. Somewhere, a fire was burning, a slight smell of smoke drifted through the cold air.

‘Hello Casey.’

The woman’s voice had a southern twang and was slightly rough but still pleasant, like she had smoked too much. Casey turned her head to find that the woman was looking directly at her. Shrewd eyes regarding her. She was older, maybe in her sixties, but well put together, blonde hair falling in styled waves. Her white jacket was tailored, expensive.

‘Hello.’

Casey found her voice was quiet as she took in the stranger.

‘I wanted to compliment you on the footage from the hospital. Simply spectacular. The world is watching.’

The woman smiled as she said this and reached into her pocket for a cigarette, her fingers were long against the lighter, clicking it smoothly. The smoke drifted up into the cold air. Joseph had been certain that the videos would be untraceable, that he had done enough, it should never have lead back to her. It hadn’t even been her computer.

‘Who are you?’

The woman took another drag of her cigarette and smiled slightly at Casey before responding.

‘They weren’t the only ones you know. The three from the video. Not by any means.’

When Casey didn’t reply, the woman continued.

‘Those people, Dr Staple, the ones who came with all their guns and nonsense, they weren’t the police. But I think you knew that.’

As she said this, the woman pointed her cigarette at Casey and nodded her head.

Casey’s head was reeling. The fear in Hedwig’s eyes, the blood on her hands. She couldn’t speak,
this was too much information, too fast. Elijah’s cryptic email. Joseph’s grand ideas of a conspiracy spiralled in her mind. Her fingers itched, she wanted to call him. The children from the playground were leaving, heading in for dinners and baths. Home. The woman only took another drag of her cigarette and continued.

‘There are people who know that there is something more, that humanity is not constrained to the rules that we know. There are people who believe that one person with too much power would tip the scales, that we are just not ready to have gods living among us. Those people Casey, at the hospital, they work to suppress power, differences, to keep the world ticking in the same way it has all these years. This is not the first time they have done this Casey, they are experts, chipping away at our perceptions, convincing those they can to conform, exterminating those they can’t control.’

Casey frowned as the woman paused to take a deep drag. Together they watched the children being lead away, hands clasped tightly with those they trusted.

Casey glanced at the woman again and took a breath.

‘What do you want?’

The woman turned back to Casey and smiled.

‘There are those of us who disagree with Dr Staple and her like. Who believe that the extraordinary should be celebrated, nurtured, utilised. We are like them Casey, we work in the shadows searching for those gifted few. We do not hunt them Casey, we do not neutralise or exterminate. We foster their talents, help them to grow, find them places in this world where their gifts can be most useful.’

Casey took a moment to decipher this, to figure out if her questions were being answered. She didn’t feel any more enlightened. Casey’s hand drifted up the embroidered logo at her chest. The woman’s eyes followed the movement and her lips lifted in a slight smile. Casey brought her eyes back to the woman’s.

‘I don’t understand.’

The woman dropped her cigarette and twisted it into the tarmac beneath her heel.

‘Casey, your footage has changed things, people are becoming aware. The gifted ones need not live in the shadows. The world is evolving. It is our time.’

‘Time for what?’

‘Time to accept that there is more to us. That we can be greater. There will be more Casey, Mr Dunn, Mr Glass, your Mr Crumb, they have opened the door to others, given them the opportunity to acknowledge what power they may have. We will be there to help them.’

Casey frowned again, studying her face. The words were beginning to sound confusing, religious, manic. Patricia. Casey watched as the woman selected another cigarette.

‘Sometimes power is dangerous. Mr Glass, The Beast, they hurt people.’

The woman seemed pleased by this comment and pointed the lit cigarette at her again to emphasise her words.

‘Exactly Casey. It can be dangerous, it can be dangerous if left unchecked. But with help, with guidance it needn’t be. When people live in the shadows, ashamed or scared, they can twist into something dark. This is what we must avoid. This is why we need you.’
Casey didn’t know how to respond to that, instead she watched the smoke from the cigarette spiral.

