**Sierra's Tomorrow**

by **Silverfrost23**

Summary

My name is Sierra Jameson. I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.
It was late, one dark night when Russell Kwon, a member of the Tomorrow People and a talented pickpocket, snatched a nurse’s dropped keycard from the reception desk before.

He ran up a flight of stairs rather speedily. Russell was on an important mission and was in telepathic contact with his leader’s second-in-command, Cara Coburn.

Okay, Russell, that card gets you up to the clerk’s office on the twelfth floor, said Cara. That’s where the files are.

Got it, said Russell.

Unbeknownst to Russell, he tripped a silent alarm as he passed by a door in the corridor.

Cara, who was watching Russell’s movements from the security cameras via her laptop, scowled at Russell’s recklessness.

Great, you’ve just tripped an alarm, said Cara.

Hey, I’m doing the best I can. It’s not my fault I didn’t know about the alarm, snapped Russell. He frowned at the psychic residue he was picking up. Whoa, the kid you’ve been talking to was here just recently. He must be pretty powerful even if I can pick up a trail.

Cara’s telepathic abilities were stronger than most of the Tomorrow People ever dreamed of. Picking up telepathic trails was difficult and not everyone could do it.

So, which way am I headed? I’m kind of lost, said Russell.

Cara sighed and was about to reply when she became worried. Hang on, Russell. The security guard’s headed your way. You’ve got to get out of there. There’s an exit directly behind you.

Russell didn’t flee. He just grinned when he found a sign pointing him in the direction of the file clerk’s. Straight it is, then.

Russell!

Russell ignored Cara and went down a winding labyrinth of corridors until he came upon his intended destination. He used the keycard to grant himself access to the file clerk’s office. Inside the room, there were dozens of heavy, brown-colored file cabinets and fortunately they were all labeled, so Russell knew where to look.

After a quick look through the file cabinet’s drawers, Russell grabbed the two files he’d come for and stowed them into his bag and not a moment too soon. The security guard had caught up
with Russell and was just outside the door. Quickly, Russell raced out the backdoor and onto the rooftop where he then teleported onto the street below. Once outside, Russell put on a smug grin and walked casually down to the subway station, unaware of the capture squad that was on his tail.

Before long, Russell was waiting for the subway that would take him home. But then he found himself surrounded by two Ultra agents and his training kicked in. Russell grabbed the nearest agent and fought him off before turning his attention to the next one. After a series of blows, the agent finally went down and Russell boarded an empty subway car. When the subway began to move again, Russell began to relax, only to be on alert again when an Ultra agent, a non-human one to be precise, teleported in and began to fight him.

Russell was punched multiple times in the face and sustained bruises from being bashed into the metal pole he’d been clinging to. Russell fought back, only for his blows to be dodged before he was punched in the stomach and tossed across the subway car. Russell was then grabbed and held in a headlock that nearly suffocated him. By a miracle, Russell managed to teleport out of the agent’s grip and gave the agent a taste of his own medicine. He teleported every time he delivered a punch to the head and eventually knocked the agent out before Russell finally teleported to safety.

At the entrance to the Lair, Cara was waiting and she looked both worried, angry and impatient.

“What were you thinking? We don’t use our powers out in the open!” she scolded. She seemed angry, but her voice gave away just how worried she’d been.

Russell rolled his eyes. “Would you chillax? I know that, but I didn’t have much of a choice. They were Ultra agents. They must’ve been following me.”

Cara couldn’t stop herself from glancing in the opposite direction as she frowned in concern. “Are you sure you lost them?”

Russell grinned as he nodded. “Yeah, Cara. I’m sure. Besides, you’re talking to me, remember? John taught me everything. I know what I’m doing. Speaking of which, how is he?”

“Same as he always is this time of year,” said Cara, sadly.

The leader of the Tomorrow People, John Young, was a mystery. When he wasn’t being everyone’s fearless leader, strict and commanding and protective; John was fun to be around like everyone’s favorite big brother. But John had his secrets and every year on the exact same date, John became melancholy and shut himself away for a few days.

Russell winced as he handed Cara the stolen medical files. “Yikes. You really think these files on your mystery patient kid are going cheer him up a little? Are they really worth it?”

Cara looked satisfied as she glanced over the files and then passed them to Russell. “It’s not just the kid that’s worth it, it’s also his mother. Look at their surnames and the mother’s birth certificate.”

Russell looked confused and then his eyes widened as he looked over the files. “Holy crap. John’s going to have a stroke!”

The mother’s lineage was just impossible. It couldn’t be true…could it?

XXX
It was raining cats and dogs one horribly cold and windy afternoon as a dark-haired young woman by the name of Sierra Jameson walked across the busy sidewalk in the direction of the red brick house where she lived.

She was quite thin, soaked to the bone, her clothes were bedraggled from her walk through the rain and mud, her dark green eyes had a tired look to them, her feet throbbed and ached with every step she took, and the wind blew so hard she thought she might take flight, but still, Sierra preserved and eventually made it inside the building.

With some difficulty, Sierra slammed the door shut and slid down onto the bench beside the door. “I’m home!” she called, as she slipped off her coat and began untying her shoes.

“Mama!”

The next thing Sierra knew, she had her arms full of her young son, Robbie. Sierra couldn’t stop herself from smiling as she hugged him tight. No matter how difficult things got, no matter how crappy her job was, Robbie always managed to make her smile. It was the best part of her day.

Sierra’s relationship with Robbie’s father had ended badly, but Robbie was still her greatest treasure. Sierra refused to let Robbie be affected by the pain of the past while still so young, and chose instead to focus on the good until he was old enough to understand. Robbie had inherited some of his father’s good qualities that Sierra had loved—his blond hair, gray-blue eyes, his kindness, his selflessness and his ability to make Sierra laugh and smile.

“Hey, sweetie. How was school today?” asked Sierra, as they broke apart.

“It was good. We got to watch cartoons during recess because of the rain and I drew a dinosaur,” said Robbie. “Cara showed me how to make a paper airplane.” Cara was Robbie’s imaginary friend. “And I’ve been helping Grandpa Finch make dinner. We’re making your favorites because you’ve had a long day.” Despite his young age, Robbie always went out of his way to make Sierra happy.

So, that explains the pasta and the chocolate cake I’m smelling right now.

“Well, that is the sweetest thing ever. And as it happens, I’m starving and it smells delicious, so I can’t wait to taste it,” said Sierra, as she tickled Robbie and kissed his head. She looked up when Astrid poked her head into the entryway. “Hey, I need to talk to Aunt Astrid and take a shower. So, why don’t you go finish dinner and when I get out, you can show me your picture. Okay, kiddo?”

“Okay.”

Robbie slid off his mother’s lap and returned the kitchen.

Astrid looked fondly in Robbie’s direction. “You really lucked out with that one. He’s the sweetest kid I’ve ever met.”

“Yeah, he really is,” said Sierra, fondly. “Thanks again for picking him up from school for me, Astrid.” Sierra had had to pull a double-shift and was forced to ask Astrid to pick up Robbie from school. Although they’d been best friends since childhood, Sierra hated asking Astrid for favors, especially when Sierra was already so dependent on Astrid and her father’s generosity.

“It was no trouble. Any excuse to spend time with my nephew,” said Astrid. She didn’t share in Sierra’s feelings regarding their situation. “So, how was work? What’d you have to stay late for
Sierra made a face. “In that order? Lousy. Dylan had a hangover and didn’t come in. Hence, why I had to pull a double-shift today.”

“Again?” said Astrid, disgusted. Dylan was Sierra’s least favorite co-worker. He was a lazy, arrogant pig of a man. “Why don’t they fire him?”

“Because his dad is my boss’s boss,” said Sierra. Her job was crappy and Sierra hated it but in this economy, she was lucky to find any work that would pay the bills. “But it wasn’t all bad. I got a little extra in the paycheck for my troubles and speaking of which—” Sierra reached into her pocket and pulled out a bank envelope with cash. She counted out two hundred dollars and held it out to Astrid. “This month’s rent.”

Astrid hesitated. “You know how I feel about you paying rent.”

“Yeah, but this is your dad’s house and you know I feel if I don’t contribute at least a little. So, just take it,” said Sierra. “Please.”

When Sierra had been a pregnant teenager, she’d fallen on hard times. She’d been kicked out of her mother’s home and separated from her younger brother. She’d had no place to live, very little money and no job, nothing to support herself or her unborn baby with. Out of shame and wounded pride, Sierra hadn’t gone to anyone for help. To avoid the authorities and foster system, she’d wandered around and hidden until Astrid, who often did volunteer work, found Sierra at a homeless shelter. When Sierra finally confessed her secret, Astrid had been horrified to learn of Sierra’s living conditions and had taken Sierra into her home with Mr. Finch’s whole-hearted consent.

Sierra and Robbie had been living with Astrid ever since. Unwilling to be a burden, Sierra had taken online courses and gotten her high school diploma and as soon as she was able, took a job. Mr. Finch considered Sierra and Robbie family and hadn’t wanted to take Sierra’s money at first, but Sierra was stubborn and insisted on contributing. Eventually he’d agreed to two hundred dollars a month and some help around the house for rent in exchange for Sierra and Robbie’s room and board.

Astrid looked like she wanted to protest but the stubborn look in Sierra’s eyes won her out and she sighed as she took the cash.

“One of these days, I’m going to win,” said Astrid.

“Maybe, but I doubt it,” laughed Sierra. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to get out of these wet clothes before I get sick.”

Astrid nodded and then Sierra disappeared up the stairs.

Sierra’s life wasn’t the one she’d planned on. It had its ups and downs, and it had changed several times, but it was a decent life. Her life. However, she had no idea it was about to change yet again.

XXX
That night, Sierra’s sleep was disturbed by someone shaking her.

Sierra yawned and switched on the bedside table lamp to see Robbie standing in front of her, all dressed. Sierra frowned and after checking Robbie’s side of the bed, which was devoid of its usual occupant, decided it wasn’t a dream.

Robbie looked both anxious and excited, which didn’t bode well.

“Sweetie, what is it?” asked Sierra.

“Cara wants to talk to you,” said Robbie.

Sierra was confused. “Cara? Your imaginary friend?”

For the past month or so, Robbie had been talking to an imaginary friend called Cara. Robbie was shy and sometimes found it hard to connect with kids his own age, so he didn’t have a lot of friends. When ‘Cara’ entered Robbie’s life, she seemed nice from everything Robbie had said about her and she made him happy and not so alone, so Sierra hadn’t asked questions about ‘Cara,’ and now Sierra was beginning to regret that decision.

Robbie bit his lower lip and twisted his hands together. “Cara isn’t imaginary. She’s…special. She’s like us, Mom,” he confessed.

Sierra sat up quickly and narrowed her eyes. “She’s telepathic? Robbie, what have I told you about using your powers to communicate with strangers?”

Time and time again, Sierra had spoken to her son about the dangers of using their abilities in public and to certain dangerous people. They hadn’t even told Astrid and her father the truth of what they were and the fact that they’d been able to keep such a secret was a miracle unto itself. Sierra had met few others like her and save for one exception, they hadn’t been the kind of people she’d wanted her son exposed to.

“Not to,” said Robbie, as his lip trembled. “But Mom, I saw her. Really saw her. She’s good. She’s not one of the bad people.”

Sierra sighed and was quiet for a moment as she reined in her anger. Granted, Robbie was young and could be considered naïve, but Robbie’s abilities were strong, stronger than her own, even. And Robbie’s trust didn’t come easily to the people he met, not until after he’d examined them thoroughly. If he trusted this stranger, there had to be a good reason.

“I’m sorry, Mom,” said Robbie.

“It’s okay, honey,” said Sierra, gently. She could never stay mad at Robbie for very long. It was a wonder he wasn’t spoiled rotten. “But from now on, there’s to be no more secrets and the next time you meet someone like us, you tell me immediately. Promise?”

Robbie nodded. “I promise.”

Sierra yanked off the bed covers and swung her leg over the mattress. “What exactly does Cara want?”

“She wants to speak with you, but you’re blocking her,” said Robbie. “She says it’s important.”

Sierra sighed again. Sierra’s barriers around her mind were strong, so it was no wonder why this Cara person couldn’t get through. She had no desire to talk to Cara but apparently, Sierra had
no choice. So, Sierra closed her eyes and reluctantly lowered her shields.

*Cara, if you’re listening, I’m here,* said Sierra.

*Hello, Sierra.*

The voice was female, gentle and unfamiliar. Sierra didn’t like it.

*I know you must have a lot of questions—* began Cara.

*You don’t know anything,* interrupted Sierra, sharply. *Just because you’ve been talking to my son behind my back doesn’t mean you know anything about him or me.*

There was a moment’s pause. *I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to offend you,* came the sorrowful reply. *I didn’t intend for this to happen. I tried to talk to you sooner but your blocks are too strong for me.*

Sierra ignored the pang of guilt she felt. *I know. They’re up for a reason. I have to protect my son and myself.*

*I understand that and I promise you, I don’t intend either of you harm. I just want to talk to you,* said Cara.

We are *talking,* replied Sierra, grumpily. And getting nowhere as well. What was the point of all this?

*In person, I mean. You and Robbie,* said Cara. *I can tell you where to meet. It’s safe. No one will find you there.*

Sierra paused as she considered this. *Will you leave us in peace if I agree?*

*If that’s what you want,* said Cara. *Yes. Will you come, then?*

Sierra pinched the bridge of her nose. The things she had to do for her peace and quiet. How did she get mixed up in this craziness? *Fine. Where do we go?*

Pleased with Sierra’s response, Cara gave her directions.

After Sierra dressed and wrote out a note just in case they didn’t get back before Astrid woke up, Sierra took Robbie’s hand went down to the Broad Street subway station. The station was devoid of life but soon a train came up. Not long after Sierra and Robbie boarded the train, someone came up from behind and placed his hands on their shoulders, causing them to be teleported to an unknown place.

Robbie clutched Sierra’s hand for dear life as she took a defensive stance and narrowed her eyes at the two people before her.

One was an Asian man who looked like an overgrown kid and the other was a pretty young woman, who seemed mature beyond her years.

“What is this?” demanded Sierra.

“You can relax, it’s all good here. Allow me to begin the introductions. Name’s Russell,” he said, as he extended his hand for Sierra to shake. “And this is Cara. You must be Sierra and Robbie. Great to finally meet you.”

“Uh-huh,” said Sierra, as she reluctantly shook Russell’s hand.
Robbie peered out from behind Sierra and his face lit up at the sight of Cara.

Cara smiled at Robbie. “Hello, Robbie.”

Robbie released his mother’s hand and hugged Cara, who returned the embrace.

“Are we finally going to see the Lair now?” asked Robbie, eagerly.

“The Lair?” echoed Sierra.

Why do I not like the sound of that?

“It’s what we call this place,” explained Russell. “Follow us.”

Sierra reluctantly followed Russell and Cara down a passage and down a small set of steps. Sierra found herself in an incredibly well-lit abandoned subway station at least a hundred feet below the streets of Manhattan. It was filled with furniture of all sorts, food and other necessary supplies, games, exercise equipment and so much more. There were at least fifteen Tomorrow People there as well and almost all of them were staring at Sierra and Robbie with awe and wonder.

Sierra couldn’t stop staring at it all until Robbie tugged on her sleeve.

“Mom, can I go play pool with those kids?” asked Robbie.

A couple of teenagers that were standing by a large green pool table in a distant corner of the room, were beckoning for Robbie to join them in their game.

“What? Sure. But stay where I can see you,” said Sierra.

Robbie nodded and joined the teens in their game.

Once Robbie was out of earshot, Sierra turned her attention back to her hosts.

“Okay, would someone care to explain all this?” demanded Sierra.

“This is the Lair, our home. We’re called the Tomorrow People,” explained Cara. “We didn’t pick the name, I swear. We teleported you here. Have you—?”

“I know what the Tomorrow People and the three T’s are,” said Sierra, briskly.

Teleportation, telekinesis and telepathy, the three gifts of the Tomorrow People, homo sapiens and homo superior, and the genetic mutation that lay dormant until a certain point during adolescence, Ultra the organization that hunted them…Sierra was well-versed in all of it.

“Considering how strong your shields are, I figured you would be,” said Cara. “But I’ve got to say, it’s the first time I’ve met one of the Tomorrow People who wasn’t breaking out as opposed to how experienced you are. What’s your story?”

“There isn’t much of one to tell,” said Sierra. Her past wasn’t something she cared to discuss in detail. There were things even Astrid didn’t know about. “When I started breaking out, I thought I was losing it but then a stranger, Robbie’s father, came into my life and explained everything.”

Cara nodded sympathetically. “We’ve all got similar stories.”

Somehow I doubt that.
Sierra began to lose her patience. “This is getting us nowhere and this meeting was a mistake. I need to go. I don’t have time for this. I’ve got to get up for work in a matter of hours and get my son to school and try to make ends’ meet so we don’t end up on the streets. If this is about you reaching out to me and my son just because of our powers, then this conversation is over. You may have it all great down here, but you have no idea how much I used to wish I didn’t have my powers. They’ve given me so much trouble. You have no idea what my life has been like for the last eight years.”

Tears glistened in Cara’s eyes. “Sierra, I’ve spoken with your son and watched you for a long time now. I know exactly what it’s been like.”

Sierra shook her head. “No. No, you don’t. You don’t have a freaking clue.”

What did Cara know? Had she ever been pregnant and homeless and constantly looking over her shoulder while struggling just to survive on a day-to-day basis? Had she ever hidden out of fear and shame from those closest to her? Sierra seriously doubted it.

“Maybe I don’t know everything, but I do know how it feels to be alone and scared, to be ashamed of what you are,” said Cara. Her brown eyes were pleading. “Please, I’m begging you. Don’t leave just yet. Hear us out first.”

Sierra wanted to refuse but then she glanced at Robbie, who’d picked up on his mother’s distress and gave her a pleading look.

Why did I ever teach him the puppy-dog eyes?

“Fine,” she said, aloud. “But cut to the chase.”

Cara looked relieved as she nodded. “Why don’t you sit down?”

Sierra was led to a couch and sat down while Cara and Russell sat across from her on some chairs.

“Sierra, do you know of the shadow war between the Tomorrow People and Ultra?”

Sierra nodded and unconsciously rubbed her arm. Beneath the cotton sleeve, there was a scar there from a part of her past she didn’t care to remember.

Ultra was a secret government containment agency that had been hunting down the Tomorrow People. Ultra wanted the Tomorrow People neutralized. Those that they didn’t kill, were captured and forced to use their powers to hunt down and betray their own kind. Despite being the ‘superior species,’ the Tomorrow People had one flaw: the Prime Barrier in their brains prevented them from killing, even in self-defense.

“The Tomorrow People who work with Ultra, we can’t track them or communicate with them. It’s why we need your help,” said Russell. “We need you to find someone. I guess you could call him our leader’s leader.”

Sierra frowned in confusion. “Excuse me?”

“We have someone who takes care of us down here,” said Cara. “He’s a good guy, you’d like him.”

“Why isn’t he here talking to me, then?” asked Sierra.
Russell and Cara exchanged looks.

“Let’s just say that he’s kind of a mess this time of year,” said Russell, hesitantly. “It’s an anniversary or something for him, so we generally leave him alone unless it’s an emergency. He’ll be back tomorrow, though. Is that okay?”

Sierra nodded understandingly. “Fine. Continue.”

“There was someone that our leader used to work with, his name was Roger Price,” said Cara. “Roger disappeared, went into hiding somewhere only our kind can reach. Roger never came back.”