‘Casey, Kevin’s powers may have been born from trauma, from abuse and pain, but they needn’t have been used for darkness. Given the right support, encouragement. Love. He could utilise his strengths, help the world.’

Images of the beast leaping across the grass filled her eyes, his teeth red with blood, eyes black, tearing at throats, limbs, anything that got in his way. She shook her head.

‘The beast is dead, Kevin died with him.’

The cigarette lay forgotten against the woman’s fingers for a minute, ash building along it’s length. The woman smiled sadly at her.

‘He’s not dead Casey.’

Frozen, Casey felt her eyes fill with tears, breaths coming faster. His blue eyes, staying in the light with her. He was dead, she had been covered in his blood. She shook her head rapidly.

‘I’m sorry. I know this must be hard to hear. But they took him. They’ve kept him, alive, under control. They are studying him Casey. He is here, in the city.’

‘No. I held him. I felt him die. He’s gone.’

The woman flicked the ash off her cigarette and took another drag, shaking her head slowly.

‘You held him, when everyone else fought him, ran from him. That is why I am here, talking to you.’

Casey felt her mouth fall open slowly, she turned her head away. The sky was beginning to darken slightly. A couple walked past, hands clasped. Casey followed their interlocked fingers. He was alive.

‘We need your help Casey. We can get him out, we can help him. But he is dangerous, there’s no denying it. You can help him more than we can, help him to realise his true power, give him the human connection he needs to this world. Your link to him is undeniable. Who else could stop him with a touch? Could draw him out of the darkness?’

Casey looked down at her hands, remembered the feel of his skin as it heaved beneath her, shrinking, veins retracting under her fingers. She was just a girl. The woman leant forward, bringing her hand up to squeeze Casey’s arm.

‘Will you help him Casey? Will you help us?’

Casey looked back up into the woman’s dark eyes. They were sincere, searching. She knew then she would do anything to help Kevin. The ocean eyes that haunted her dreams. Casey nodded slowly.

‘Tell me how.’

The woman squeezed her arm once more before raising it in a proffered hand shake.

‘My name is Dr Marie Staple.’

Casey frowned and didn’t offer her hand.

The woman smiled sadly and lowered hers.
'Yes, Ellie is my daughter. Our views began to differ somewhat, and here we are.'

Casey nodded slowly and raised her hand. The woman’s hand was soft and cool against hers. The woman smiled again, she moved to remove another cigarette, placed it between her lips. They were painted a soft red, immaculate.

'We will be extracting him from them next week. We will clear the way. We will need you to help take him from there to his safe house. We believe he is drugged but we don’t know how powerful he will be, how he may be as he comes round. We need you to keep a calm alter present, keep him under control as we move him. Casey, can you do that?'

Casey swallowed. She was just a girl. But she was broken, evolved. Casey nodded slowly.

'I can try.'

The woman smiled again as she exhaled another plume of smoke.

'Good, we believe in you Casey.'

'What then? What will happen to him?'

'Ah, well.' The woman took another drag. 'We would like to invite you to stay with us, in the safe house, to work with Kevin, to help him control his abilities.'

The streetlights around the park were beginning to turn on with a faint buzz. Casey shivered.

'You are eighteen now, soon, you will no longer be able to stay at your foster family’s home, they are not funded to care for adults. You will have to find your own place, a job. We can offer you a place to live, an allowance, and you can help Kevin, you can help others like him. You are special Casey.'

'I don’t… what will I tell people? My foster family?'

'You are working with other abuse victims, at a charity. It is all above board Casey, and entirely true.'

Casey looked up at the purple sky. A motorbike revved past the park. She closed her eyes and breathed in the cold air. Opening them, she saw how closely the woman was watching her.

'Okay, I’ll do it. I’ll do it.'

The woman smiled and stood up, dropping her cigarette into the small pile that had formed at her feet.

'Good, take my card Casey, if you have any questions, please call me. Otherwise, please be ready next Thursday at 4pm. We will pick you up with your bags from your home.'