“How do you know Ultra didn’t nab him?”

Cara shook her head. “According to our current leader, that’s quite impossible. Roger was the strongest of all.” When Sierra scoffed in disbelief, Cara quickly added, “Listen, Sierra, if you’ve inherited just a fraction of his powers—”

“Inherited?” interrupted Sierra, furiously as she rose up. She instantly connected the dots and when she did, Sierra felt angry and foolish. Of course these people didn’t want her, they just wanted to use her to find someone who’d been dead to her for a long time. Still, the shock from the revelation was undeniable. “Wait, you’re telling me this is all to do with my lunatic, deadbeat father? He was one of us?”

Roger Price or Roger Jameson as she had known him was Sierra’s father. During Sierra’s childhood, she’d looked up to the man as he’d showered her and her younger brother with love and performed magic tricks for them. But as Sierra got older, Roger fought more with her mom and disappeared for long stretches of time. Eventually, Roger left and never came back. Sierra had never forgiven Roger for it and to hear that the Tomorrow People wanted such a loser back into their lives and looked up to him, angered her.

Realizing they were about to lose her, Cara and Russell tried to defuse the situation.

“He was more than that, Sierra. He was a hero,” said Cara. “And we need you to help us find him. We believe that the two of you share a connection, just you do with Robbie.”

Sierra snorted and shook her head. “No, you’re wrong. Roger was nothing but a pathetic waste of space that abandoned me and my mother and my brother when we needed him most.” If Roger was this powerful person who cared about people, he would’ve been there when Sierra broke out. Hell, he would’ve been there when Sierra was struggling to stay alive for her unborn baby’s sake! “I haven’t even seen him since I was eight years old!”

“You’re his daughter. If anyone can find him and contact him, you can,” said Russell, encouragingly.

“And who says I want to find him?” snapped Sierra. Why couldn’t these people understand? “He bailed on me and he bailed on you. And so help me, if you say he left so I could have a normal life, you’ll wish you hadn’t! I didn’t grow up human or safe from Ultra! He failed me, just like he failed you!”

Even if any of their garbage was true, which Sierra doubted it was, she had no reason to go after Roger. In Sierra’s mind, there was no justification for abandoning one’s family, especially one’s own children. It was wrong in so many ways.

There was a moment’s tense silence before Cara broke it. “You don’t believe us? Well, maybe
you’ll believe this. Follow me.”

Sierra rolled her eyes and followed Cara to another room. There was a strange-looking computer hanging from the ceiling and the room was filled with a desk, a couch and a bunch of useless junk.

“Pull up Roger’s last message, TIM,” said Russell. “TIM’s our AI computer, just so you know. He’s kind of like our HAL, except not evil.”

Sierra didn’t even blink as the computer projected an image. She did, however, inhale sharply, when her father’s image appeared on the screen behind her.

“Hello, Sierra,” said Roger’s image. “If things turn out the way that I hope, you’ll never see this. If you are seeing it, then let me start by saying that I’m sorry. I know you probably won’t believe me when I say that I love you and Luca and have only wanted the best for you. Everything I’ve done has been to protect you and—”

“Stop it!” Sierra forced herself to turn away. “Turn it off. Turn it off, now!”

TIM switched off the message and there was another tense silence in the room.

Sierra leaned against the desk and tried to compose herself. Her mind was abuzz with thoughts she didn’t want to think and her heart ached with feelings she didn’t want to feel. She could barely breathe and the urge to leave was unbearable.

“I don’t need an apology from my father,” said Sierra. Her eyes were red with unshed tears and her voice was thick with emotion. “It’s a little late for that. I am nothing like my father. I may have powers, but deep down, I’m just a single mother trying to stay alive. I’m sorry, but you’ve got the wrong girl and I have to leave. I’m sorry.”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra ran from the room.

Robbie, we’re leaving. Meet me in the entrance.

But Mom—!

Now, Robbie! said Sierra, sharply. Don’t argue with me! Just do as I tell you!

Knowing better than to argue with his mother when she used that tone, Robbie didn’t argue further.

Sierra was almost the entrance when one of the Tomorrow People teleported into the lair.

“Okay, I’m here, Cara. What was so important that I had to—Sierra?!”

A half-empty glass beer bottle fell to the floor and shattered, spilling the foul drink everywhere, but no one paid it any attention.

Sierra froze in her tracks at the sight of the man before her. His appearance had changed. He no longer wore an expensive suit as he was now dressed in a casual T-shirt, denim jeans, leather boots and a black leather jacket. His blond hair was messy instead of neatly combed back and there was stubble on his face. He’d aged, which was only to be expected given how long it’d been since their last encounter. But there was no question of the man’s identity.

“John,” she gasped.
The man standing before Sierra was John Young, her ex-boyfriend. He was the leader of the Tomorrow People and Cara must’ve called him in to persuade Sierra to stay.

John stared at Sierra in shocked disbelief. “You’re here.” As if to prove it to himself, John hesitantly reached out and touched Sierra’s shoulder.

Sierra stiffened at John’s touch but didn’t pull back. Being reunited was completely unexpected and not something Sierra had ever intended to happen, but try as she might to deny it, Sierra had missed John’s gentle touch. Sierra had been fourteen years old when her powers manifested. When that’d happened, she’d started hearing voices and when she went to sleep, she’d often wake up in a different place no matter what she tried.


“It was a lie,” interrupted Sierra, coldly. She pulled away from John’s touch. Her emotions were churning inside her and she forced them back. Now wasn’t the time to reignite the spark between them and nor could she deny the anger and hurt she felt. “What you saw in McCrane’s mind was a necessary trick to protect myself. You weren’t there to save me. What was I supposed to do? Besides, what did it matter to you? You broke up with me and left me, remember?”

Sierra remembered all too well the night of their breakup. It was one of Sierra’s worst memories. She felt a fresh wave of anger when she recalled how she’d met with John that night, expecting a night of romance before she told him her news, only to be heartbroken when John unexpectedly announced he wanted to end their relationship. He’d claimed he had to put Ultra first and out of desperation, Sierra had begged John to leave Ultra and flee with her, so they could stay together. John had refused, much to Sierra’s grief. She’d believed him and his conviction then, but yet here he was, clearly an Ultra fugitive. He couldn’t be bothered to make that choice when he was Sierra’s boyfriend but he could make it now? It disgusted her.

John looked offended and then immensely regretful. “It was a mistake, one that I regretted as soon as I made it.”

Sierra scoffed in disbelief. “I don’t believe you.”

When they’d broken up, Sierra had neither seen nor detected the slightest hint of regret in John’s behavior. Why should she believe anything John said now?

“Believe it or not, it’s the truth,” snapped John. He seemed truly devastated and angry. “You want to know why I broke up with you that night? It wasn’t because of my duty to Ultra, it was Ultra was getting too close to finding out about you, about us and I panicked. I thought if I stayed away you’d be safe, but then things changed and I decided to run with you. I was going to come back to you, apologize and beg you to take me back and run off wherever you wanted. But when I was about to, I caught up with McCrane and when I read his mind, I thought you’d died. If you hadn’t blocked me, if our connection hadn’t just disappeared, I wouldn’t have believed it. You have no idea what your death did to me!”

Sierra looked away, unable to meet John’s eyes. Her shields had slipped down and she could sense the truth in John’s words. She saw his devastation and felt his grief, and more importantly, she felt his love for her that she returned. Sierra felt the urge to reconnect with John and begin anew but she pushed it back.

Sierra’s powers had manifested when she was fifteen years old and when that happened, it was
the start of one of the worst years of Sierra’s life. Unable to find a reason for why unexplainable things kept happening to her and fearing she was losing her mind, she’d unintentionally cried out telepathically for help—any help. Help came in a form of a kind, calming voice that belonged to then-sixteen-year-old John Young, who’d not only heard Sierra’s cries, he’d sensed her and she him, they were connected. After a number of telepathic conversations, John not only convinced Sierra she wasn’t crazy and he was real, he persuaded her to meet him at a local café one afternoon.

During that meeting, Sierra not only learned the truth of what she was—what she and John both were and about Ultra and the life John led—she also started to learn how to control her powers under John’s tutelage, which was a welcome blessing in her life. But far more than that, during the year that followed, Sierra and John developed a secret, close friendship that gradually blossomed into a deep, passionate love that was consummated when Sierra was sixteen and John was seventeen. It was a love that Sierra had believed would last forever and not once did she ever imagine it ending. But it had. When she’d least expected it, John had broken her heart and left her alone after he’d sworn on his life that he never would.

Sierra had never intended for John to think she was dead, she’d just wanted to be safe. When she’d closed off their connection, it’d been because of her own heartbreak, nothing more. But regardless of whatever they still felt at the moment, how was Sierra ever supposed to trust him again?

“I’m sorry for the pain my actions caused you, John,” said Sierra, softly. She hadn’t wanted to do what she did, but hadn’t seen any other way to protect herself and her unborn child. Not to mention, she hadn’t known John thought she was dead and even so, had he looked harder for her, he would’ve known the truth. “But I can’t change what happened. It’s in the past and I don’t have time to talk right now. I need to go, so if you’ll excuse me—”

Sierra tried to leave but John blocked her and then the worst thing happened.

Robbie appeared at Sierra’s side. “I’m ready to go.” He looked up at John and smiled. “Hi.”

John blinked in surprise and then his brow wrinkled as he frowned. “Hi. Who…who’re you?”

“This is Robbie. My son,” said Sierra, quickly, hoping John wouldn’t ask further questions.

By now, a crowd had gathered and judging from the looks on their faces, they were quite shocked from having connected the dots while John had yet to. If Sierra had her way, John would be ignorant of the truth. It was hard to say who was all the more shocked, Russell or Cara. The former never would’ve imagined the scenario playing out in front of him and in all their talks, Cara had never once guessed at Robbie’s lineage.

Realizing what was happening, Sierra knelt down to Robbie’s level. “Robbie, sweetie, go see if Russell can get TIM to play you a movie while I take care of this. Be ready to go when I say so. Understand?” When Robbie nodded, Sierra glanced at Russell and silently pleaded with him before he nodded and held out his hand for Robbie to take. She needed Robbie to leave just for a little while so she could fix the situation before it got out of hand. She wanted to leave right then and there but she knew if she did, John would more than likely chase after her and she couldn’t have that.

“C’mon, kiddo. We’ll watch Wall-E and I’ll share my gummy bear stash with you,” said Russell, as he began scurrying Robbie away to the other room.

However, it was too late and John connected the dots. “Wait. How old are you, kid?”
“Don’t answer him!” said Sierra, before Robbie could speak. The last thing she wanted was for John to know the truth. He didn’t deserve to know, not after what he’d done. She shot a glare at John. “It’s none of your business, John. So, drop it!”

But John was nothing if not persistent, just as Sierra remembered. “How old are you, kid?” he demanded, as his voice rose in volume.

“I’m seven!” Robbie blurted out.

Robbie disliked people raising their voices at him. It made him scared and caused him to blurt out whatever came to his mind. After yelling out his age, Robbie’s eyes were wide as though he was afraid he’d done something wrong, and he looked apologetic at his mother.

Sierra just shook her head and looked kindly at him, signaling to Robbie that he wasn’t in trouble. Robbie relaxed a little but still looked nervous and Sierra could sense his excitement. He’d recognized John, of course, both from images in Sierra’s mind and from the one photograph Sierra had of John from their time together.

*Mom, can I meet him? Please?*

*Maybe. We’ll see,* said Sierra, as she mentally sighed. She didn’t want to deny Robbie’s request, but at the same time, was it better if they were kept apart until Robbie was of adult age and better understood the situation? *For right now, just go with Russell.*

Robbie nodded and then disappeared into TIM’s room with Russell.

When Robbie had gone, Sierra turned to face John, who was looking at her with fresh tears in his eyes, clearly distraught. Sierra’s son was seven years old and they’d broken up seven years ago. That combined with Robbie’s looks, it wasn’t hard to figure out the truth.

“John—” she began, but John cut her off.

“Is Robbie my son?” he asked, sounding hoarse.

Sierra’s throat tightened and she didn’t reply. This was exactly what she’d hoped to avoid.

“Is Robbie my son?” John repeated. “*Our* son?”

Sierra wanted to lie, claim that Robbie was her son by another man or say Robbie had been adopted, and John was imagining things, but the words wouldn’t come; and even if they had, Sierra knew that John could always tell when she was lying. So, having no other choice, Sierra did the only thing she could: she told the truth.

“Yes,” she confessed. “Robbie is our son.”

Robbie wasn’t just a third-generation Tomorrow Person, he was a synergist—the son of two very dangerous and powerful Tomorrow People.

John inhaled sharply and looked as though he might faint as he covered his face with his hands.

After a moment, John disappeared.

Even though everything Sierra’s body was screaming at her to just run and disappear, she didn’t. She opened up her telepathic connection with John and followed him to another room. She went down a flight of winding stairs and entered a room that was dripping from the recent rain and
was furnished with soft mats and exercise equipment.

John was in the middle of the room. He was shirtless, his hands were bound up with athletic tape and he was punching the living daylights out a large black punching bag. He was getting out his anger and pain and he had plenty of it. He had every reason to be upset. For the past seven years, he’d thought his girlfriend—albeit ex-girlfriend—was dead and then suddenly his world was turned upside down. Suddenly, Sierra was alive and had apparently been hiding away their son, John’s son. A child John never got to see grow up.

John had missed everything—from watching his girlfriend’s pregnancy progress and hearing the baby’s heartbeats and feeling the baby kick, to the birth of their son, their son’s first words and steps, to seeing Robbie’s powers develop and his first day of school. He’d missed everything because of his own foolishness and Sierra’s decision to block him out. The pain from it all hurt worse than anything John could’ve imagined.

Sierra hesitated but after a moment, she placed her hand on John’s shoulder.

John tensed and his skin broke out in goosebumps as he spun around and faced her.

The raw pain and anger in John’s eyes hurt worse than Sierra had expected but she didn’t avert her dark green gaze from John’s own grey-blue one. Like it or not, this conversation was overdue.

“John, we need to talk,” said Sierra, softly.

“Yeah, we really do,” said John, gruffly as he grabbed a nearby water bottle and downed half of it. “Robbie. Our son. You found out you were pregnant the night we broke up, didn’t you? That’s what you wanted to tell me that night.”

Sierra slowly nodded.

John exhaled slowly as though he was trying to calm himself. “But you chose not to. You weren’t ever going to tell me about him, were you?”

“No, I wasn’t,” she admitted. After Sierra’s past involvement with John, she’d had no intentions of ever telling him about their child. The day that Sierra had planned to tell John of her pregnancy was the day they’d broken up, thus destroying Sierra’s faith in John. He’d left her. What was to stop him from leaving their child? Not to mention, Sierra had seen what happened to people who stayed together for the sake of children and she hadn’t wanted that, so she’d made what she’d thought was the best possible decision at the time.

“Well, he’s my kid too, so you don’t get to make that decision by yourself anymore,” said John.

Sierra glared at John. Robbie’s father he might’ve been, but John didn’t get to just waltz back into Sierra’s life and take control. “Think again. I never put your name on Robbie’s birth certificate. And besides, legally, you don’t exist. You can’t exactly take a paternity test to prove your claims without risking getting on Ultra’s radar again. So, you can’t do anything if I don’t want you to.”

John knew Sierra was right but he still refused to back down. “I want to be part of his life, Sierra. I may not be able to prove it, but I know Robbie’s my son. I’ve lost seven years, I won’t lose any more time with him! I screwed up with us, I know, but you know I’d never do anything to hurt our son.”

“I don’t know actually! And even if I did, it’s not that simple, John!” said Sierra, in frustration.
“You left me! More than that, you left Robbie before he was even born! We can’t just go back to what we were before. We’re not the same anymore. Things have changed.”

“Then why are you even here if it wasn’t to tell me about Robbie? How did you even find this place?” demanded John, in frustration.

“You can blame your little lackeys, Cara and Russell for that,” snapped Sierra. “I didn’t know you were even here, okay? Cara’s been talking to Robbie behind my back and she used him to track me down in hopes of locating my father, Roger, who apparently had more secrets than I was aware of. Did you know my powers are second-generation? That my father, Roger, was one of us?”

John did not speak but the look of guilt and shame on John’s face answered Sierra’s questions.

Sierra looked at John with disgust. “Of course you did. Why am I not surprised?” Considering how secretive John was, it was no shock to Sierra that he’d withheld that information from her. “And you couldn’t find a spare minute to tell me? You knew how I felt about him!”

“I knew Roger, but I didn’t know who you were to him until the day he disappeared,” said John, honestly. “I swear, I didn’t know.”

Sierra turned away from John’s gaze. Ironically enough, Sierra hated that John was telling the truth right then and there. It made things more difficult for her.

_How many more secrets am I going to uncover before this insanity’s over?_

“Sierra,” said John, sighing as he placed his hands on her shoulders. “Look at me.”

Sierra turned around gazed into John’s eyes.

“I know I messed up and I’m sorry,” said John. “All I’m asking for is a chance, one chance to make amends and start over. Just let me try, please.”

Sierra hesitated. “I don’t know if I can do that, John. You broke my heart. If I can’t trust you with mine, how can I trust you with our son’s?”

It was one thing for Sierra to be heartbroken but the last thing she wanted was for Robbie to endure that same pain, to be rejected and abandoned by those who meant the most to you. Robbie was too young to know any of that.

John cupped Sierra’s face in his hands and used their connection to allow her to feel everything he felt before he kissed her forehead.

“Because I’d rather die than lose you two again,” he murmured. “I know you don’t believe me now, but one day I’ll prove it to you. I will _never_ leave you again.”

A few tears escaped Sierra’s eyes. Fixing things between the two of them wasn’t going to happen overnight. Hell, maybe it was impossible. But just because things were messed up between the two of them didn’t mean they couldn’t attempt to start over and make things better for their son. Sierra had grown up fatherless. Robbie deserved better than that.

“I can’t make any big promises about us right now. Let’s just take things one day at a time, John. One day at a time,” murmured Sierra. “Okay?”

John looked relieved as he nodded. “Anything you want.”
“Speaking of wants…Robbie wants to meet you,” said Sierra. “Properly, that is. If you’re up for it?”

“I won’t lie to you, I’m scared to death,” confessed John. Much as he wanted to be in Robbie’s life, suddenly plunging into fatherhood was scary. “But I think I can handle it.”

“Okay.”

This was it. Now or never. Sierra could only hope she wouldn’t regret it.

Robbie, come here, sweetheart.

Seconds later, Robbie teleported into the room and stood in front of his father.

John looked astonished. Even for a synergist, Robbie was terribly young to have powers already.

Sierra stepped a few feet away to give father and son some privacy.

“So, you’re really my daddy?” said Robbie.

John wordlessly nodded.

“I’m Robbie.”

John knelt down to Robbie’s level. “Hey, Robbie. It’s nice to meet you.” John looked regretful. “I’m sorry it took so long.”

But Robbie didn’t seem angry or the least bit upset. “It’s okay, you didn’t know.”

John smiled a little. He was glad that Robbie didn’t think poorly of him. Truly, the boy was mature and wise beyond his years.

“Can…can I hug you?” asked Robbie, shyly.

Fresh tears glistened in John’s eyes as he nodded and the next thing John knew, he was holding his son tightly in his arms for the very first time and he never wanted to let go.

XXX

The next morning, things were chaotic.

Sierra’s alarm clock kicked the bucket and she overslept. She barely had time to fix Robbie breakfast and rush him to school and get to work on time. It also meant that Sierra had no time to talk to Astrid and she really wanted to talk to her. She needed someone to confide in about John reentering her life and suddenly being part of Robbie’s. To make matters worse, Sierra was having the crappiest day of all times at her job and was on the verge of tears. One thing after another went wrong and Sierra was beginning to think it couldn’t get much worse. But it did.

At the end of the day, Dylan the jerk extraordinaire, got Sierra fired. He was ticked off that not only had she complained about him harassing her but also refused to date him. He’d claimed her department was ‘downsizing,’ which was a load of crap. Then on the way home, Sierra was almost
mugged by some bozo in a ski mask. Sierra’s powers and training enabled her to come out with very little injuries, but she’d still put the jerk in the hospital and she had to be looked at by the paramedics and file a report with the police.

While Sierra was waiting to fill out the last of the medical forms so she could head home, an all-too familiar nurse entered Sierra’s room.

“Sorry for the wait. If you just sign these, you can be on your—Sierra?”

“Marla,” said Sierra, stiffly. *Of all the nurses in the hospital, why did it have to be Marla?*

The nurse, Marla, was Sierra’s estranged mother. Once, they’d been quite close, but things changed when Sierra’s powers manifested. Sierra had often teleported in her sleep and talked about hearing voices, causing Marla to have Sierra visit numerous shrinks and try multiple antipsychotic drugs to try and help. The bills had been terrible, even when Sierra took a part-time job to help out. It had worn them both out when nothing they tried fixed Sierra’s ‘problems.’ Sierra had been led to believe that Roger suffered from the same problems and Marla had unintentionally made Sierra feel like a burden on the family.

When Sierra learned the truth of what she was, she’d quit seeing the shrinks and taking the pills, and while that took a load off the Jameson family’s finances, it also caused Marla to go ballistic and they’d fought. Their relationship was estranged after that. Sierra had kept her powers a secret as she’d feared the reactions of her mother and younger brother, Luca, if they knew, which meant Marla was in the dark. The final straw had been when Sierra became pregnant and refused to give up the father’s name or even consider giving the baby up for adoption. Marla had kicked Sierra out of the house and they’d had no further contact until that moment.

“It’s nice to see you. How’ve you been?” asked Marla.

Sierra gave her a look. “Unless Luca told you, I don’t see how that’s any of your business. Can I have those forms? I need to get out of here.”

When Sierra had left, she’d refused to let Luca think she’d just ditched the family like Roger had. Though it hadn’t been without difficulty, she’d kept in contact with Luca and they visited each other infrequently. Sometimes Sierra brought Robbie to visit. Luca’s busy high school schedule kept them from meeting more often, but when they did, Luca would eagerly spend time with his nephew.

“You keep in touch with Luca?” said Marla, as she handed Sierra the forms.

“Why wouldn’t I? Luca didn’t kick me out when I needed help,” said Sierra, unable to keep the bitterness out of her voice. “Luca didn’t make me feel like a burden.”

Marla winced and had the decency to look ashamed. “Sweetheart—”

Sierra pulled away when Marla reached out and she glared at her mother. “Is there something you want? Because I need to leave,” she said, as she finished the signing the forms.

When Marla didn’t speak, Sierra scowled and rose up. She was almost out the door when Marla suddenly blurted out, “Luca would like to have you over for dinner.”

Sierra froze in her tracks. “Luca or you?”

“Both,” admitted Marla. “Sierra, I—”
“I’ll think about it,” interrupted Sierra. “I’m not saying never, just not right now.” *Especially not after the day I’ve had.* “Luca’s got my contact information. Now, if there’s nothing else, I really need to go.”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra left the hospital. She was in no hurry for Marla to see her tears.

XXX

Astrid was not home when Sierra returned after picking up Robbie from school.

As she needed to put the word out about her need for a job, Sierra spent the next hour filling out applications and giving out her résumé. Once that horrendous chore was done, Sierra decided to take a good long walk to try and relax.

Everything had gone completely bug nuts in the last twenty-four hours and Sierra needed a break from it all. She just wanted to forget about her current job situation, her issues with John and Marla and the new information about her father, just for a little while.

Sierra’s peace and quiet was soon disturbed, however. She was headed home down her usual route, which was unusually devoid of life, when she spotted an unmarked, blacked out SUV following her out of the corner of her eye.

*Oh, crap.* Sierra continued to walk casually, hoping she was wrong. *John, can you hear me? Where are you?* asked John, sensing the urgency.

*I’m on John and Pearl Street. I think Ultra’s following me,* said Sierra. *I’m going to try and lose them.*

*I’m on my way,* said John.

*No, don’t!* said Sierra, sharply, as she broke out into a run. *Robbie’s going to know something’s wrong. I need you to take care of him and keep him safe. Robbie’s your priority! Is that clear?* If Sierra’s suspicions were right and Ultra had found her, then it wouldn’t be long before they found Robbie too. She couldn’t let that happen.

*Crystal,* said John.

Sierra didn’t want to risk expose, so she continued to try and run from the black vehicles, only to be cut off from all sides and then a blond-haired man that shared some resemblance with Sierra’s face, emerged from one of the parked cars on the side of the road. He had a smug, arrogant look on his face and was nothing if not creepy.

“Hello, Sierra. I’m Jedikiah. Pleasure to meet you,” he said. “You remind me of him, you know. Your father, Roger.”

“I don’t care,” said Sierra. She did a quick count of the vehicles and the agents surrounding her and the weapons they carried. “Is this place deserted of civilians?”

Jedikiah frowned in confusion. “Yes. Why do you—?”
“Then I don’t need to hold back,” said Sierra, with a glint in her eyes.

Sierra clenched her hands into fists and suddenly the cars teleported away. The agents’ weapons flew out of their hands and were twisted like pretzels. Those who came at her, Sierra was able to put down with one little touch before fighting off the rest using the martial arts skills John had taught her. Sierra finally went down when a dart containing a sedative hit her in the back of the neck, causing her to lose consciousness.

XXX

Back at the Lair, John was going out of his mind trying to track Sierra down.

Robbie had arrived in the Lair shortly after Sierra was taken. He’d sensed his mother’s distress and was scared to death and worried sick about Sierra. John had done his best to console his son before focusing his efforts on locating his former lover.

While John knew that Jedikiah’s main base of operations was in the heart of the city, a place he was all too familiar with, there were also other Ultra bases throughout Manhattan and Sierra could’ve been at any one of them. It didn’t help that Ultra used special technology to render Sierra’s powers useless, making it all the more difficult for John to locate her.

“What do you got for me, TIM?” asked John.

“I had the car until Grand and Essex, but the traffic cams were down south of Canal,” said TIM.

John growled in annoyance. Typical. Ultra always did know how to cover their tracks. “Fine, pull all the sat images you can find on the lower island.”

“Already started,” replied TIM. “But they might need a minute to composite.”

“We don’t have a minute!” yelled John, frustration. “Sierra could be dead for all we know!”

John raised his hand as if to telekinetically strike at the computer, but stopped when Cara came in.

“Could you yell any louder? I don’t think people can you hear you in China,” said Cara. Her face softened at the expression on John’s face. “I know you’re upset that we lost Sierra, but we’ll find her.”

“No, I lost her. Again!” retorted John. What had he been thinking, just letting her leave the Lair when he knew there was a chance Ultra might pick up on her after the medical file theft? “I never should’ve let her leave. But I can get her back!”

“Not alone, you won’t,” snapped Cara. “John, look, you can’t blame yourself for this. I was the one who talked to Robbie and had the files stolen in the first place. This whole thing is my fault.”

“And I should punish you for breaking the rules, but I can’t,” said John, softly. “If you hadn’t done what you did, I never would’ve found Sierra or my son.” While John disliked that Cara had gone behind his back and acted without his consent, it was nothing compared to how grateful he felt about the end result of Cara’s actions.
“And it’s because of your son that we need to be smart and careful about this,” said Cara. She placed her hand on John’s shoulder. “Sierra’s the key to finding her father and we’re going to do all we can to get Sierra back, but if we don’t do it right, Robbie will lose both his parents. Is that what you want?”

John shook his head and looked down at his feet. Cara was right, of course, but John wasn’t about to admit it aloud.

There was a knock on the door and then Russell came in with Robbie close behind him. “Hey, sorry to interrupt, but the munchkin’s got something to show you. It’s important.”

Russell seemed on edge, which wasn’t a good sign.

John pulled away from Cara and knelt down to Robbie’s level. “What is it, buddy?”

“It’s Mom. Jedikiah’s going to hurt her. Look.” Robbie looked distressed as he held out the sketchpad that Russell had given him to draw on. On the first page was an incredibly well-drawn picture of Sierra locked up at Ultra while Jedikiah gave her the needle. There was also a time written on an empty space of the paper, one hour hence.

Cara looked baffled at Robbie’s picture. She knew the boy was a good artist but this skill was far beyond anything she’d ever seen.

John frowned in concern. “Robbie, how do you know Jedikiah’s name or what Ultra looks like?”

Robbie bit his lip. “I saw it, in my head. Sometimes, when I’m really happy or really upset, I see things. Things no one else can see. I can’t always control it, but when I see things, I draw them. It’s how I knew I could trust Cara. I saw her past.”

John exchanged shocked looks with Cara and Russell. There’d never been a single member of the Tomorrow People who’d had powers beyond that of the three T’s. If Robbie was indeed seeing bits of the past and the future, then there was no telling just how powerful he was or what this meant for the future of their species. It also meant that if Ultra had the slightest inkling of Robbie’s abilities, they’d stop at nothing to get their hands on him, something John wouldn’t permit.

“Okay. What else did you see?” asked John, sounding a lot calmer than he felt.

“That’s it. I just saw Jedikiah giving Mom the needle in an hour. I didn’t even see her get taken.” Robbie’s eyes glistened with tears. “Is he going to kill her?”

“No,” said John, firmly. He put down the sketchpad and placed his hands on Robbie’s shoulders. “I promise you, I’m going to do all I can to get your mom back. I won’t let Jedikiah hurt her. That vision isn’t going to happen for another hour, which means we got time. Okay?”

John had already lost Sierra once and he would not lose her again.

“Okay,” said Robbie, as he hugged John tightly.

John returned the embrace and rubbed circles on his son’s back to calm him. The poor kid was being so brave but John could still sense his son’s fear.

“I found the car,” said TIM, interrupting the moment. “Would you like to know where it is?”

“Yes,” said John.
When Sierra regained consciousness, she found herself restrained to a chair inside an unfamiliar gray room with glowing blue lights. Jedikiah sat across from Sierra and there was a small black table in between them. On the table, there was a small black tablet and a tray holding a syringe.

“I’m sorry about the cuffs,” said Jedikiah, as she struggled against her restraints. “Security precautions and all. And considering you took a lot of my men down with just a touch, you see why they’re necessary, don’t you? Oh, and speaking of which, don’t bother trying to teleport out of here. The walls are lined with what I call D-chips, a tech that blocks any use of your powers.”

Sierra didn’t speak. She just glared at Jedikiah.

Jedikiah clapped his hands together. “We didn’t get properly introduced before, Sierra. Allow me to rectify that. My name’s Doctor—”

“Jedikiah Price, I know,” interrupted Sierra. “You’re the head of Ultra.”

Jedikiah sighed dramatically. “I can imagine what John’s told you. Let me guess, he said I’m some boogeyman that’s systematically rounding up and wiping out your kind. Did he say why I’m doing this or is it just because I’m evil?”

“I think you’ve answered that question yourself, don’t you think?” spat Sierra. A man who did what Jedikiah did, only did so out of fear, pure and simple. “You’re a coward. Mankind’s always feared what it doesn’t understand and you’re no different.”

Jedikiah laughed. “Oh, please, Sierra. Give me more credit than that. I’m an evolutionary biologist. If anything, I’m fascinated by your kind. But to be fair, the only thing that concerns me is how the rest of the world would react if they knew a paranormal species was living secretly in their midst. A species that could annihilate them.”

Sierra couldn’t believe what she was hearing. What was this, an *X-Men* comic book saga? “We can’t even kill!” she protested. “All I want is to be left alone! Why can’t you see that?”

“That’s just it, Sierra. *You* want to be left alone. But the same can’t be said for the rest of your kind.” Jedikiah rose up and picked up the tablet that was sitting on the table. After a moment, the screen lit up with profiles on paranormals. “You see, you have no idea what the world would look like if I didn’t find and stop people like you. See here? This is a teenage boy who stole seventy million dollars from the Federal Reserve. Here we got a sixteen-year-old who was caught trying to tag the Oval Office. We’ve also got an adult paranormal who was caught Tweeting nuclear launch codes. The list goes on!”

Sierra was silent. She knew her kind could be stupid and reckless with their powers and even less than benevolent, but this wasn’t something she’d expected. She didn’t want to admit it, but from Jedikiah’s point of view, he had reason to be afraid of the Tomorrow People. Like it or not, they were dangerous, but that didn’t make Ultra any less dangerous or evil.

A computer screen hanging up on the wall lit up with a map of the world and there were countless little dots on the map, each representing one of Sierra’s kind.
“There are so many breakouts, Sierra. They’re all over the world,” continued Jedikiah. “They’re unpredictable and uncontrollable. I’m not the bad guy here, Sierra, not by a long shot.”

Sierra doubted that. So far all Jedikiah had done was prove that he was evil. She then tensed when Jedikiah pick up the syringe.

“Don’t you dare!” hissed Sierra, as she furiously struggled against her bonds. “Keep that away from me! Let me go!”

Sierra had seen the syringe before in John’s memories. It contained a power stripper. It made the victim human but ultimately destroyed them. Sierra sometimes wanted to be human again, but the price of it was too great, even for her.

Jedikiah slung his arm over Sierra’s shoulder and rubbed her back. “Shh, relax, Sierra. This is nothing to be afraid of. It’ll only hurt for a second and then you’re free to go. This will fix you.”

“There’s nothing wrong with me!” yelled Sierra.

Jedikiah grasped Sierra’s chin in his hand. “You’re so much like your father, so much promise. But you don’t want to end up like him, do you? I don’t know what myths John has spun about your father, but they’re not true.”

Sierra spat in Jedikiah’s face and couldn’t help the smugness she felt as Jedikiah pulled away from her and wiped his face. “I may not hold my father in high regard, but I’ll never believe anything you say about him!”

This time, it was Jedikiah who glared after he’d cleaned himself up. “Well, you can believe whatever you want, but your father’s not coming back to save you or the Tomorrow People because he’s dead.”

What?! My father’s dead? He can’t be. The brief moment of shock allowed Sierra to be distracted and Jedikiah took advantage by plunging the needle into Sierra’s neck.

Sierra yelped from the pain of the needle and braced herself for what was to come, but nothing happened. There was no pain from the drug, no sense of loss, no destruction, and no sudden seizure from the drug’s effects. There was nothing. Sierra felt the same as she ever did, which baffled her and judging from the look on Jedikiah’s face, he was just as startled as she was, if not more.

Suddenly, the door swung open and an Ultra agent burst in. “Sir! There’s been a breech!”

Jedikiah took a remote from his pocket and aimed it at the computer screen. John, Cara and Russell’s images were on the security cameras and they were fighting their way to Sierra’s cell.

“Well, look at that. Your friends are coming to rescue you. That’s one way to get them out of hiding,” said Jedikiah.

“No!” cried Sierra. “No, please! You can’t do this!”

But it was no use. Sierra’s pleas were ignored and she was left alone in the room, trapped like a rat.

Sierra struggled against her restraints, but no matter what she tried, she couldn’t break free. She yelled in frustration. John and the others were going to get killed if she didn’t get out. But how was she going to escape? The room blocked her powers.
Or does it? said a little voice in her head.

A lightbulb lit up in Sierra’s mind. Sierra stopped struggling and thought it through. If the power-stripping serum hadn’t worked, could the same be said for the D-chips in the room? There was only one way to find out for sure.

Sierra took a deep breath, closed her eyes and concentrated on teleporting out. Suddenly, Sierra found herself in the hallway outside her prison cell. She gasped and laughed in both relief and shock. It’d worked. It’d worked!

“Sierra!”

Sierra turned her head to see the baffled and relieved faces of John, Cara and Russell. But there was no time for a happy reunion as Ultra agents were coming in the opposite direction.

“Run!” yelled Sierra, as the four of them began to flee.


“I teleported!” said Sierra.

“That’s impossible,” gasped Russell.

They ran down the hall and down several flights of stairs. They’d just made it to the lobby and were almost home free when Jedikiah yelled out John’s name and they found themselves surrounded by Ultra agents. Jedikiah was aiming a gun at John’s face.

“I see you’ve finally decided to come home,” said Jedikiah. “Did you think Sierra was going to help you find your Promised Land? Is that it? Well, I’ve got news for you. It doesn’t exist and even if it did, you’re sure as hell never going to see it.”

Jedikiah fired his gun.

“No!” cried Sierra.

Without thinking, Sierra thrust out her hand and stopped time itself. Save for Sierra, John, Cara and Russell, everything was frozen. The bullet, Jedikiah and the Ultra agents were all trapped in a time-stop, unable to move.

Sierra’s would-be rescuers stared at her in shock.

“Sierra, how’re you doing that?” asked John. He was just as surprised as the others. He knew his girlfriend was powerful but this was an unexpected surprise.

“Not important right now, John!” grunted Sierra. Keeping the temporal stasis field was difficult and she was feeling the strain.

“Get us out of here,” said John. “Now!”

Sierra kept her eyes on the bullet in front of her as she grabbed John’s arm and the rest of them did the same before she teleported them back to the Lair, leaving behind a broken window from the bullet and many baffled Ultra agents.
When they arrived at the Lair, John and Sierra were almost slammed into the wall by their worried son.

Robbie was relieved to have his parents back safe and sound. He’d fallen asleep and had a nightmare shortly after John left to rescue Sierra and the dream had caused Robbie to be scared he was going to lose both his parents and be alone. It took nearly forty-five minutes along with the combined efforts of Robbie’s parents to assure the hysterical seven-year-old that they were both all right and everything was okay now.

When Robbie had calmed down, he fell asleep on a couch and was tucked in with a blanket. Cara agreed to watch Robbie while his parents had a discussion. Russell reluctantly did the same, although he was more interested in exploring Sierra and Robbie’s abilities and giving said abilities labels. He cheered up when Sierra promised to do that with him later.

With their son taken care of, John took Sierra into TIM’s room and locked the door.

“John, I—” began Sierra, but she was cut off when John suddenly held her tight.

“Don’t scare me like that. I thought I’d lost you again,” said John, sounding slightly muffled from Sierra’s shirt.

The situation suddenly settled on Sierra and she felt a little shaken. She tightened her grip on John. She wasn’t ready to be with him romantically just yet, but she loved how John made her feel safe and protected.

“I’m okay. I’m here,” she murmured. “I’m not going anywhere.”

They remained like that for a few moments before eventually breaking apart. They sat down on the couch, a few cushions separating them.

“So, are you going to tell me?” asked John.

“Tell you what?” asked Sierra.

“About Robbie’s powers and yours,” said John. “I know about his visions, Sierra. He showed me. And how the hell did you do what you did at Ultra?”

This was yet another conversation Sierra had wanted to avoid, but once again she was trapped. “I can’t explain it as I barely understand it, but the gist of it is, my powers evolved after we broke up. What you saw, when I did at Ultra, stopping time…it’s called temporal manipulation. I’ve never really been able to control it. It just happens sometimes when I’m scared or in danger. And it’s not the only thing I can do, John.”

John gave her a questioning look.