Casey accepted the card, it was white and glossy, the logo of a charity on the front. The name Dr Marie Staple was slightly raised, in cool green letters. She looked back up to the woman who nodded once more and turned away, heels clicking as she disappeared into the darkness.

Casey sat for a moment and breathed in the evening air. The smell of bonfire had dissipated, replaced with the fresh smell of approaching night. Casey sniffed and stood up, hugging the jacket to her body. He was alive.
I'm basically imagining Jessica Lange
Chapter 3

Casey’s foster family were over the moon at her job offer. A chance to work with survivors, victims of abuse, help those who had been through what she had been through, give them the help she hadn’t had. They were so happy that Casey managed to avoid too many questions. She packed her bag a week early.

The last week of school passed slowly, then quickly, like a dream. She barely slept. He was alive. His warm hand invaded her dreams, clasped in hers, like a lifeline. Somewhere in the city he was alone, scared, lost. Casey held the jacket close in the darkness, the embroidered silhouette close to her cheek. There were no monsters in the dark for her any more. She had picked up her phone countless times to call Joseph, text him, tell him. She didn’t know how, didn’t know what to say. He hadn’t understood her sympathy for Kevin, despite everything. He couldn’t get past the murders, the cannibalism. She couldn’t blame him, it was the normal response. Casey didn’t call him.

Thursday dawned bright and clear, she had finished school the previous Friday. With nothing to do, the days had moved thickly, and Casey often found herself wondering the streets. Her things were all ready to go, she didn’t have much. Too many possessions had been tainted by her uncles grasping hands, but the things she did have, were hers. There were hours until 4pm. Casey left her packed bag ready and waiting and let her feet carry her out of the house and through the city. Of course they would bring her here, to the zoo, to the place where she had changed. It had reopened after the deaths, but there was still a memorial near the gates, flowers and cards, teddy bears and photographs of the three lives lost. Casey knelt amongst them, fingers drifting over the wilting petals. She looked into the faces of the girls she had barely known, the woman who had saved her.

‘I’m sorry’ she whispered to the quiet air.

Casey closed her eyes and stood up. The zoo gates loomed over her, it was starting to get busy, visitors arriving in twos or threes, families and couples. Casey followed in a father and young daughter. She was chatting away, excited about all the animals she would see. The father laughed and stroked her head. Casey sniffed and moved forwards, paying her entrance fee and walking past the penguins, the birds, the zebras. She headed to the big cats, watched them pacing, their mouths open. Watched them reclining over each other, rolling in the dust. Their tongues lolled, their hot breath puffing in the air. One stretched out, claws flexing as its muscles rippled. The children around her were excited to watch them move, no fear of the predators, safe in the clutches of their loving parents.

Casey was waiting by the door in her zoo jacket, her uniform, when she heard a car pull up. Rushing through the third set of goodbyes, another round of hugs, of thanks, of good lucks. The car was black and nondescript. As Casey approached, a door opened. Marie Staple greeted her from inside, as immaculate as ever. Casey settled into the leather seats. The car smelled of pine air freshener.

‘Good afternoon Casey, it’s simply wonderful to see you again.’ Marie smiled at her warmly and leant over to squeeze her arm.

Casey nodded and pulled the door closed behind her. The windows were tinted, but she could see her foster mother standing in the doorway, the warm light of the family home spilling out into the darkening afternoon around her. She turned away from the image.

‘Tell me what’s going to happen.’

‘We will be going straight to the place they are holding him. Once there, you can go to him, the
The building is already secure. We have a van waiting, we’re not sure what state he will be in. You and him will travel together to the safe house. Once there, we will assess the situation depending on his condition.’

The car started and moved away from the place that had been a brief but welcome refuge.

‘His condition?’ images of him bruised and bloody, helpless and alone swam before her.

‘We know they have been testing him, searching for the root of his power. We are not sure to what extent they have examined. We expect him to still be physically uninjured though, only drugged.’