“It’s better if I just show you. Give me your hand,” said Sierra. “The hurt one.”

The palm of John’s right hand was bandaged from a cut he’d sustained from cleaning up the broken glass of his beer bottle.

John was still puzzled but he didn’t question Sierra. He held out his hand for her to take.

Sierra took John’s hand in hers and gently took off the bandage. She then placed her hand on
John’s palm and there was a slight tugging feeling. When Sierra removed her hand, John’s injury was just gone as if it had never been.

John looked shocked. “How…?”

“Biological manipulation. I can make people better…or worse,” explained Sierra. “Robbie has my abilities and a lot more. I can’t see the past or the future, only he can. And that’s not all he can do.” Sierra quickly told John of Robbie’s other, secret power.

John looked visibly shaken. “How long has Robbie had his powers?”

“He’s always had them,” confessed Sierra. “When I was still pregnant with Robbie, he was protecting me and communicating with me.”

“Holy crap…” murmured John.

Sierra nodded in agreement. She knew what John was thinking. Both John and Sierra were very powerful, very dangerous paranormals, but Robbie was still coming into his own gifts, which meant the possibilities for their son’s abilities were limitless. He could very well be the most special of the Tomorrow People of all.

A look of determination crossed John’s face. “I won’t let Jedikiah get his hands on our son.”

“I know you won’t,” said Sierra. When it came down to it, John was a protector and she knew he’d do all he could to keep Robbie safe. She folded her hands together and sighed. “John, before we go any further with this, can I see the rest of my dad’s message?”

After everything that had happened, Sierra had reconsidered her earlier opinion on her father and decided to give the man a second chance.

John’s face softened as he nodded and then he ordered TIM to replay Roger’s last message.

This time, Sierra paid more attention to her father.

“Hello, Sierra,” said Roger’s image. “If things turn out the way that I hope, you’ll never see this. If you are seeing it, then let me start by saying that I’m sorry. I know you probably won’t believe me when I say that I love you and Luca and have only wanted the best for you. Everything I’ve done has been to protect you and Luca. I thought maybe you’d get lucky and take after your mom. But if you’re watching this…well, things didn’t turn out the way that I’d hoped. I wasn’t the best dad and I regret that so much. If I could back and do things over again, I would. And I know I have no right to offer you advice…not after what I’m about to do.” The pain on Roger’s face and in his voice made Sierra’s heart clench. “But if you turned out like me, then your life just got very complicated and very dangerous.” Roger held a large coin, the same coin he used to perform magic tricks with. “Don’t believe everything you see. The truth is, there’s only one thing you can trust more than anything. You. Trust your heart, honey. I love you, Sierra. I love you.”

Sierra wiped her face of the tears that had fallen. She’d been so wrong about her father. She’d been so wrong about everything. Why hadn’t she seen through Roger’s act all those years ago? Roger had been a good father, one that Sierra loved and missed so much.

“I’m going to find him, John,” said Sierra, determinedly. “I have to.”

“I know,” said John.

One way or another, Sierra was going to get her father back.
Sierra and Robbie spent the night at the Lair.

It was just lucky that the following morning was Saturday and Sierra’s turn to buy the week’s groceries, so she could explain hers and Robbie’s absence from the house. After purchasing a few days’ worth of food, Sierra and Robbie were escorted home by John. Once John had left for the Lair, it was time to face the music.

“Hey, Astrid, we’re home,” called Sierra, as she shut the door behind her with her foot. “We’ve got the groceries.”

Astrid emerged from the living room and entered the entryway. “Perfect timing, I was just about to call you. You’ve got a visitor waiting for you in the living room.”

Sierra groaned. “Oh, great. Who is it? Marla?”

Astrid looked surprised. “You reconnected with your mom?”

“Astrid!”

“Sorry.” Astrid shook her head. “But to answer your question, no. It’s not your mom. It’s a guy. He says he’s your uncle, your dad’s brother. Jedikiah Price.”

Sierra’s eyes narrowed. “What?!?”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra put down her grocery bags, went into the living room and her blood ran cold at the sight of Jedikiah, sitting on the sofa and casually sipping a cup of coffee.

“You never told me you had an uncle,” said Astrid.

“I’m afraid that’s my fault, Miss Finch. You see, Sierra’s dad and I had a falling out before Sierra’s brother was born. And I was telling you earlier, my work’s left me rather lonely and I decided to try and reconnect with my brother’s family. It’s been really hard tracking them down. I only found Marla and Luca yesterday—Marla can confirm everything by the way, just in case you were wondering—and since that went smoothly, I thought I’d take a chance with my beautiful niece and my grandnephew. But I’ve got to say, Sierra, finding you was quite difficult, it’s like you all just up and vanished.”

Sierra caught the implication in Jedikiah’s words and narrowed her eyes. “We needed a fresh start, for Robbie’s sake. I’m sure you can understand.”

“Oh, of course. Children are the future, after all,” said Jedikiah. “And I must say, it’s a pleasure to meet you, Robbie. You look like a very bright young soul, just like your mother.”

Jedikiah smiled at Robbie, but the seven-year-old didn’t return the smile. Robbie pulled away and clutched Sierra’s hand tightly.

Sierra gave Astrid a look and then she turned to Robbie. “Sweetie, why don’t you go help Aunt Astrid put the groceries away while I talk with my uncle for a minute? Help yourself to a doughnut when you’ve finished.”
“Okay, Mom.”

Sierra waited until Astrid and Robbie were out of earshot before she turned on Jedikiah. “What’re you doing here?”

“Reuniting my family,” said Jedikiah, coolly.

“We’re not family!” snarled Sierra.

Jedikiah reached into his pocket and pulled out a photograph of two young boys. Sierra recognized it from her father’s old photo album. On the back, written in Roger’s tidy scrawl were the words, ‘Remember, bro. Love, Roger.’ It was proof of Jedikiah’s claims.

“That’s your dad and I when we were kids. Only I was born human and he was like you,” said Jedikiah. “The whole reason I became a geneticist was to understand him and perhaps one day help him, just like I want to do with you and Robbie.”

Sierra scowled. “Excuse me?”

“I want to offer you a job, Sierra,” said Jedikiah. “Work for me.”

Sierra stared at Jedikiah in disbelief. “Work for you? You’ve got to be kidding me!”

“I’m not,” said Jedikiah, seriously. “Hear me out. I know you’re jobless and dependent on your friend’s generosity, but you don’t have to be. I can give you everything you need: a large salary, your own penthouse apartment, a ticket to the perfect school for Robbie and so much more.”

“Funny. I didn’t see any of this generosity when you tried to destroy me,” snarled Sierra. “You’re only offering this because your D-chips and power-stripping serum don’t work on me. Why should I even consider this?”

“Because it’s the chance of a lifetime and I made a mistake with you,” said Jedikiah. “Clearly, I underestimated you. We’ve only just glimpsed at what you’re capable of. In all my years in this job, I’ve never seen anyone who even hinted at your powers. You’re living proof that your kind is evolving. If you let me help you hone your skills—”

“Ultra hunts down, uses and exterminates people like me!” interrupted Sierra. “It’s bad enough you and I are related! Why would you think I’d be willing to work for you and betray my kind?”

“For your family,” said Jedikiah. “And for your friend and her dad.”

Sierra’s hand clenched into a fist. “Are you threatening them?”

“No, you’re threatening them if you don’t help me contain the spread of your species,” said Jedikiah, sharply. He talked about Sierra’s kind like they were disease. “Can’t you see I’m offering you the chance to help protect the people you love?”

“Yeah, and to be a traitor!”

“To whom? Some rebel runaways you met two days ago? Or to your mother? Your brother? Your best friend? Or perhaps your son?” Jedikiah sat down and switched on his tablet. “Or is it because you still feel something Robbie’s father?”

Much to Sierra’s horror, Jedikiah pulled up the results of a DNA test. The test results
“Once I knew who you were, I was curious about Robbie’s father, so I acquired a bit of Robbie’s DNA and ran some tests. I know that Robbie is a synergist and that he’s the son of Ultra’s most wanted fugitive, John Young. Now, this information is strictly classified, of course, but imagine what might happen if my partner, a man who could be your worst nightmare, got ahold of it.”

Sierra’s eyes darkened with anger as she grabbed Jedikiah by the lapels of his jacket. “Shut up! You leave my son out of this! Now, I may not be able to kill, but if you lay a finger on my son, I swear to God, I’ll make you wish I could!”

“While I admire your mother bear protectiveness, it’s not me you have to worry about, Sierra,” said Jedikiah, as he freed himself from her grasp. “It’s the shadow war itself you should focus on. Sooner or later, you’re going to have to pick a side.” He switched on security camera footage on his tablet, which showed Roger entering a car and the car exploding in a ball of flame. “John and his band of rebels would have you believe that your father’s a hero, that he’s alive. They lied to you.”

Sierra didn’t reply as she held the tablet in her hands. Her throat was tight at seeing her father’s death. She wanted to believe it was a trick of Jedikiah’s, another lie, but what if she was wrong?

“I know it’s hard, but the man in the video is your dad, after he broke into my office and sabotaged my research,” said Jedikiah. “You don’t want that to happen to you. For Robbie’s sake. Work with me, Sierra. Come be an agent at Ultra.”

“And what happens to Robbie if I do?” demanded Sierra.

“Nothing,” said Jedikiah. “Much as I would love to work with Robbie closer, I give you my word that he won’t be part of this. He stays out of it completely.”

Sierra put down the tablet. “I need time to decide.”

It was a lot to take in and Sierra needed time to herself to think things through, consider each and every possibility before she made her decision.

“Of course. Twelve hours should suffice,” said Jedikiah.

“Forty-eight” said Sierra, flatly.

Jedikiah sighed. “I don’t think you’re in a position—”

But that was as far as Jedikiah got before Sierra angrily placed her hand on Jedikiah’s cheek. Within moments, Jedikiah was kneeling on the ground, in agonizing pain and gasping for breath.

“I think that if you want that reversed, you’ll do as I ask,” said Sierra, coldly as she crouched down to Jedikiah’s level. “The Prime Barrier only keeps me from directly killing you outright…so, if I wanted to, I could take Robbie, disappear and leave you like that. You’d never be cured, you’d just die a slow, agonizing death. So, what’s your answer? Do I get the time I want or not?”

Jedikiah’s pain was too great for him to give a verbal answer. He just nodded and held out his hand for Sierra to take.

Sierra took Jedikiah’s hand and gripped it tightly as she undid the damage she’d done. Jedikiah was soon back on his feet, the picture of health and he was looking at Sierra with newfound
“You drive a hard bargain, Miss Jameson. Just like your old man,” said Jedikiah. “Even so, my offer still stands.” He handed her his card. “I’ll expect your answer the day after tomorrow.”

Sierra nodded and slipped the business card into her pocket.

XXX

Time went by in a flash and before Sierra knew it, it was the night before she was to give her answer to Jedikiah about his offer.

At that moment, Sierra was on a rooftop, waiting for John to arrive. She was tossing a coin in her hand and feeling beyond upset. She felt like she’d been betrayed all over again. She’d also been doing a lot of thinking and had reached a decision regarding her future and her son’s.

When John finally arrived, the first thing Sierra did was slap him, hard.

“Ow,” said John, as he clutched his red cheek. “Sierra, what was that—”

“How long have you known Jedikiah’s my uncle?” interrupted Sierra, furiously. She refused to believe that John hadn’t known. He was a former Ultra agent, for heaven’s sake! What she didn’t understand was why he’d kept it from her. “You’ve known the entire time, haven’t you? Why didn’t you tell me? Were you ever going to tell me or was my lineage the only reason you and I were together?”

John’s face fell and for a brief moment, there was hurt and anger in his eyes. “How could you think I’d do that?”

“How can I not? My world’s been turned upside-down again. I’m thinking a lot of things right now, John!” said Sierra. “Now, answer me!”

John sighed. “I suspected,” he admitted. “But I didn’t know for sure, not until Roger disappeared.”

“You mean when he was killed,” said Sierra, as anger tears slid down her cheeks. “Jedikiah showed me the security footage. I saw what happened.”

“And you believe him? Sierra, Jedikiah is a liar!” said John. “Look, technically, you two are related, but you’re not like him. You’re one of us.”

Sierra clenched her hand into a fist and drew a deep, shuddering breath. “John, Jedikiah knows who you are to Robbie. He knows Robbie’s your son.”

John’s eyes darkened. “What? How?”

“It doesn’t matter how, the point is, he knows.” It was bad news. Heaven alone knew what Jedikiah would do to get his hands on John’s son if Sierra didn’t act. “And there’s more. Jedikiah’s made me an offer. If I come and work with him, he’ll give me a good salary and an apartment of my own. Robbie will be kept away from Ultra and Jedikiah’s sick partner. I have no desire to be near that man, but working with him will help keep Robbie safe and find out what happened to my
father.”

John looked horrified and then disgusted. “You’re actually considering this? Sierra, Jedikiah would drive us all extinct just for the sake of the human race. He’s using you!”

“It’s not that different than what Cara and Russell are doing,” retorted Sierra. “Those two, they played me from the start. They want to use me, to find my father. And so do you.”

John looked hurt and reached out to Sierra but she pulled away. “It doesn’t have to be this way. You and Robbie can come live with me in the Lair. You’ll be safe from Ultra, I’ll protect you.”

“And then what, John? Where do we go from there? I can’t keep running and hiding for the rest of my life! That’s not fair to Robbie. He deserves better,” said Sierra, in frustrated exasperation. She sighed. “This is bigger than just us. I have to do what’s best for Robbie. He deserves more than what I’ve been able to give him so far.”

There was nothing that Sierra wouldn’t do for her son, but for the chance to finally stop looking over her shoulder, to be able to fully provide for Robbie without worrying so much and maybe eventually lead a semi-normal life…Jedikiah’s offer had its pluses.

John sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose before he face Sierra. “Look, I know it’s hard. You have a life here, a family. But the people who’re like us, the ones we’ve found, the ones we will find, and you and Robbie, are my family. I’m not going to let anything happen to them and I won’t let anything happen to you and Robbie. Now, please, Sierra…” John held out his hand for her to take. “Just come with me.”

But Sierra made no attempt to take John’s hand. Once, Sierra would’ve taken John’s hand and just run away without looking back. But that time was long since gone. Things had changed.

“When I first broke out, when you and I started talking all those years ago…that mysterious voice in my head…even when I thought I was going crazy, I trusted you and I would’ve done anything to be with you. There’s still a part of me that does trust you,” said Sierra. She sighed again. “So, you need to trust me when I say that I’ve been doing a lot of thinking and I’ve come to a decision, one I think will be the best for all.”

John tensed, as though he could guess what she was going to say and didn’t like it.

“I have to find out what happened to my dad, whether or not he’s alive or if he’s a hero or not, I have to know. But there’s only one way I can do that and still protect those I love without the risk of losing them,” said Sierra. “I’m going to become a double-agent. I’ll work for my uncle, but I’ll still help protect the Tomorrow People, keep them off Ultra’s radar.”

John inhaled sharply. “Sierra, do you realize what you’re getting yourself into? That’s a huge risk.”

“It’s one I have to take,” said Sierra. “But I run the risk of Robbie’s secrets being exposed if I don’t do this, John. So, please, trust me and help me.”

John sighed and for a moment, he was silent as he considered Sierra’s words. For a moment, Sierra thought John might be stubborn and refuse.

“I don’t like this. I don’t like this one bit,” said John. “But for Robbie’s sake, I’ll do anything.”

Sierra heaved a sigh of relief. “Thank you, John.”
With John’s help, maybe…just maybe, Sierra could get through what was to come.

XXX

The next day, Sierra went to Ultra and after showing the security guards her ID, she was escorted to Jedikiah’s office.

The head of Ultra was waiting for her. Jedikiah seemed very pleased to see Sierra. “So, I take it you’ve made the right decision?”

“I have,” said Sierra, without hesitation. “I’m in.”

Jedikiah smiled and shook Sierra’s hand. “Welcome aboard, Sierra.”

Sierra shook her uncle’s hand.

My name is Sierra Jameson

I seem like your average girl. I’ve got family, friends and I just got a new job working for my uncle. But it’s a lie, a façade. I can never lead a normal life, not if I want my son’s future to be better. So, for the sake of those closest to me, I’ve got take risks and lead a life I never would’ve imagined...

A/N: Episodes 7 and 12, Limbo and Sitting Ducks will not be included as they don’t fit my storyline. Sorry.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

Three days earlier…

Sierra’s alarm clock screeched at her, reminding her of the hour.

Sierra groaned and resisted the urge to burrow deeper into the pillow and blankets of her bed. Instead, she yawned and got going on her day. After dropping off Robbie at school and seeing Astrid off at the bus stop that would take her to her college classes, Sierra headed to Ultra for yet another shift.

Sierra was not looking forward to it. Granted, Jedikiah had done as promised—he’d paid her a generous salary in advance, almost too generous, and provided Sierra with an apartment that she was preparing to move into after talking to Astrid, and he’d kept Robbie’s profile hidden—but Sierra didn’t trust the man.

At Ultra, Sierra was partnered with a fellow paranormal, a man by the name of Vaughn, who seemed nice but firmly loyal to Ultra. Sierra quickly learned that working with Ultra was like being at military school. No one set a toe out of line as all of Ultra’s rules and protocols were enforced with an iron fist. Many of the corridors were even lined with D-chips to enforce good behavior among the paranormal agents. If that wasn’t difficult enough, the entirety of Sierra’s first week was spent in rigorous training that she strongly disliked.

With practicing her teleportation skills, Sierra had to multitask while teleporting. Vaughn had Sierra teleport from one end of room to another and catch a ball before it hit the ground. When he was satisfied with that, Sierra had to teleport to dodge and deliver blows to her sparring partner during hand-to-hand combat lessons. Afterwards, Sierra had to practice teleporting objects away without actually touching them, just like she’d done when she’d first met Jedikiah.

Practicing telekinesis proved to be more enjoyable. So far, no matter how heavy it was or how far away, as long as Sierra could see it or envision it in her mind’s eye, she could grab it, twist it and use it for her own purposes. Vaughn was particularly impressed when Sierra sat cross-legged with her eyes closed and lifted up over a dozen heavy objects and telekinetically warp the molecules of the object to whatever she chose without the slightest hint of strain.

To demonstrate her power of biological manipulation, Sierra had fix the agents she’d injured during her first encounter with Jedikiah. Afterwards, she tested her ability on everything from
living tissues samples and lab rats from Ultra’s lab to ‘volunteers,’ just to see how far Sierra could
go without setting off the Prime Barrier and testing how sick or injured someone could be and still
have Sierra able to make them well again.

It wasn’t something Sierra particularly enjoyed, but it was while practicing Sierra’s telepathy
that she nearly lost it in.

Sierra sat across from Vaughn in an empty room, a small table was in between them. Sierra was
antsy as she hated having anyone in her mind except for Robbie and John. But Ultra agents often
used telepathy in the field for communication and half of the practice was to test her defensive
capabilities against an unknown telepath, Sierra had no choice.

“So, Sierra—may I call you that?” When she nodded, Vaughn continued, “I’m sure you’re
aware, with telepathy reading someone’s thoughts is just the beginning. With the proper training,
you’ll be able to access their feelings, their emotions, even their memories.”

“I understand,” said Sierra, stiffly.

She kept glancing at her watch out of the corner of her eye. How much longer before she could
leave? She’d already gotten used to communicating telepathically with her partner. Couldn’t that be
enough for one day?

“I’m going to enter your mind and your job is to fight me, block me out. Got it?” said Vaughn.

Sierra nodded and took a deep breath before bracing herself for what was to come. When
Vaughn entered Sierra’s mind, instead of putting up her shields as intended, Sierra’s PTSD kicked
in. All of a sudden, Sierra was hit with a painful flashback from her past and she lashed out against
Vaughn without thinking. Vaughn was suddenly on his knees, clutching his head in agony and it
was his cries of pain that snapped Sierra out of it.

Sierra gasped in horror as she helped Vaughn to stand. “Oh, my God… I’m so, so sorry. Are
you okay?”

Vaughn winced as he rubbed his left temple. “I’m fine. It’s not the first time I’ve been brain
blasted. But I don’t think we need to continue practicing telepathic defenses. You clearly have that
down to a T, Sierra.”

Sierra couldn’t prevent the blush that touched her cheeks. “Yeah, I’ve had a lot of practice.”
Sierra’s watch started beeping, reminding her of the current hour. Robbie’s school let out in half an
hour. “I’ve got to go. I’ve got to pick up my son from school. We good here?”

Vaughn nodded and then Sierra left the room.

As soon as Sierra was out in the hall, she took advantage of the emptiness and silence to try
and relax. She closed her eyes and rested her head against the wall, a calming method
recommended by one of her old shrinks.

What the hell was that? I thought I was over it. It’d been years since that day when she’d been
attacked. Sierra thought she’d finally recovered and gotten past it, but clearly she hadn’t. If I’m still
acting like this during a practice session, what’s going to happen out on the battlefield? What if
one day her shields broke and she lost it? What would happen then? How much longer is that
scumbag going to have a hold over me?

The sound of approaching footsteps snapped Sierra out of her thoughts. Quickly, she regained
her composure and smiled the tiniest bit.
“Ah, just who I was looking for!” said Jedikiah. He reached out his arm and placed it on Sierra’s shoulders. “Walk with me.”

“Uh, actually I’m in a bit of a hurry. I was about to go pick up—”

“It’s okay,” interrupted Jedikiah, his tone kind and soft, as he led Sierra down the hall. “It can wait, it can wait. Right now, I want to bring you up to speed on our program.”

Why do I get the feeling I’m not going to like this?

Jedikiah led Sierra to a control room, filled with computers and their operators.

“Welcome to our nerve center,” said Jedikiah. “Here we’ve got news feeds, surveillance footage, police monitors, etc. We track incidents, altercations, suicidal teens, behavioral disorder, reports of chronic sleepwalking, unexplainable thefts—which is how we found you, by the way—basically, we track anything that can indicate a new breakout.”

Sierra couldn’t help but feel impressed by the sight of it all. It was rather incredible. It was like something out of one of her favorite sci-fi programs she used to watch with Luca.

“Then we have our agents, like you and Vaughn, who help us track rogue paranormals,” said Jedikiah. “People like you, only not so nice.”

“Homo superior?” guessed Sierra.

Jedikiah’s brow wrinkled in disgust. “Yeah, I don’t particularly like that name.”

“You and me both,” said Sierra.

The scientific term sounded so arrogant. Sierra didn’t like that.

“For different reasons, I think,” said Jedikiah. “You see, I dislike it because it implies that my race, the human race, is somehow inferior.”

Somehow, Sierra wasn’t surprised that it was because of pride and self-esteem issues that Jedikiah detested the name of homo superior. It matched up with Sierra’s profile of her uncle perfectly: a coward with a gun.

“Which is why you want to round us all up? Strip us of our powers? Kill those of us who don’t comply with your wishes?”

Jedikiah gave Sierra suspicious look. “No, it’s up to us to guard against a species that can strike anywhere at any time, something I’m sure you know all too well.”

Sierra’s eyes narrowed. “Excuse me?”

“I just got a report from Vaughn about your last training session. Your ability’s impressive, but no one lashes out like that unless they’ve had a rather…unpleasant previous encounter with another like them,” said Jedikiah. “Something you’d care to share with the class?”

“With all due respect, sir, I prefer to keep my past in the past unless it has some relevance to the job at hand. I’m sure you can respect that,” said Sierra, stiffly.

Thankfully, Jedikiah did. “Fair enough. You’d better run along now. Robbie’s waiting for you.”
Sierra gave Jedikiah a rare, grateful nod and departed from Ultra.

XXX

When Sierra arrived at Robbie’s school to pick him up, she panicked when she discovered he wasn’t there. When she checked with the office, they told her that a tall blond-haired man in a leather jacket claimed to be Robbie’s father and when Robbie confirmed that claim, Robbie left with him. Knowing that John had taken Robbie from school without her permission didn’t ease Sierra’s worries.

Robbie wasn’t responding to Sierra’s telepathic calls, which meant either he was busy and didn’t notice or something bad had happened. So, by the time Sierra was on the subway car that would take her to the Lair, she was on the verge of a panic attack. As Cara was Robbie’s best friend, Sierra tried calling her first.

*Cara! Cara, are you there?*

But there was no reply, which angered Sierra. Cara had barely said more than two words to Sierra since Sierra decided to work at Ultra.

*Fine! Don’t talk to me. Whatever! See if I care!* Sierra closed her eyes and tried talking to her ex-boyfriend. *John! John, can you hear me?*

*Yeah, Sierra, I can hear you,* said John. *What’s wrong?*

*I can’t find Robbie and he’s not answering my calls. Is he with you?* asked Sierra. *Is he hurt?*

*What? No, Sierra, Robbie’s fine, I promise. He’s napping on the couch,* said John.

Sierra sighed in relief. *Thank goodness. I’ll be right there.*

After the scare she’d just had, Robbie would be lucky if Sierra didn’t ground him for a month!

When Sierra teleported into the Lair, she ignored the cold looks and stares she got and went straight to Robbie, who was waking up from his nap.

*“Mom?” said Robbie, sleepily. “What’s the matter?”*

Sierra touched Robbie’s shoulder. *“You weren’t there when I went to pick you up from school and you didn’t answer my calls. I was worried that something might’ve happened to you. Why did you do that? You know you’re not supposed to go anywhere without telling me first.”*

Robbie suddenly became more awake and he looked regretful. *“I’m sorry, Mom. I didn’t mean to disobey you, I just thought Dad had talked to you first.”*

*“Oh, did you?”* Sierra narrowed her eyes at John, who looked away. She was still upset about the situation but she couldn’t very well fault Robbie for making such a simple mistake.

*“Am I in trouble?”* asked Robbie, timidly.

*“Not this time,”* said Sierra. *Today she’d been lenient, but next time she was going to ground him. “But you’ve got to promise me you’ll never do this again. Promise?”*
“I promise,” said Robbie.

“Good. Did you do your homework yet?”

Robbie shook his head. “Not yet.”

“Go do it now and be ready to leave when I tell you. We’re going to Uncle Luca’s for dinner tonight,” said Sierra. “If you have any trouble, ask TIM or me or your dad.”

It had taken a great deal of talk before Luca wore Sierra down and convinced her to have dinner at Marla’s place that evening. Robbie was finally going to meet his maternal grandmother. Sierra had mixed feelings about it. She wanted to reconcile with her mother but part of her was still angry and bitter towards Marla for the past.

Robbie nodded and disappeared into TIM’s room to do his homework.

When Robbie had gone, Sierra rounded on John. “What the hell were you thinking, just taking Robbie without telling me? Do you have any idea how scared I was? You can’t do that! Especially not now of all times!”

At first glance, it may have seemed like Sierra was overreacting, but after everything she’d done to keep Robbie safe, all those years of looking over her shoulder, years of being terrified someone would find out about Robbie’s abilities and take him away, and never letting him out of her sight, her reaction wasn’t all unreasonable.

John didn’t seem fazed by Sierra’s anger. “I’m sorry. It was a mistake. Next time I’ll tell you.”

“You had better,” growled Sierra. “Or there won’t be a next time.”

John became angry. “You’d take Robbie away from me again?”

“If I had to, yes,” said Sierra, coldly. “I don’t care what I have to do as long as he’s safe.”

Cara snorted in disbelief. “Says the woman working for the man who’s trying to exterminate us.”

Russell, who was standing nearby, winced. “Uh…guys, maybe this should be a private conversation.” He beckoned to the crowd of Tomorrow People, who’d gathered to watch the scene unfold.

“Cara, don’t,” said John, warningly.

Both Russell and John’s words fell on deaf ears.

“No, John. Let her speak.” Sierra glared at Cara. “What is your problem with me, Cara? Last week, you practically begged me to come here and help you find my father and now you barely even look at me. What’s the deal? I thought I was one of you, that I was welcome.”

“That was before you went to work with Ultra and your uncle,” snapped Cara. “And were it up to me, you wouldn’t be welcome here anymore. You have no idea what you’ve gotten yourself into.”

Sierra laughed and not in the good way. “That’s what your problem is? My decision to become a double-agent? Well, I’ve got news for you, Cara. I wouldn’t be in this situation if you hadn’t exposed me to Ultra in the first place!” How dare Cara be angry with Sierra’s decision when it was
Cara and Russell’s fault that all Sierra’s work to stay hidden had been destroyed? “And FYI, it’s not like I want to work there. I don’t have a choice! I have a life, a family to protect and care for!”

Cara scoffed. “Oh, please. There’s always a choice! And don’t talk to us about family. You’re not the only one who had a human life. We’ve all left behind family. I had a sister that I was forced to leave behind. You think I don’t feel the pain of that choice every day?”

Sierra was silent as she glanced at the faces of the other Tomorrow People. She didn’t need her telepathy to know that some of them shared Cara’s feelings. They clearly thought she was a traitor, that she was an arrogant fool who didn’t belong. Great. Even among her own kind, Sierra was a freak who didn’t belong.

“We’ve all made sacrifices, Sierra, but somehow you think you’re special,” said Cara, coldly. She got right up into Sierra’s face. “I may not speak for all of us, but as far as I’m concerned, your connections don’t mean anything anymore. You don’t belong here. You’re not one of us.”

“That’s enough!” barked John. “Stop it! Both of you!”

John tried to come between them, but Sierra froze him in place with her telekinesis and then she shoved Cara a few feet away and got up in the older woman’s face.

“Maybe you’re right, Cara. Maybe I don’t belong here. Maybe I’m not one of you. I don’t know. But what I do know is the pain losing those closest to me. My mother abandoned me when I broke out and became pregnant, I barely talk to my brother and up until last week, I thought that my dad, your greatest hero, was just some human loser who left me! Now, I don’t know what to think, other than he’s alive and if he can help me protect my son, I’ll do what it takes to find him. That’s the whole reason you sought me out, remember? So, how do you expect to find him and actually start to build a better future for our kind if all you’re doing is hiding down here like rats? I’ll do what I have to. If that means working for Ultra, fine. But don’t you dare judge me for my decisions!”

Sierra’s words convinced some of the Tomorrow People, but not all. Cara was one of the latter.

“Jedikiah’s goal is to eliminate our species from the face of the planet, Sierra! John worked there, he knows!” she yelled. “Blackmail and getting inside your head is just the beginning. You haven’t even scratched the surface of what they can do. And as long as you’re down here, the rest of us aren’t safe!”

Sierra was quiet for a moment before she gazed at Cara with tear-filled eyes. “And yet you don’t have a problem with my son’s presence here. So, the real question is, are you scared I might expose you on accident or are you just afraid that I’ll take John away from you?”

Cara opened her mouth to speak but no words emitted from her mouth and she turned bright red.

Sierra felt bad for having exposed Cara like that, but she was angry and her mouth tended to run away with her when she was upset. Sierra wasn’t stupid. She’d seen the way Cara had looked at John. It was obvious the woman had feelings for John. Whether or not John returned those feelings wasn’t relevant as it was plain as day Cara felt threatened by Sierra’s presence ever since the latter’s former relationship with John had been made known to the Tomorrow People.

By that point, John was freed of Sierra’s hold and he took the opportunity to take Sierra down to the work-out room for some privacy while they talked.
“I’m not going to apologize,” were the first words out of Sierra’s mouth. She knew how childish she sounded, but Sierra couldn’t have cared less. “If Cara’s going to be a complete and utter bitch, fine. I don’t need her approval.”

“I know. You’ve never needed anyone’s approval. I’m not going to ask you to apologize. I’ll deal with Cara later,” said John. “For what it’s worth, not everyone agrees with her and I’m smoothing things out with the rest of them. I’m not happy about your decision, but I’m not going to argue with you about it. Anyway, that’s not why I brought you here.”

Sierra deflated a bit and was curious. “Why did you, then?”

John folded his arms across his chest and leaned against the railing. “I think you know.”

Sierra groaned. How did John always see through her? “John…”

“I should’ve told you I was picking up Robbie, that was my mistake. I’m still getting used to our joint custody agreement. You have every right to be upset about that. But I know you and we both know that this whole thing isn’t about Robbie or your issues with Cara. What happened at Ultra today, Sierra? What scared you?”

John seemed genuinely concerned, which made it all the more difficult for Sierra to consider refusing to tell him of the incident. In Sierra’s eyes, it seemed so trivial when compared to what John and others like her had endured. But as John had often told her when they were together, if it was bothering her this much then it was important.

Sierra sighed and looked down at her hands. “When McCrane tried to kill me, my abilities were strong but not as strong as they are now. McCrane broke through my defenses and got inside my head. He messed me up pretty bad before I gathered the strength to force him out and do what I did. I’ve kept my mind heavily shielded ever since. Today, my partner, Vaughn, was trying to help me defend myself against telepathic intrusions. Vaughn was gentle and didn’t see anything that warranted danger but I…I flashed back to that night and if Vaughn hadn’t screamed like he did, I don’t know what would’ve happened.”

John’s face softened and with Sierra’s permission, he held her close and rubbed soothing circles on her back to calm her as she slowly stopped shaking.

Sierra sniffled as she pressed her face into John’s chest. “It’s been years and McCrane thinks I’m dead, but I still see him in my nightmares. He still has a hold on me no matter what I do. How am I supposed to live like this, John? I can’t risk a flashback or a panic attack when I’m out on the field. And what if he comes back and finds out the truth? You know what he’s like, what he’s capable of. If McCrane finds Robbie and decides to use him for revenge—”

“Shh,” interrupted John. He pulled away and placed his hands on Sierra’s shoulders so he could look directly into her eyes. “I’m sorry that I wasn’t there when you needed me. I should’ve been there to protect you and I’ll always regret that. I can’t change the past, but I can help you get past this. I’ll do whatever it takes to make you feel safe again. And if McCrane does return, I’ll do what’s necessary to protect you and Robbie, I swear it.”

Sierra smiled a little. “Thanks, John.”

She felt very comforted, knowing she wasn’t alone. John had no idea how badly Sierra had needed to hear John’s words.
Later that night, dinner at Marla’s house was something of a tense affair.

The meal itself was delicious as Marla’s cooking was just as Sierra remembered and Robbie got along with his grandmother better than Sierra had expected, but there was still tension in air between Marla and Sierra.

It was difficult for both women. After the rough day Sierra had had, she forced herself to be polite and she didn’t speak unless spoken to and even then she was evasive with her answers to Marla and Luca’s questions. Marla was finding it difficult to reconnect with her estranged daughter and begin to form a proper relationship with her grandson as she could sense Sierra’s bitterness and Marla was afraid doing something that would cause Sierra to sever all ties with her and Luca completely.

Eventually, the meal was over and they began to clear away the dinner dishes.

“Well, I’d love to help clean up, but I’m swamped with homework,” said Luca, as he placed his plate on the counter.

“That’s fine, Luca. In fact, why don’t you take Robbie upstairs with you? Sierra and I will clean up,” said Marla.

“Sure. C’mon, kiddo. You can borrow my headphones and play a videogame while the ladies finish up in here,” said Luca.

Robbie didn’t take Luca’s offered hand. “I can’t. I need to help Grandma and my mom clean up.”

At Astrid’s house, the rule was whoever cooked didn’t have to clean up. Since Marla had cooked, Robbie felt that he should help clean up the dinner dishes even though he was a guest.

“Why don’t you bring us the dishes from the table and then you can go play?” suggested Sierra. “There’s not that much to do here, anyway.”

It was a good compromise. Robbie would help out and Sierra could get the private talk with her mother over and done with.

Robbie consented to his mother’s wishes and as soon as the table was cleared off, he followed Luca upstairs to play.

“Luca, just one game and it’d better not be one of your violent ones!” warned Sierra. She knew Luca wouldn’t let Robbie play something like Assassins Creed or Call of Duty but it was a mother’s prerogative to be fussy about that sort of thing. “Just Lego Harry Potter or something like that.”

“Relax. I know the rules and I’m not about to give my only nephew nightmares,” said Luca, rolling his eyes.

“And even if he offers, I’ll still say no,” said Robbie, making Sierra smile.

Marla couldn’t help but chuckle and shake her head in the boys’ direction. “Luca learned that headphone trick from you, you know.”
Sierra chuckled. “He learned a lot from me.” Sierra held up a dirty dish and a clean dishtowel. “Do you want to wash the dishes or dry them?”

Marla took the dishtowel.

For a few moments, the two women hand washed the dinner dishes in silence until Marla broke it. “Robbie’s a good a kid. Very helpful. You did well with him, Sierra.”

Sierra felt uncomfortable under her mother’s praise and looked away from Marla’s gaze. “Thanks. It hasn’t been easy, but I’ve been doing my best.”

“Parenting’s never is easy,” agreed Marla. “It’s a lot of trial and error. You do what you think is best, try do what’s right, and you think you know everything but in the end you don’t. Nothing can prepare you from making mistakes and feeling regret over some of your decisions. Like the ones I did.”

*Here it goes.* Sierra braced herself for what was to come.

“I’m sorry, Sierra,” said Marla, as tears came to her eyes. “I know you probably don’t want to hear it, but I am so, so sorry. I never should’ve done what I did all those years ago. The pills, the shrinks…all of it, it never should’ve happened. I never should’ve asked you to give up your son. Making you leave was the worst mistake of my life. I’ve regretted it ever since. In one moment’s anger and fear, I lost what mattered most. I lost you and I lost my grandchild and I’ll never forgive myself for that.”

Sierra dropped the dish she’d been scrubbing into the soapy, hot water and she was quiet for a moment. “Why didn’t you try to find me after I left? Why didn’t you let me come home?” she asked, as her voice cracked.

Marla looked regretful. “I did try to find you. I looked for months, but you disappeared off the face of the earth and afterwards, I thought you might still be angry with me and refuse to come back.”

Sierra bit back her anger. *You could’ve tried harder! Now, we’ll never know what would’ve happened!* She wanted to say, but did not. Instead, she asked the questions that had been burning in her mind. “And what would’ve happened if I had? Would you still have asked me to give up Robbie?”

“No,” said Marla, truthfully. “I wouldn’t have. I would’ve supported you and been there for you like I should’ve done in the first place.”

While that was good to know, mother and daughter still had a long way to go before being fully reconciled. If they ever could.

“Why’d you freak out so much when I went off my medication and stopped seeing my shrinks? Why didn’t you believe me when I told you I was better?” asked Sierra, as they resumed their work.

Marla sighed and looked down at her hands. “It’s because of your father. You know what he was like. Roger was in trouble and he was out of control. He’d go off who knows where for goodness knew how long. Roger used to go off his medication and cancel his therapy appointments and when he did, he would tell me he was fine, that he was better. I believed him every time, but it wasn’t true. He wasn’t fine. So, when I saw the same signs in you, I panicked and I was so afraid that you were going to follow into his footsteps and—”
“Mom, Mom, it’s okay!” said Sierra, quickly. Marla was beginning to shake and cry, but she slowly stopped when Sierra held her close. It was the first time Sierra had called Marla ‘mom’ and hugged her in years. Sierra felt a wave of regret and pain as she stroked Marla’s hair. “It’s okay. I’m here. I’m not Dad. I’ll never you put you through that, I swear.”