Casey felt herself breathe a little easier.

‘Where is the safe house?’

‘It’s outside the city, isolated in case Kevin is unable to contain himself, there are less civilians around. We have to take precautions.’

‘Who will be at the house with us?’

Marie smiled and smoothed out a non-existent crease from her slate grey trousers.

‘Initially, we will have a small team there with you, to ensure your safety. I will visit regularly for sessions with Kevin. After time, we hope for him to be able to live alone, it will be up to you to decide if you will stay with him then.’

Casey found herself worrying at the inside of her mouth. So many unknowns. She just had to see him first, reassure herself that he was really truly alive, after his warm blood had washed over her fingers, there had been so much.

The woman leant forward to talk to the driver and Casey looked out of the window, they were moving through the city, out of the centre, this area was more industrialised, factories and warehouses.

Marie moved back and patted Casey on the shoulder.

‘We’re here. Let’s go’

Casey felt her stomach drop. It was one thing to say she would try but another to truly do it. Could she really help? In what state would she find him? All these secret societies, doctors and experts and they really thought she was the best person for the job?

Casey breathed in deeply and opened the car door. The air seemed colder after the warmth of the car. It smelled of oil and smoke. Grey clouds moved slowly through the sky. It would be dark soon. They were outside a large warehouse with no signage. Outside, men with guns stood, mumbling into walkie talkies.

Casey looked up at Dr Staple as she moved next to her on the pavement.

‘Did you have to hurt people?’

The older woman looked down at her.

‘Don’t worry about that now. He’s waiting Casey. He needs you.’

Casey frowned and turned away from her, moving towards the open doors. Inside was bright with
florescent lights, the floor was polished concrete. The place smelled of disinfectant. Casey could feel
the doctor behind her, smelled her smoky perfume.

‘Where do I go?’

‘Just keep going straight ahead, he’s in the room at the end of the hall.’

They walked past rooms that looked like offices, rooms that looked like science labs, rooms closer to
surgeries. Casey shuddered. There were no windows, the walls were all unnaturally thick. There was
no sound from the outside world.

‘There, Casey, he should be in there.’

Casey found herself at a reinforced door. There were bolts on the outside, as thick as her wrist. There
was no sound from within. Her heart was thudding, pounding in her ears, he was inside that room.
Casey swallowed hard, forcing the lump down, she couldn’t be weak now. He needed her. Marie’s
hand came to rest on her shoulder, squeezing lightly.

Casey’s hand felt heavy as she lifted it up and grasped the first bolt. It moved smoothly against the
metal. The second and third were easier and soon Casey found her fingers resting on the handle. One
more deep breath, a turn and a pull and there he was.

The room was lit as brightly as the rest of the complex. She wondered briefly if they ever gave him
darkness. Kevin was lying on a hospital bed in a stark sparse room, a drip in his arm. His eyes were
closed, his chest bare. Casey brought her hand up to her mouth, stifling a cry. He looked small,
weak, vulnerable. She moved forward into the room alone, the smell of disinfectant was even
stronger in here. There was a bathroom off the one side, a band of lights surrounding the door, just
like at the hospital. Casey braced herself and moved closer to the bed, studying him. Another scar
had joined the ones she had given to him. In the deep muscle of his stomach, a perfect circle where
the bullet had ripped through him, ripped him away from her. His face looked grey and drawn, dark
under the eyes, hollow in the cheeks, he looked older. His hair was still shaved close, the bones of
his skull visible beneath the light stubble. Gently, Casey reached out a hand to clutch his. It was
warm and soft, limp and lifeless. Casey watched the movements of his chest for a moment before
turning back to the doorway where Dr Staple waited, her hand still holding his.

‘The drip Casey, he must be being kept under.’

Casey turned back to the drip, looking at where it punctured his arm, there were bruises there, like
countless needles had invaded his body. Slowly, Casey moved her other hand over to his arm, her
fingers brushing the tube that disappeared into his skin. As she did so, she felt movement beneath her
fingers. Casey froze, looking down to the hand she held in hers. Those strong fingers were twitching,
gripping hers. Casey’s eyes widened, flicking up to his face. Her mouth fell open slightly at the sight
of his blue eyes focused on her, frowning and confused. His hand pulled away from hers as he
looked at her, gaze falling unfamiliarly over her features. He didn’t know her.

His voice was weak when he spoke, and cracked a little. The familiarity and strangeness of it jarred
her. She had not met this man.

‘Who are you?’

Casey forced herself to breathe slowly, to stay calm, this is what she was here for. She had to help
him. She spoke softly.

‘I’m Casey, what’s your name?’
He took a moment to answer.

‘Ian’

Casey breathed out, she had never met this alter, didn’t know anything about him, but she had to get him out, keep him calm.

‘It’s nice to meet you Ian, I’m a friend of Kevin’s.’

This only seemed to confuse him more, brow furrowing, he looked at her through darkened eyes.

‘We don’t have any friends.’

Casey swallowed at these words, so true, so familiar. Kevin’s eagerness to have a friend, right at what he thought was the end.

‘You do now. I’m here to help you Ian, we need to get you out. Can Kevin come into the light?’

Ian shook his head painfully, wincing at the movement.

‘He, they won’t let us. The needle... it makes him... makes us sleep, sometimes.’

Casey's brow furrowed. She gestured to the drip in his arm.

‘I’m going to take this out Ian. Can you walk?’

Ian looked down at his arm as if he didn’t know what she was talking about. He frowned again and squeezed his eyes shut.

‘I don’t feel so good.’

Casey gently removed the tape covering the needle and slowly pulled it, letting it drop to the floor. Blood welled in its place. Ian groaned. Casey ventured a hand forward again, gently gripping his. Ian opened his eyes again and looked down at their joined hands.

‘Can we really leave?’

Casey smiled sadly at the tone, he didn’t really believe it. How long had he been in this dead room? She willed back the tears that threatened to spill. Ian seemed calm, and she hadn’t heard Hedwig mention him in relation to the hoard. He seemed as good an alter as any to keep with her right now.

‘Yes Ian, we can leave, but I need you to stay in the light now, stay with me while we move, I have to get you somewhere safe. Can you do that Ian? Can you stay in the light?’

Ian closed his eyes again as if he was in pain and nodded once.
Chapter Notes

Sorry for such a huge error with my grammar in previous chapters! Don't quit the day job right!

Casey would never know for sure who she had led from that sterile prison into the cool dusk. He hadn’t spoken again as they stumbled along, only held her hand blindly, gripping with an unforgiving strength. His weight had been heavy against her side, his waist warm beneath her fingers as she wrapped her free arm around him. He had woken once in the van lying in her arms, and Casey had seen those blue eyes find hers, clear for just a moment. She couldn’t say who was behind them.

“Casey”

The single word had been quiet and pained, whispered with recognition as he drifted off into unconsciousness. Drifted away from her again before she could reply.

Casey remembered that night in flashes. The smell of the disinfected hallways, the stark contrast of the darkening light, his hand in hers. The wetness from her tears when they fell on his cheek as the views of the city outside the van windows were left behind.

She didn’t know if her being there had helped, what they had been expecting from him, from her. She didn’t know if it would have been any different if it had been a stranger that had taken his hand and led him out. All she knew was that he was there, real and solid in her arms.

The safe house was large and comfortable, but there didn’t seem to be much that was particularly safe about it, aside from its isolation and large walls. In the darkness, it seemed an ordinary house, where Casey found herself wedged in a comfortable arm chair, beside a comfortable bed where she watched Kevin’s chest rise and fall, drifting into an exhausted oblivion. No one asked her to leave.