Marla eventually pulled away and sniffled. “I know I don’t deserve your forgiveness and I’ve no right to ask you for a fresh start between us, but now that I’ve found you again, Sierra…you, Luca, and Robbie are all I have left and I don’t want to lose you or my grandbaby again.”

Sierra bit back a sigh. Here it was, the difficult part. “Mar—Mom,” she corrected herself. “I can’t pretend the past didn’t happen. I can’t promise we’re going to get better because I don’t know if we can. But I might be willing to take baby steps. For now, it’s all I can do. Is that enough?”

Marla looked disappointed but not surprised as she nodded. “It’s more than enough. Thank you.”

They hugged again, but this time Sierra’s shields slipped and she accidentally peaked into Marla’s memory of Roger’s departure.

Roger was bundled up for protection against the winter weather and he was carrying a suitcase as he headed for the front door. Marla trailed closed behind him, dressed in her fluffy pink pajama robe, looking desperate and pleading.

“Please, don’t do this,” begged Marla. “We’ll move again. We’ll find another doctor and you’ll get better.”

Roger stopped in his tracks at the front door. “That’s not what this is about.”

Marla sighed. “Then what is this about?”

Roger was cold and unremorseful. “I don’t love you anymore.”

The memory ended as Sierra inhaled sharply and pulled back.

Marla looked at Sierra with concern. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” lied Sierra. She rubbed the back of her head. “It’s just a bad voodoo pain, caught me off-guard, that’s all.”

Marla believed her, which was one less thing for Sierra to worry about. But Sierra was still concerned. Was she making a mistake with the search for her father?

XXX

Steam burst out of the bathroom as Sierra, who’d just taken a relaxing hot bath, emerged, dressed in clean clothes and drying off her damp hair with a towel. It was now the weekend, almost noon and Sierra had some time off from Ultra, which she was taking full advantage of.
Sierra, are you there?

Sierra bit back a yelp and clutched her chest in fright before she mentally shot daggers at John.

Give me a heart attack, why don’t you? snapped Sierra.

Sorry. Didn’t mean to, said John. Hey, are you and Robbie busy?

Sierra glanced at Robbie, who was sitting on her bed, looking quite bored as he reread an old storybook. No. Why?

Get Robbie and meet me at our favorite Chinese restaurant in twenty minutes. I’ll explain when you get there.

Sierra was puzzled but decided to wait before asking questions. She was tired but a little time outside the house for something other than work would be good for her. Besides, she had been craving Chinese and a family outing was just the thing to make Robbie happy.

As predicted, Robbie was eager to go the restaurant with his parents and when they arrived, Robbie wasted no time running into John’s awaiting arms.

“Daddy!”

John, who was sitting at a nearby booth looking over a menu, smiled at the sight of his son. He got out, held out his arms and then lifted Robbie into the air.

“Hey, buddy. Are you being a good boy for your mom?” asked John.

Robbie nodded.

“He’s been very good,” promised Sierra, as she slid into the booth. She glanced at the menu. “So, what’s good tonight? I’m starving.”

“I preordered your favorites. They should be here soon. But that’s not entirely why I asked you here,” said John, looking a little sheepish.

Sierra looked curious. “Oh? Do tell.”

John took a deep breath. “So, I know Robbie’s still coming into his powers and since we’re both worried about Jedikiah and Ultra, I went through my things and found something I think will be helpful to protect him in the future.”

Robbie looked both eager and excited. “What is it?”

“Hold out your hand.” When Robbie extended his arm, John reached into his pocket and pulled out an old leather watch, which he strapped to Robbie’s wrist. “This belonged to Grandpa Roger. He gave it to me as a reminder to be brave and protect me. It’s got a chip in it that’s made of the same material they use in the secure part of Ultra. It’ll deflect telepathic signals, so no one will be able to get inside your head except for me and your mom. But you need to wear it all times.”

Robbie looked at the watch in awe, like it was the coolest thing ever. “Thanks, Dad. I won’t take it off ever, I promise.”

“Glad to hear it,” said John.

Robbie smiled as John ruffled his hair and then Robbie looked at his mother. “Mom, can I play
a video game while we’re waiting?”

“Sure, sweetie.” Sierra pulled out her wallet and counted out a few quarters, which she gave to her son. “But stay where I can see you!”

Robbie nodded and then the sounds of Pac-Man and Robbie’s laughter hit their ears.

“You’re a really selfless guy, John,” said Sierra. “I know what that watch meant to you, but you still gave it up for Robbie’s sake. Thanks.”

“He’s my son. Losing an heirloom’s worth it if it means he’s safe,” said John. “I’ll get one for you as soon as I can, I promise.”

“Thanks. I appreciate it,” said Sierra.

John meant it and so did Sierra, but they both knew Sierra had no use of a D-chip watch. Her shields were stronger than that.

John looked at Sierra with concern when she sighed. “This may seem like a stupid question, but are you okay?”

“No really,” admitted Sierra. “I was at my mother’s earlier tonight and while we were talking, I slipped. I accidentally looked into her mind and I saw one of her memories of the night my dad left. Marla and I have had our issues in the past and I’m not her biggest fan right now, but still…the pain she felt when my dad was so cruel to her…” Sierra’s voice wandered off and she looked at John with a sense of hopelessness. “John, what if I’m wrong about all this? What if I am making a mistake?”

John was quiet for a moment before he reached out and gave Sierra’s hand a gentle squeeze. “People are complicated, Sierra. When you spend half your life in their heads, that much becomes pretty clear. Your dad was no exception to that.”

Sierra felt comforted by John’s words.

At that point, their food arrived and Robbie returned. The little family enjoyed a delicious meal and were having fun together like a family should. For Sierra, it was a bittersweet moment. It felt so real, so happy, and so right, like it was what the three of them should’ve been all along. She wanted it to last forever. But her heart ached as she knew it couldn’t. John had broken her heart and left her once before. What was to stop him from doing that again?

They’d just had the leftovers of their food packed up in doggie bags when a strange look crossed John’s face.

“What’s wrong, John?” asked Sierra.

“The bank robber’s at it again,” said Robbie, before John could speak. “You’re going after him, aren’t you, Dad?”

Sierra raised an eyebrow. “A bank robber?”

“One of us,” explained John. “It’s some kid, Kurt Rundle. He’s upgraded from banks to armored trucks. We just started tracking him and he’s on the move again.”

Sierra was concerned. “Should I go with you?”
John shook his head. “No. If this goes south, Jedikiah can’t have reason to question your loyalties. Take Robbie and go home. We can handle it.”

Sierra wasn’t convinced but the look in John’s eyes kept her from arguing. “Call me if you need help.”

John nodded and hugged Robbie. “Be good for your mom and I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“I will. Be careful, Dad,” said Robbie. “I love you.”

John smiled and kissed the top of his son’s head. “I love you too.”

XXX

Any hope that Sierra had of the Kurt Rundle kid escaping Ultra’s notice went out the window the following morning when she walked into the nerve center.

Jedikiah and three of his senior agents, including Vaughn, were watching live feed from a police station’s security camera. The driver of the armored truck was giving his statement for why he was acting so out of character. Apparently, the guard claimed someone had been controlling him, like a scary puppet master.

“That’s the second guard to tell that story this month,” said Jedikiah. “Pretty soon, the local PD’s going to smell a rat.”

“That hostage, the kid in the hoodie who disappeared, we’re running a facial recognition scan for him now,” said Vaughn. Right after he finished speaking, Kurt’s image appeared on the monitor. “Kurt Rundle, address in North Bergen.”

“Go,” said Jedikiah. “I want this handled quickly and quietly.”

The agents nodded and began to leave the room.

“Mind if I go with?” asked Sierra.

Jedikiah held up his hand, stopping Sierra in her tracks as he shook his head. “An active bank robber’s not the kind of breakout you want to cut your teeth on, kid. The subject is violent and antisocial.”

“It’s nothing I haven’t dealt with before. Besides, I can take care of myself and I know the area where the subject lives,” said Sierra. “I’ve been busting my butt training all week and I’m sure that if I’m wrong about my abilities, Vaughn will keep me out of trouble. And with all due respect, sir, you promised I would see Ultra from top to bottom. How am I supposed to do that if I’m stuck behind a desk?”

Jedikiah opened his mouth to speak but then closed it again, as though he realized he’d been beaten by his niece. Still, Jedikiah raised an eyebrow before turning to give Vaughn a questioning look. Vaughn nodded, in agreement with Jedikiah’s question.

“Ah, what the hell. Better to get your feet wet now rather than later,” said Jedikiah. “But you’re to obey your trainer’s every word and be a fly on the wall, understand?”
“Yes, sir. Thank you, boss,” said Sierra.

Sierra followed Vaughn to the parking garage and sat beside him in a blacked out SUV. She knew she was doing the right thing but even so, she felt very apprehensive about what she going was going to face on her mission.

When Sierra and Vaughn arrived at Kurt Rundle’s house, a cute little residence that seemed out of place among all the apartment buildings surrounding it, they were met by Kurt’s mother.

Mrs. Rundle was in a terrible state. She was clearly worried sick about her son and she’d been crying recently. She also seemed surprised by Sierra and Vaughn’s presence and was confused by their cover story.

“Truant officers?” she echoed. “I thought you were the police, that you might have news on Kurt. I filed a report two weeks ago.”

Sierra’s heart ached for Mrs. Rundle. Being a mother herself, Sierra understood Mrs. Rundle’s pain. She didn’t know what she’d do if she lost Robbie. What was Kurt thinking, causing his mother this much grief? What was going on in the kid’s head?

Despite her orders to follow Vaughn’s lead, Sierra took control of the situation. She stepped forward, gave Mrs. Rundle a kind look and held her hands.

“I’m very sorry for your pain, ma’am,” said Sierra, sympathetically. She handed Kurt’s mother a handkerchief. “But I promise, we’re going to do all we can to find your son.”

Mrs. Rundle wiped her eyes with the handkerchief and sniffled. “Thank you. Are you a mother?”

Sierra nodded and showed Mrs. Rundle a wallet picture of Sierra’s son. “His name’s Robbie. He’s seven. His dad’s not in the picture, so it’s just been the two of us for a long time now.”

Mrs. Rundle smiled through her tears. “He’s adorable. You must be so proud.”

“Indeed I am,” said Sierra, smiling.

“Kurt and I are in the same boat as you and your baby,” said Mrs. Rundle, as she returned the photo. “His dad died when he was five. It’s just been the two of us ever since. I don’t understand why Kurt would disappear. I know he’s been stressed about the bills lately, but I don’t care about them. I just want my boy back.”

Sierra squeezed the poor woman’s shoulder and then she pointed to the photographs and the bottle of pills that were sitting on the hall table.

“May I?”

Mrs. Rundle nodded.

Sierra ignored Vaughn’s irritated look as she examined the photographs and the pills. The photos were all of Kurt and parents, happy and smiling together. Though, there were more of Kurt and his mother than his father. It was clear from the pictures that Kurt’s entire world revolved around his family. When Sierra looked at the pills, she discovered that not only were they prescribed recently, but they were also the same pills Sierra had taken when she’d first broken out. Suddenly, everything became clear. Kurt was robbing the banks to pay for his medical bills and was staying away out of fear for his mother.
“My colleague has a few more questions to ask you. Would you mind if I looked in Kurt’s room for anything that might help?” asked Sierra.

“Not at all,” said Mrs. Vaughn. “Kurt’s room is upstairs and the second

“Thank you,” said Sierra.

Sierra went up into Kurt’s room and looked around. It was like every other teenage boy’s room, it was messy, full of music, posters, movies and other junk. It was also empty.

Sierra sighed. She was loathe to do this, but if she was to ever get past her problems, she had to lower her shields. She closed her eyes and scanned for Kurt, telepathically.

Right on cue, she heard Kurt’s thoughts. He seemed like he didn’t know what he was doing and was just silently begging for the intruders in his house to leave.

Go away. Please, just go away!

Judging from the noises coming from up above, the kid was in the rafters and he sounded scared. He obviously had no idea what was happening to him or why.

Kurt, it’s okay, said Sierra. She winced when she heard a thumping noise and a barely stifled muffle of pain. Sorry, didn’t mean to scare you.

Who are you? How’re you doing this? demanded Kurt.

It’s okay. My name’s Sierra. I’m like you, I’m gifted, said Sierra. I’m not here to hurt you, believe me.

Yeah, right, scoffed Kurt. Says the girl who’s got her own S.W.A.T. team waiting outside to kill me.

What’re you talking about? I don’t have a…

Sierra’s voice wandered off as she looked outside the window and saw more Ultra vehicles waiting outside. Her heart sank as she realized what was happening. Jedikiah had sent in a human kill squad to kill Kurt. She mentally berated herself for being so naïve and stupid to think Jedikiah was just going to bring Kurt in. John had warned her about this. Ultra killed those they couldn’t help, train or bring into line. Kurt fell into that category. What had she been thinking?

Kurt, listen to me. The people that’re after you, I’m not like them. But if I lie and tell them you’re not here, they’ll know and hurt your mom, said Sierra. I know you don’t want that, so you need to go as soon as I leave your room. Got it?

Why should I trust you? asked Kurt.

Because like your mother, I’ve got a son and I’d sooner die before I see him get hurt, said Sierra. To prove it, she projected an image of Robbie and her into Kurt’s mind. I know where you can go where you’ll be safe. Find John Young. He’ll take care of you, I promise. But only if you do as I say!

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra left the bedroom and then she bit back a sigh of relief when she sensed Kurt teleport away.

When Sierra reentered the entryway, she shrugged her shoulders. “I didn’t find anything, but
I’m not about to give up hope yet, Mrs. Rundle.”

Mrs. Rundle looked grateful.

_“I sensed him in the crawl space above his bedroom,”_ said Sierra, to Vaughn.

Vaughn looked pleased. _Good work, Sierra._

Aloud, Vaughn said to Mrs. Rundle, “Well, we need to go now, ma’am, but if you can think of anything else, give us a call.” He handed her a business card and then sent a telepathic signal into her mind that sent her to sleep.

Right after that, the kill squad arrived and tried to find Kurt by riddling his ceiling with bullets but they found nothing. Kurt had gone.

Sierra felt sick to her stomach. _I’ve made a big mistake. I can’t do this._

John and Cara were right. She never should’ve done this.

XXX

As soon as Sierra had the chance, Sierra arranged for John to meet at the clock tower, one of their old spots where Ultra couldn’t detect them. She was about to explode and she needed someone she could talk to, even if it meant admitting she was wrong.

Eventually, John teleported in and Sierra had never felt more relieved to see him.

“Thank goodness you’re here. Something happened. There’s no one else I can talk to,” said Sierra. She frowned in concern when she saw that John was keeping his distance, looked far from happy and had his arms folded across his chest. _“What’s wrong?”_

Just then, Cara and Russell teleported in.

“Surprise!” said Russell, grinning.

Sierra didn’t smile back. She just returned Cara’s scowl. It figured that John would bring in his lackeys. She wasn’t happy about it but didn’t dwell on it. They had more pressing issues to deal with.

“Look, we don’t have a lot of time before my lunch break’s over, I’m going to cut to the chase,” said Sierra. “The bank robber breakout, Kurt Rundle? He’s on the run from Ultra. They sent in a kill squad and I barely got him away in time. We need to get him to safety. I told him to find you. Has he?”

John shook his head. “Nope. Looks like Ultra beat us to him.”

“Duh,” said Russell.

“What did you think was going to happen, Sierra? You honestly thought Jedikiah would just strip Kurt of his powers?” sneered Cara. “No. When a breakout demonstrates anti-social behavior, Ultra takes more extreme measures.”
Sierra resisted the urge to punch Cara in the face. “I’m aware of that, thank you very much. We’ve got to find Kurt before they kill him. Right, John?”

Sierra looked to John for help but much to her dismay, John shook his head. “Once a breakout’s on Ultra’s radar, it’s too late. It’s too dangerous for us to get involved.”

Sierra couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “Kurt’s just a kid that’s going to get a bullet in his head and you’re worried about risk assessment?” John promised he’d help her out and he was going back on his word. Clearly, Cara had gotten into John’s head. Either that, or John was reverting to his old ways. Whatever it was, it angered Sierra. “You’re a hypocrite! I was on Ultra’s radar and you risked everything to get me back!”

“That was different—”

“Why? Because I’m your ex-girlfriend and I’m the mother of your son?” demanded Sierra. John had broken the rules before. Why was it okay to break them for her life and not for the lives of others? “You can’t make exceptions for me and not others, John! Either you try and save them all or you don’t do it at all!”

John clenched his hand into a fist and looked angry. “It’s not that simple! We bring in as many as we can—”

“And then what?” interrupted Sierra. “When are you going to stop hiding? You think this is what my dad had in mind?”

It was the wrong thing to say as Cara and Russell backed off while John looked both enraged and hurt from Sierra’s words.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” said John. He sounded like he was barely controlling his anger. “Jedikiah has an army and not just his TP slaves, the ones like you, he has human operatives who’re intent on killing all of us! I have a responsibility to protect us.”

Sierra gave John a cold look. “Then help me protect the breakout! Kurt’s just a screwed up kid. He doesn’t deserve to die like an animal!”

“Neither do we!” snapped John. “I’m sorry, Sierra, but my decision is final. We’re a hunted species, trying to survive and we will survive. That’s what your dad had in mind.”

Sierra could see that John couldn’t be persuaded otherwise but she was still disappointed. “I was right all along. For all your promises and big talk, you haven’t changed one bit. You’re still letting me and Robbie down.” In Sierras’s anger, she was secretly pleased when John had the decency to flinch at the sting of her words. “Go back and hide if that’s what you think is right, John. But while you’re doing that, I’m going to save this kid and fight to make a better future for our son.”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra walked off and teleported away, not wanting anyone to see the angry tears that were burning in her eyes. She was a fool for thinking she could get any help with this. She would just have to handle Kurt like she’d done everything else, alone and without John’s help.

XXX
Later that night at the Lair, John was standing on a stepladder, doing some routine maintenance on TIM’s systems. It was somewhat frustrating as TIM kept spewing out smoke and steam and moving this way and that.


“Forgive me, my exhaust system triggers automatically every six minutes,” said TIM.

“I built your exhaust system, pal. Spare me the lecture,” snapped John.

TIM didn’t really need any work done, it was more for John’s benefit.

John needed do something to clear his head as the punching bag was being used by someone else and he couldn’t talk to Sierra, not after the fight they’d just had. Sierra. John’s heart ached as he thought of his ex-girlfriend. He still loved her, even if she didn’t want to rekindle their relationship. John knew that she was about the Kurt Rundle kid, but even so, John had an obligation as leader of the Tomorrow People to protect and provide for them as Cara had so generously reminded him.

There were rules and protocols in place for handling breakouts and they had to be followed to the letter if the Tomorrow People expected to survive Jedikiah’s genocidal war. The needs of the many outweighed the needs of the one. John wished he could go back and erase his fight with Sierra or at least forget the look of disappointment and anger in her eyes. That was so much more painful than any physical wound. Maybe Sierra was right. Maybe John was a hypocrite. But he couldn’t keep risking the lives of the Tomorrow People for just one person. It was the right thing to do, wasn’t it?

“Dad, are you busy?”

John looked down to see Robbie standing in the doorway, holding his sketchpad. The kid looked miserable, like something was bothering him.

“Hey, Robbie,” said John. “No, I’m not busy. Does your mom know you’re here?”

John was glad to see his son, but he didn’t want to risk Sierra’s anger again if the kid had wandered off without her permission.

Robbie nodded. “I asked her if I could visit and she said yes, as long as I’m back before dark. She and Aunt Astrid are eating ice-cream and watching a mushy movie.”

The seven-year-old made a face, which caused John to laugh. Sierra and Astrid were having a girls’ night complete with the romantic comedies that John had never liked but watched with Sierra on their date nights for her.

John climbed down from the stepladder and beckoned for Robbie to join him on the couch. Soon, Robbie was curled up against his father’s side.

“What’s on your mind?” asked John.

Robbie hesitated but then asked, “Why do Cara and Mom hate each other? I overheard their fight the other day. Is it my fault?”

John’s face softened. Robbie obviously felt upset that his mother and his best friend were fighting so much. Poor kid must’ve felt torn.
They don’t hate each other, son. Cara and your mom are just having problems, that’s all. It’s nothing to do with you,” assured John. “Girls are just silly.”

Robbie chuckled but then he looked upset again.

“What else is wrong?” asked John.

Robbie hesitated again before he flipped open his sketchbook to reveal the scene at the clock tower. “I saw you and Mom fighting. I thought you guys were getting better. Are you guys going to leave each other again? Am I going to lose you?”

John’s face fell and his heart sank. Robbie never should’ve had to witness his parents’ fights. “No, kiddo, you’re not going to lose me, I promise. Your mom and I just having some troubles, but it’s nothing for you to worry about.”

Whatever his issues with Sierra, John was not going to leave her again. Losing her once had almost killed him. John couldn’t do that again and nor was he about to risk losing his child.

Robbie didn’t seem very reassured. “Then why won’t you guys apologize and help the Kurt kid? I didn’t see very much, but Kurt’s not bad like the guy who hurt Mom, I promise.”

John sighed. Who knew being a parent could be so difficult? How was John supposed to explain this to his young son?

“It’s not the easy, son. It’s complicated. You’ll understand when you’re older,” said John. Even as he said it, he berated himself. The answer was so pitiful and evasive. “I know that Kurt’s not a bad guy, but I have to protect everyone down here. If something happens to me, who’s going to look after them? They need me here.”

“And Mom needs you too,” said Robbie. He gave John a pleading look. “She doesn’t like working with Jedikiah. He scares her. But she needs you to make her feel like she can do her job and not be scared. Mom told me how you were always brave and selfless before I was born and you said Grandpa Roger gave you my watch so you’d remember to be brave. Well, how’s everyone down here supposed to learn to be brave if you won’t be? You’re scared of losing Mom and I again, but if you don’t help her, then you will lose us and I don’t want that to happen!”

Stunned by Robbie’s wisdom beyond Robbie’s seven years, John was at a loss for an answer. Robbie had challenged everything that John stood by and confronted John’s personal demons and John couldn’t defend himself. Robbie was right on all accounts. John had been hiding for so long and afraid of what might happen if he didn’t, that he’d forgotten how to be the kind of leader everyone expected him to be, to be the kind of father he wanted to be for Robbie and be the man Sierra had fallen in love with all those years.

“Mom really needs you, Dad. You need to help her save Kurt,” said Robbie.

“Robbie’s right.”

John and Robbie looked up as Cara and Russell entered the room. Cara looked upset but determined and Russell was hesitant, as though he was concerned about what might happen.

“We need to bring Kurt in,” said Cara.

John raised a suspicious eyebrow at Cara. “Why the sudden change of heart?”

Ever since Sierra had agreed to work at Ultra, Cara had been angry and harsh towards Sierra.
Her sudden change of heart made no sense. In fact, it made John rather suspicious about Cara’s motives for helping John’s ex-girlfriend.

“Look, my issues with Sierra are my own, but it doesn’t change the fact that she’s right,” snapped Cara. “We need to help her bring Kurt in before this ends badly.”

“The bank robber’s a reckless idiot, but so was I and I turned out awesome,” reminded Russell. “And Sierra’s got a point. You had no business bringing a lot of us in, Cara included, but you still risk your life for us. Do you regret that?”

“No,” admitted John. “But we have rules and we have to be careful. I don’t want to do something that I will regret.” Getting caught by Ultra and being separated from Robbie was one of those things John would definitely regret.

“Well, I don’t want to regret sitting on our hands doing nothing,” said Cara. “You’re looking out for us, we get that, but we’ve been in hiding for over two years. What’s the point of surviving if we never get a chance at living? Think of your son. Is the life we lead now one you want for him in the future?”

John looked at Robbie, who was being silent during the adults’ conversation. Cara’s words reminded him of what Sierra had said. Robbie deserved better than to lead a life where he was hiding and always looking over shoulder. Robbie deserved a life where he could be free without fear of Ultra and Jedikiah. He deserved happiness.

It was then that John made his decision.

XXX

At Ultra the next day, Sierra walked into the nerve center in hopes of finding out something new about the breakout as all her other leads had turned up dead.

“Any news on Kurt?”

Vaughn shook his head. “My guess is he’s laying low.”

Sierra sighed. She was never going to get a break. “I still don’t get it. This kid can teleport anywhere in the world he wants and I found him hiding in a crawl space. It doesn’t make sense.”

Vaughn gave Sierra a knowing look. “Not necessarily. Where did you go when you discovered you had powers?”

“Nowhere,” admitted Sierra. When her powers had manifested, Sierra had stuck close to home for feelings of security and safety.

Vaughn nodded. “Exactly. The crazier life gets, the more we want to hold onto what’s familiar.” He turned away from her and resumed his search on the computer.

Sierra’s brow wrinkled as she thought of what Vaughn said and then an idea struck her. Using the tablet she’d been issued with when she joined Ultra’s ranks, Sierra did a quick search of residences near Kurt’s home address that were empty. Before long she found what she was looking for and slipped away without anyone noticing.
As predicted, she found Kurt in the house across the street with a pair of binoculars. Kurt nearly jumped out of his skin in fright when Sierra arrived.

Sierra held up her hands in a surrender position. “Kurt, calm down. It’s me. It’s Sierra. Remember? We talked the other day."

Kurt relaxed a little, but he still narrowed his eyes at her. “How did you find me?”

“It’s where I would go,” said Sierra. “Empty building that’s under construction, clear view of your house…it’s perfect. Look, I know you’re scared and you have right to be, but I’m not going to hurt you.”

Kurt didn’t believe her. “You’re working with the people who tried to kill me! Either you’re lying or you’re an idiot, either way I’ll pass.”

Kurt started to walk away, but Sierra followed him.

“I’m not working with those monsters by choice! I’m a double-agent. I have a family just like you, okay? You know I’m not lying about that. I showed you my son.” Sierra grabbed Kurt’s arm and made him look at her. “Listen to me! There’re others like us, people who aren’t working with those suits. People who will protect you. It’s a paranormal underground where people like us can be safe. You’ve got to trust me, Kurt. We’ve all been through the same thing as you have.”

Kurt looked away from her. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Yes, I do,” said Sierra, unable to keep the desperation out of her voice. “When I broke out, I was just like you. I woke up in different places than when I went to sleep and I heard voices in my head. I thought I was losing it, but I wasn’t! I tried countless pills and shrinks to make it stop until I realized the truth. And I know why you’ve been robbing those banks. Your mom can’t afford to pay for your pills and you feel responsible. But it doesn’t have to be like that. You’re not alone, Kurt.”

Kurt looked both surprised and hopeful. “You really mean that?”

Pleased she was finally getting somewhere, Sierra nodded. “I do. And I can take you to the haven where you’ll be safe and protected, but we need to go now. I’m not the only one who can find you. Ultra, the people that I work for, will find you if we don’t hurry. So, please…” Sierra held out her hand. “Take my hand and come with me.”

Kurt hesitated but before he could take Sierra’s hand, Vaughn teleported in and punched Sierra down.

“I knew if I left you alone you’d find him. Thanks for being so weak, Sierra. I’ll take it from here,” said Vaughn. He turned to Kurt. “Take it easy, son. I just want to talk.”

*Kurt, he’s lying. He’s going to kill you. You have to run!* said Sierra.

Kurt heeded Sierra’s warning. He telekinetically blasted Vaughn into a wall and broke into a run before teleporting away. Vaughn quickly rose up and chased after Kurt and Sierra did the same. She chased Vaughn and Kurt throughout the building, always one step behind until she finally caught up with them on a nearby rooftop.

Vaughn was sporting nasty-looking injuries, courtesy of Kurt and Kurt was using his powers to try and push Vaughn off the roof and despite Vaughn’s efforts, Kurt was succeeding.
“Kurt, stop!” yelled Sierra.

Kurt looked up at the sound of Sierra’s voice and fled just as Vaughn took a misstep and fell. Having no other choice, Sierra grabbed Vaughn by the wrist just as the senior agent passed out from his fear of heights. Being weary from not having eaten that day and having very little sleep, Sierra struggled to pull Vaughn up and was about fall herself when she was grabbed and pulled to safety.

“Much as I admire falling with style, I don’t think you should attempt it.”

“John!” said Sierra, surprised. “What’re you doing here?”

“Besides saving your neck? I’m here to help and so is Cara,” said John.

Sierra’s eyes widened in surprised and she looked questioningly at John.

“I know, it’s hard to believe but it’s true. But it’s not important right now. Your partner’s going to be out for a while. Where’s Kurt?” asked John.

Sierra couldn’t stop the smile that flickered across her face as she told John where she thought Kurt might’ve gotten to.

By the time she and John arrived, Cara was there, trying to talk Kurt into coming out of hiding. “Kurt? Kurt, I know you’re there! My name’s Cara. I’m with Sierra. I’m like you. I was like you once. I was alone, terrified. Every meal I ate was either stolen or fished out of a dumpster. But then somebody helped me, just like I’m trying to help you. Just tell me you’re listening.”

“No!” cried Kurt, crying. “It’s gone too far. I pushed that guy off the roof.”

“No, you didn’t,” said Sierra. “Kurt, it’s me. It’s Sierra. I’m with the people I was telling you about, the good ones. Cara’s telling you the truth. You can trust her. And you didn’t kill anyone. I got to Vaughn in time. He’s unconscious, but he’s fine. Just come out and we’ll make you safe again, I promise, you. Please.”

For a moment, there was nothing and Sierra thought they might’ve failed but then Kurt emerged from his hiding place. Tears were streaming down his face and he was shaking. He looked scared to death as he fell into Sierra’s arms, sobbing.

“It’s okay, Kurt. It’s okay,” she murmured, soothingly.

Everything was going to be all right…or so Sierra hoped.

XXX

Later that day, Sierra sat in her uncle’s office, looking like a mess. Bruises could be seen wherever there wasn’t clothing covering it, there was a stitched cut above her eyebrow, her wrist was in a sling from being sprained and she walked with a limp.

In order to provide proof of Sierra’s loyalties to Ultra, she’d persuaded Kurt (with some protest from John) to fight and injure her so there’d be no doubt in anyone’s mind that Sierra had tried and failed to capture the breakout. Her story convinced Vaughn and the agents who’d seen her, but
Jedikiah was harder to convince.

“So, let me get this straight. A rogue, rookie breakout, not only escaped both you and my senior agent, but also beat the snot out of you,” said Jedikiah, laughing. “And to top it all off, this whole mess could’ve been avoided had you not decided to break protocol and go off solo in the first place.”

“Sierra’s green. It won’t happen again—” began Vaughn.

“There will be ample time to explain yourself, Mr. Vaughn,” interrupted Jedikiah. “Right now, we’re focused on Sierra, okay?”

Sierra met her uncle’s piercing gaze. “I’m willing to admit going off alone was a mistake, sir. But in my defense, I thought I could handle it given how I have some experience working with much younger paranormals. I underestimated Kurt’s abilities and I let him get the drop on me.”

Jedikiah nodded. “While I’m pleased to hear that, I still find it rather comical and almost impossible to think that a woman of your abilities was so easily defeated by a rookie. But in fact, what I’m going to believe is that you were a bit too eager to prove yourself and that made you careless and reckless, something your supervising agent should’ve taken care of.”

A flash of alarm went off in Sierra’s head. “Sir, I—”

“If however,” continued Jedikiah, “It was something else, like a conspiracy to hand over a deviant breakout to the Tomorrow People, now I have to say that would be quite unforgivable and a complete violation of our agreement. Wouldn’t you agree, Sierra?”

Sierra gritted her teeth as she nodded. “Absolutely, sir. I would never jeopardize my position here.”

Jedikiah was pleased. “Good. Good. Then your debriefing will be a piece of cake.”

Sierra’s heart sank. “This isn’t the debriefing?”

Jedikiah shook his head. “Oh, no. That’s done by a senior telepath, Agent Nichols.”

Sierra glanced behind her to see a dark-skinned woman with black hair, dressed in a tight gray suit, standing in the doorway. Something about her unsettled Sierra but she concealed it as she followed Nichols to an interrogation room.

Sierra swallowed painfully and held her hands together to stop them from shaking as she sat down across from Nichols. Communicating with someone telepathically was one thing, but having them in her mind like this was another. She had to block Nichols out, give her no reason to question Sierra’s loyalties and there was only one way to do that, provided she could stop freaking out.

“Something bothering you, Jameson? You seem nervous,” said Nichols. “It almost makes me think you have something to hide.”

Sierra’s fear was forgotten as she glared at Nichols. “I don’t,” she snapped. “I just don’t like people snooping around in my head, not after what I’ve been through.”

“Well, lucky for you, I’m not going that far. I’m just going to see if you’re telling the truth when I ask you questions,” said Nichols. Her tone was almost gentle and comforting, which eased Sierra’s nerves just a little. “Shall we begin?”
Sierra nodded. “Let’s get it over with.” Quickly, Sierra did as John taught her and filled her head with a memory and emotion so powerful and overwhelming that it eclipsed everything in her mind and then she braced herself for what was to come.

_Is your name Sierra Jameson?_ asked Nichols.

_Yes_, said Sierra.

_Is the sky blue?_ asked Nichols.

_Yeah, depending on the day_, said Sierra.

Nichols ignored Sierra’s attempt at being a smart alec. _Did the Tomorrow People assist in the escape of today’s breakout, Kurt Rundle?_

_No_, said Sierra, firmly. _He escaped after he beat me up and knocked me out._

_Where’s the breakout now?_ asked Nichols.

_I don’t know_, growled Sierra.

Nichols leaned in closer as though she were trying to read Sierra’s facial expressions. _Did the Tomorrow People assist in the escape of today’s breakout, Kurt Rundle?_

_I said NO!_ snarled Sierra.

It seemed like the debriefing went on for hours, but actually only continued on for a few more minutes before Sierra was escorted into the hall where Jedikiah was waiting. Much to Sierra’s surprise and relief, Jedikiah was smiling.

“Congratulations, it appears you passed with flying colors. Good work.”

Sierra stood a little straighter. “Thank you,” she said, as they shook hands.

“No, thank _you_ for being a straight shooter. I have to admit, I was a tad concerned there might be a problem, what with you being the mother of John’s son and all—”

“John and I are _over_,” said Sierra, firmly. Did he really have to keep bringing that up? Yes, she was the mother of John’s son but it was irrelevant. She and John hadn’t been together in years and they weren’t going to rekindle their relationship anytime soon, if they ever did. “We have been since before Robbie was born.”

“—but this seems to be nothing more than a senior agent who failed to keep his trainee in check,” said Jedikiah, as though she hadn’t spoken.

Sierra’s blood ran cold. Granted, she hadn’t like Vaughn’s recent actions, but there was no need for him to be punished.

“It wasn’t Vaughn’s fault.”

“Fault isn’t the problem here, Sierra. This is about accountability,” said Jedikiah, in the tone of explaining something obvious. “If I cannot hold my agents responsible for their subordinates, the efficacy of the entire program breaks down and I’m accountable.”

Sierra raised an eyebrow. Jedikiah? Accountable? He’d mentioned a partner, not someone of higher rank at Ultra.
As if Jedikiah was reading Sierra’s mind, he nodded. “Yes, there are people who’re above me, Sierra. The one that I’m keeping Robbie safe from. I’ll tell you all about him on another day. For today, I think the lesson’s clear: failure will not be tolerated.”

Sierra wanted to press further for answers but decided against it. “So, what happens to Vaughn?”

Jedikiah looked almost remorseful. “He’s been put on a desk. Not your concern. In the meantime, you’re going to get a new partner, Agent Nichols. I’m sure you two will get along swimmingly.” He patted Sierra’s shoulder. “Have a good night.”

Sierra felt a chill go down her spine. She had a horrible suspicion about Vaughn’s punishment and hoped she was wrong. She dug out her cell phone and called Vaughn. Much to her horror, Sierra followed the sound of Vaughn’s ringing phone to Ultra’s mortuary where she saw Vaughn in a body bag and his cellphone glowing with her call. A call which he was never going to answer.

*They killed him because of me.* Sierra felt like she was going to be sick. *What have I done?*

XXX

Sierra wasted no time going to the Lair.

For the first time in over a week, no one was giving her cold or angry looks. Kurt was there, playing chess with Robbie and things seemed a lot better than they had been a few days ago. Sierra paid it no attention as she scanned the place for John and soon found him in TIM’s room, sitting at his desk and making up a watch like the one he’d given Robbie.

John looked up when he heard her come in and he smiled. “Hey. What’s up?”

“Can we talk?” asked Sierra. Given what happened the last time they’d talked, she half-expected John to refuse but he didn’t.

John nodded and beckoned for Sierra to take the chair across from him.

Sierra closed the door behind her and sat down. Sierra looked down at her hands and was quiet for a few moments as she figured out what to say. Eventually, she took a deep breath, looked up and said, “What you said before…your invitation for Robbie and I come live here with you, is that still open?”

If John said yes, then Sierra could come up with some excuse to Astra, pack what was irreplaceable and try to forge a life down in the Lair with Robbie. It wouldn’t be what she wanted, but it’d be a hell of a lot safer than her crazy plan to work as double-agent.

John looked concerned as he nodded. “It’s always open. Why?”

Sierra sighed. “I’ve been doing some thinking and…I’m sorry for before. I was angry and stressed out and I know it’s no excuse, but I never should’ve said that. I was wrong and you were right about Ultra. I can’t work there anymore. It’s too dangerous and too much of a risk. John, they killed my partner because of me.”

John reached out and took Sierra’s hand. She didn’t pull back. “It’s not your fault.”
“Yes, it is! Look, I thought I could find my dad and make a better world for Robbie without getting caught up in my uncle’s world but I was wrong,” said Sierra, as tears slid down her cheeks. “I was a fool. I never should’ve agreed to Jedikiah’s deal. I was wrong.”

John cupped Sierra’s face in his hands and gently wiped away her tears with the pads of his thumbs. “You weren’t wrong. I was.”

Sierra sniffled and stared at John in confusion. “What?”

“You said we can’t keep running, that we need to stand and fight back and make a better future for our son,” said John. “But to do that, we need you on the inside, Sierra. Can’t you see? This is perfect, you working for Ultra. The only way we can take it down is from the inside—”

Sierra pulled away. “No, I can’t go back, John! It’s way too dangerous. Jedikiah already had one of his evil telepaths try and break into my head. What happens to Robbie if I don’t come back? I can’t do that to him or you. If Jedikiah finds out where you’re hiding, if he knows that I’m lying to him…it’s all my fault. I can’t let that happen. I can’t do it. I won’t put the people I care about in danger.”