The sun filtered through her eyelashes in a red glow. She blinked a few times, noting the crick in her neck, the persistent exhaustion behind her eyes, the feel of unbrushed teeth beneath her tongue. It all faded the moment her tired eyes cleared, and she saw him. He still looked exhausted, a little grey and drawn but real, tangible. Casey let her fingers drift lightly over to his hand that lay limply over the white duvet. She needed to touch him, to know this was real.

A throat cleared quietly behind her and Casey pulled her fingers back, turning. Dr Staple stood in the open doorway. She was wearing another immaculate ensemble and somehow looked well rested. The woman nodded at Casey before turning away and walking down the hallway, her heels quiet on the carpeted floor. Casey glanced down once more at the man in front of her, the steady rhythm of his breath, before standing and following the Doctor.

The hallway was equally bright, this was a comfortable home, all whites and creams and clear air. A bathroom was opposite, a little dated, but clean and light. The smell of coffee lead her downstairs.
The house seemed to be reasonably large, a glimpse of an open plan living area at the bottom of the stairs, lounge and dining area, a kitchen to the right. She followed the sound of coffee cups into the spacious kitchen. This home was nicer than anywhere she had stayed before. Casey took a moment to breath before entering the room. It was as light as the others, with a large centre island and big windows. There, at the counter, sat the doctor, two coffee cups in font of her.

As Casey sat down beside her, Marie edged one of the cups over to her. It smelled rich, the tendrils of steam a welcome sight. Casey glanced once at the woman beside her before reaching out and clasping the cup. It was warm against her tired fingers. The doctor took a sip and lowered her cup before turning towards Casey. She could feel her eyes on her, heavy, but her tone was light when she spoke.

“Good morning Casey, how are you feeling?”

Casey took her own sip before replying, relishing the scolding warmth inside her. She turned her head, mirroring the doctor.

“Good morning. I’m ok, a little tired.”

Marie nodded and took another sip.

“Well you did it, he is here, with no casualties. You did well Casey.”

Casey looked back down at her cup, the swirling darkness. She didn’t want to ask for milk.

“I’m not sure you needed me, he was so weak, and he didn’t know me… the alter who spoke to me. I was a stranger to him.”

Marie smiled. “Oh, I wouldn’t underestimate yourself. You have a connection to him, even if he didn’t seem to know you. I wouldn’t be surprised if all the alters feel comfortable with you, even if you haven’t officially met. He trusted you, allowed you to touch him, welcomed that touch in fact. If you hadn’t been there, he may have panicked, despite his weakened state. It was better for everyone that you were there, him especially. Thankyou Casey.”

Casey glanced back at her again and took another sip. The coffee was a little too strong, burning her empty stomach.

“What will happen now… the drugs… what will happen when he wakes up?”

Marie sat back slightly in her chair.

“Ah, well, I’m hoping your presence will keep him calm, no matter which alter is in the light. Now the drugs are wearing off he should be able to wake up the others so to speak. We will try to explain the situation to him, to reassure him that he is safe. He has gone through a lot Casey, this isn’t going to be a magical transformation, and there is always the risk that he will be angry.”

Casey nodded. She knew how trauma stayed with you, haunted you, ripped you to shreds even years later. In Kevin’s case, she could only begin to fathom how his mind had dealt, breaking itself to pieces, as she had torn her body, separating herself from the person who allowed her uncle to touch her, to burn her. Casey took another sip as Marie regarded her.

“I think it will be best if I stay back for the time being Casey. He seems to trust you so much, to be so desperately in need of someone to trust, I don’t want to shatter that. I want you to be the one to explain what happened to him.”
Casey frowned a little.

“To who? I don’t know who’ll wake up.”

The doctor smiled again and reached for her cup.

“You understand him so much more than any of us Casey, but I’m hoping you will be able to bring Kevin out. I watched the footage from the hospital, just one touch of his arm and Kevin was right there with you. We need Kevin to start taking control, to work through what has happened. He needs you so desperately.”

A thud upstairs had both their heads turning towards the ceiling.

Casey flicked her eyes back to the doctor.

“Go, Casey.”

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