There was a brief moment of silence.

John caressed Sierra’s cheek. “Sierra, look at me.” When Sierra’s gaze met John’s, he continued, “If Ultra could get inside your head, they’d be here right now. You’re stronger than you realize. And I will always be here for Robbie.” He sighed. “Look, I don’t want you to make the same mistakes I did. Don’t run away when you can stand and make something for yourself. I may be brave, but you’re braver. I was also at fault for our fight and for that, I’m sorry. I don’t want to let you down again.”

Sierra’s heart ached for John and she unconsciously covered John’s hand with her own. “John…”

“When you told me about your plan to work your uncle and I freaked out, it was because I was scared. Ultra and Jedikiah took a lot from me. My innocence, my life, you and Robbie…I was just afraid of losing you both to them again. That watch I gave to Robbie? Roger gave it to me, not just to protect me but also to remind me to be brave. Somehow, I forgot that and it’s time I remember. I want to make things better between us and be a better dad to Robbie. We can’t keep living in the past if we want a better future. We need to create a better world for Robbie and all others like him. So, whatever you need, whatever it takes to make things better, I’ll be there to give it to you.”

Sierra could feel the sincerity in John’s words through their connection and felt comforted. She smiled softly at him.

“You are a good dad, John,” she murmured. She’d seen how John interacted with Robbie since they’d become acquainted. It was like they’d known each other the whole time. John was loving, supportive, protective and willing to listen to his son’s problems, which was what Sierra had wanted. “Robbie trusts you and he loves you as much as you do him, that’s all that matters. As for us, well…I don’t know what’s going to happen, but I do know that I don’t want to lose you again.”

There. It was out. Sierra couldn’t deny it anymore. Since their reunion, she and John had slowly been working on fixing things between them. Being with John, working with him, had stirred up old feelings in Sierra’s heart. Sierra was nowhere near ready to be romantically involved with John again, but that didn’t mean they couldn’t be friends for right now. She didn’t want to have to say good-bye again.
John smiled at Sierra’s answer. “Me too.”

Sierra smiled back and after a moment, she cleared her throat. “I know we haven’t had a lot of
time together as a family, so why don’t we start to make up for it now? I’ll grab us some dinner
and you get TIM to turn on a movie and we’ll crash in here with Robbie. Do you want to?”

John grinned. “I’d love to.”

So, for one night they had a happy moment together as a family. Everything was perfect.

Until the next morning when Russell snapped a picture of Sierra, John and Robbie snuggled up

together on the couch, completely conked out, and John had to chase after him so Russell wouldn’t

use it for blackmail.

XXX

The following evening, Sierra was surprised when Robbie delivered her a message from Cara,

asking to meet at Sierra’s favorite Chinese restaurant, a place that was safe from Ultra, but

nevertheless, decided to go through with the meeting.

Cara was sitting in an empty booth next to a dragon statue hanging on the wall. There were two
cups of tea on the table along with a plate of fresh dumplings. “Hey.”

“Hey,” said Sierra. She slid into the booth. “I got your message. What’s up?”

“I was hoping we could talk,” said Cara. “And I do mean talk, not yell like we’ve been doing all

week.”

“Yeah, me too,” admitted Sierra. She’d been doing a lot of thinking and trying to pluck up the
courage to say something important.

Both women then spoke at the same time.

“I’m sorry about what I said,” they said, in unison.

They stared at each other.

“What?” they said, in unison.

Both women stared for another moment before bursting out laughing. It was like the two of
them hadn’t been fighting at all. It was like they were best friends.

“Why don’t you go first?” suggested Cara, as she wiped tears from her eyes.

“Okay.” Sierra took a minute to breathe deeply and stop her laughter. “I’m sorry for exposing
your feelings for John like I did. It was wrong of me. No matter how angry I was, you didn’t
deserve that and I apologize. You’re Robbie’s friend, you feel protective of him, so it’s only be
expected for you to dislike me and be upset with me after I decided to work at Ultra. You were
afraid I was putting him in danger. So, I’m sorry.”

“No, I did deserve it,” said Cara, shaking her head. “I was being really unfair to you. It wasn’t
right for me to accept Robbie with open arms and not you. You were right. I was the reason you
were on Ultra’s radar and you had to make a difficult choice, one that I know you didn’t make lightly. You are one of us. That will never change. And you were right about my feelings for John. I do care about him, a lot. There was a time when I thought there might be something between us and after I found out who you are to him, I did feel threatened. But the truth is, my feelings don’t matter. John’s just my friend and leader, that’s all. He loves you, Sierra, as much as you love him.”

Sierra blushed and looked down at the table. “We’re not getting back together, Cara. Not now. We’ve still got a lot of issues to work out before I even consider that.”

“Maybe, but I think John’s willing to wait,” said Cara, with a smile on her face. “You and Robbie make John happier than I’ve seen him in a long time.”

Sierra felt her heart flutter at this but pushed it back. “Okay, enough talk about my personal life.”

Cara laughed and folded her arms. “So, does this mean we’re okay now?”

“We’re good,” said Sierra, nodding. “And there’s something I want to show you, something I’ve never shown anyone, not even John.”

Cara’s smile faded and she looked both curious and serious. “What is it?”

“It’s how I kept Jedikiah’s telepath out of my head and the reason I’m fighting so hard to find my dad again,” said Sierra. She held out her hand. “I may not like people getting into my head, but you’re different. I trust you. So, may I?”

Cara hesitated but then took Sierra’s hand and looked into Sierra’s mind.

Eight-year-old Sierra stood at the top of the stairs of her childhood home.

She was dressed in her pajamas and it was clear she’d been crying, judging from the redness of her eyes and the drying tear tracks on her pale cheeks. She’d been awoken by Roger’s fight with Marla and was gazing at her father as he prepared to leave the house and her life for good.

“Daddy?”

Roger froze in his tracks and looked at Sierra. “Hey, baby girl. What’re you doing up?”

Sierra slowly descended the stairs. “I heard you and Mom fighting. Are you going somewhere?”

Roger looked sad as he nodded. “Yes.”

When Sierra’s eyes filled up with fresh tears, Roger put down his suitcase, took Sierra into his arms and held her close as she cried into his shoulder.

“Don’t cry, sweetheart. I won’t be gone forever. I’ll be back, I promise,” said Roger, soothingly.

“I want to go with you,” sniffled Sierra.

“I want you to come too, but you can’t. You can’t come where I’m going,” said Roger. He put Sierra down on the stairs and wiped away her tears. “Listen, I need you to do me a favor. I need you to look after your mom and Luca for me. Can you do that, Sierra?”
Sierra’s throat tightened as she nodded. “I don’t want you to go.”

“I know, baby girl. I don’t want to go either,” said Roger, as tears pooled in his own eyes. He placed his hand on Sierra’s shoulder. “Be brave for me, Sierra. Be brave and remember that I love you very much.”

“I love you too, Daddy,” said Sierra.

Roger kissed Sierra’s head and then departed from the house.

The memory ended and both women’s eyes were filled with tears.

“That’s why I have to find my dad,” said Sierra, as she took a sip of her tea. “Now that I know the truth, I can’t let that be the last memory I have of him.”

“I’m so sorry,” said Cara. “What’re you going to do?”

Sierra sighed. “I’m going to do what he asked me. I’m going to take better care of my family. I’m going to try and fix things with my mom, be there more often for Luca, show Astrid and her dad more appreciation and just be a better person for everyone involved, for both species. If there’s anything I’ve learned is that I can’t turn my back on any of them. But the only way I can do all this is by pretending to be a good soldier, by working for my uncle and staying one step ahead of him. That is what I’m going to do.”

The journey ahead of her was long and difficult, but one way or another, Sierra would get through it and in the end, things would be better.
**Girl Interrupted**

My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

Five years ago...

Cara Coburn, a young teenage girl, was sitting by herself at her school’s homecoming dance.

Because of her deafness, Cara didn’t notice Tyler Miller who’d just sat beside her and started talking to her until he tapped her on the shoulder. When she spotted him, Cara felt nervous as he was one of the cutest boys in the school and on the football team, not the kind of guy who’d really notice a girl like her.

“Hey, Cara, is it? You read lips, right?” said Tyler, slowly.

Cara nodded. She was skilled in sign language and could read lips very well.

“Trust me. You’re not missing much. The music here sucks,” he said.

Cara would’ve laughed aloud if she could’ve.

“If you want to get out of here? Go someplace a little quieter?” he asked.

Cara’s heart fluttered and she could feel the butterflies in her stomach as she nodded and took Tyler’s hand.

They drove out into the woods, which didn’t sit well with Cara. She looked nervously at her crush, who gave her a reassuring look as he squeezed her hand.

“You’re really pretty,” he said. “How do you say ‘pretty’ in sign language?”

Tyler blushed, took off her seatbelt and eagerly showed him the sign for pretty.

Tyler mimicked her with rather good results. He then began to tenderly kiss her and Cara reciprocated his affections. But all too quickly, Tyler’s ‘affections’ grew. Tyler acted like it was nothing, but for Cara, it was too much, too soon. Terrified and angry, Cara shoved Tyler off and tore her dress as she ran out in the field nearby to escape him. But the jerk followed Cara and knocked her down.

Cara was pinned to the ground and fought as hard as she could before letting out a powerful
scream. Tyler went flying across the field. Cara shakily rose up, unsure of what’d just happened or how, but when Tyler rose up, she screamed against and thrust out her hands. Once again, he went flying across the field and this time he didn’t get back up.

If that wasn’t strange enough, Cara became aware that she could suddenly hear everything around her—the whispering wind, the chirping crickets, the hooting owl and so much more. There was also a high-pitched whining in her head that made her cringe and then she passed out.

What was going on?

Present day...

Cara sat by herself on a subway car full of passengers.

She was supposed to be out on a food run, but instead she’d gotten sidetracked just like she always did this time of year. Every year, she went out to try and clear her head from the memories and emotional pain that came from the anniversary of the day she’d broken out. And every year, she was a jumpy mess, no matter how much she tried to deny it.

“Excuse me.”

Cara nearly jumped out of her skin in fright to see a man she didn’t recognize sit beside her. She eyed him with suspicion.

“Are you done with that?” he asked, pointing to the copy of the Daily Bugle she was clutching.

Cara shook her head and rose up from her seat to clutch a pole. She couldn’t help picking up a stray thought from the handsome stranger.

“Way to go, dude. You just creeped her out,” he thought to himself.

The telepathic whispers considered despite Cara’s efforts to block them out and it quickly became unbearable. When the car was empty, Cara wasted no time teleporting back to the Lair. She went straight to TIM’s room where John and Russell were going over their latest plan.

“Hey, you’re just in time. We think we found a way to get the jump on Ultra, a way to save breakouts before their powers are stripped or they’re turned into agents,” said John.

Russell spun around on his spinning chair with glee. “Yes. We are using Ultra’s own intel against them.” He laughed. “My buddy TIM figured it out.”

John rolled his eyes. “And who built TIM?”


Cara had yet to speak or face either of the two men, which worried John. Paranormals often had difficulty on anniversaries of traumas or other hardships. Some were worse than others. John knew how hard this time of year was for Cara. It was his duty as her leader and her friend to make sure she was okay and reassure her she wasn’t alone.

“Are you all right?” asked John, concern evident on his face. “I thought you were going on a
food run. Did something happen?”

Cara snapped out of her thoughts and shook her head. “I’m fine, John. I’m sorry. I just got a little sidetracked.”

While Cara had kept the precise details of the night she broke out private, John had been told the gist of it as Cara felt a leader should know of his subordinate’s problems just in case something happened. So, every year John felt concerned for her.

Just then, Robbie teleported in, dragging behind him was a kid’s wagon containing many brown, paper grocery sacks and a pair of ten-gallon containers of water. “Hi, guys.”

Cara’s brightened at the sight of John’s son. She was quite close to the boy after all their telepathic conversations and privately, she considered Robbie family.

“Hey, Robbie,” she said, as she hugged him. “It’s good to see you. What’s in the bags?”

“Mom noticed your supplies were a little low, so we went and got some stuff,” said Robbie. “Mom says this’ll last two weeks, and we also got some treats too.” Robbie rummaged through the bags and pulled out two pies, apple and cherry, Cara and John’s favorites, and he tossed Russell a large packet of gummy bears.

“Awesome! Kid, you’re the best,” said Russell, grinning.

John ruffled Robbie’s hair. “Thanks, kiddo. We really appreciate it.”

Robbie beamed. “So, what’re you guys doing?”

John held up a little metal object that resembled a key. “We need your mom to do us a favor. This will help us stay one step ahead of Ultra.”

Robbie’s eyes widened. “Cool!”

“So, is Sierra here or is she on her way?” asked Cara.

Robbie shook his head. “Nope. Aunt Astrid dragged her to a reunion party or something.”

John burst out laughing. He could see in his mind’s eye what was happening. If there was one thing Sierra disliked, it was high school reunions and big parties.

XXX

Far across town at her former high school’s gym amidst the bright lights reflecting off the disco ball and pounding music, stood Sierra Jameson.

She looked beautiful with her brown hair in loose waves, the light eyeshadow and red lipstick, gold jewelry and the summer green dress she was wearing. But she was complete and utterly bored. The lights kept blinding her, the music was threatening to burst her eardrums and give her a headache and her former classmates barely said a word to her or even glanced in her direction. The few times she’d tried to strike up a conversation had started well but ended badly as soon as they realized exactly who they were talking to.
Astrid nudged her and held out a drink in a plastic cup. “Thirsty?”

Sierra took the cup but eyed it suspiciously. “Is this—?”

“No,” assured Astrid. “Relax. It’s ginger ale. I know you don’t drink.” Sierra was the legal age, but she didn’t touch alcohol, period. “It’s just a prop. You’ve got to blend in a little.”

Sierra grinned. “I’m blending. I’m blending, see?” She performed a few goofy dance moves that made Astrid laugh.

“No, no, no, no. Don’t ever do that again,” said Astrid.

Sierra sipped her soda and then sighed. “Okay, we’ve been here for forty-five minutes and I’m seriously bored out of my skull. Remind me again why I’m doing this.”

It was rhetorical questions. Sierra knew why she was, she was there because Astrid had dragged her in, kicking and screaming while insisting the party was for Sierra’s own good. Apparently, Sierra spent too much time working and stressing and not enough time relaxing and playing.

“Because you need to get out more and I’ve barely seen you ever since you got that new job with your uncle and you moved into your new apartment,” said Astrid.

A couple of days ago, Sierra had finally taken the plunge and moved out of Astrid’s spare room and into her new apartment. It had been a difficult decision as Sierra loved living with her best friend, but in the end Sierra had had to admit that Robbie was getting older and would eventually need his own space, as did she and there was a certain freedom to having their own place. The new apartment had its perks, the view was gorgeous, Robbie had his own room which he loved and Sierra didn’t have to pay rent as it was all in her uncle’s name. Best of all, it was completely clean, no trace of Ultra could be found there whatsoever.

“True enough,” admitted Sierra. “And I get it, I do. But come on, Astrid, let’s be real. Who’s going to look twice at me? I’m the school’s mascot for what not to do. I’m the single teen mom who went crazy and dropped out, remember?”

Sierra had once enjoyed a level of popularity during her early years but all that went down the toilet when her powers manifested. Sierra was quickly labeled the crazy girl and everyone avoided her like the plague. It got worse when word spread of her teenage pregnancy. Despite the fact that it’d been years and Sierra was doing well for herself now, no one seemed to care about who she was now, only what she had been all that time ago.

“Hey, none of that,” scolded Astrid, as she placed a hand on Sierra’s shoulder. “That isn’t you anymore. You’re an amazing person who’s come a long way. You’ve got a good career and your kid is amazing. I say that earns you some points. If they can’t see that, then who needs them?”

“Yeah, I know,” said Sierra, as she took another sip.

“Besides, this might be your chance to snag a date. You haven’t had one in forever,” said Astrid, teasingly.

“And I’m not in the market for one. My plate’s full as it is,” said Sierra. “Between my new job, taking care of Robbie, reconciling with my mother, hanging out with you, moving into the new apartment and dealing with John, I’ve barely had a minute to myself.”

As soon as Sierra finished speaking, she mentally winced and berated herself for mentioning John’s name. Sierra had yet to tell Astrid that she’d been reunited with Robbie’s father or that they
were slowly mending the rift between them. Astrid was going to ballistic when she found out.


Sierra shrugged her shoulders. “In a manner of speaking. John is…Robbie’s father.”

Astrid’s eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets. “Robbie’s dad? Are you kidding me? He’s back? When did this happen?”

“A little while ago. We ran into each other and…” Sierra explained as much as she could about John without revealing to Astrid of Sierra’s powers, the Tomorrow People and Ultra. “…and now, he’s visiting Robbie on a daily basis under supervision.”

Astrid looked stunned. “Wow. I can’t believe it. Are you guys going to get back together?”

Sierra shrugged again. “I don’t know. Not now, obviously. I’m not ready for that. But maybe one day. We’ll see. Right now, we’re more focused on our son than anything else.”

Astrid took a big swallow of her drink. “So, I should ask you why you didn’t tell me about this sooner, but I think I know the answer to that question. So, what I want to know now is this: when do I get to meet John so I can scare him into behaving?”

Sierra laughed. “Later, maybe. I’ll see how it goes. In the meantime, why don’t you go hang out with your friends? They’re waiting for you.”

There was a small group of people, Astrid’s pals from her extracurricular activities at school, who were beckoning for her to come and join them.

Astrid hesitated. “You sure you don’t mind? I don’t know if I should leave you alone.”

Sierra waved it off. “I’ll be fine, Astrid. I’m a big girl. I don’t need a babysitter.”

“Okay, then.”

While Astrid was conversing with old friends, Sierra wandered about the gym and decided to see what stray thoughts she could pick up. In an effort to get past her trauma from years ago, Sierra had slowly been working on getting used to having others in her head. Now and then she listened to the thoughts of others and was working with John to work through the rest of it.

Some of her former classmates’ thoughts were disturbing, some were amusing, others were boring and a lot of them were just the same as they had been in high school. There was nothing of interest until Sierra came across Emily, one of her classmates who’d tragically lost her sister years ago. Emily and her sister had been out for a drive when a train came out of nowhere. As Emily had been the one driving the car, she blamed herself and others did too.

Jerk...jerk...bitch...thought Emily. Sarte was right. Hell is other people.

Sierra couldn’t help but chuckle, which caught Emily’s attention.

Emily glared at Sierra. “What’re you laughing at?”

“Nothing. Just thinking of the funnies from today’s paper,” lied Sierra, as she approached the other woman. “So, Emily…I don’t know if you remember me. I’m Sierra—”

“Jameson, I know,” interrupted Emily. “The crazy girl who heard voices and got knocked up and vanished off the face of the earth.”
Sierra’s face fell and she was silent. *This* was why Sierra hadn’t wanted to go to the reunion. Even amongst freaks she was a freak. Did everyone have to remind Sierra of her past? Did no one ever mature and look to the future? Apparently not.

“Hey, you know. We should split up before the *normal* people think that the freaks are starting a club,” said Emily.

Sierra shook her head in Emily’s direction as Astrid returned to Sierra’s side, looking flabbergasted. Judging from the look on Astrid’s face, she’d heard what Emily had said and she wasn’t the least bit happy about it.

“Rude much?” said Astrid, referring to Emily. “What is that cow’s problem?”

Sierra gave Astrid a look. “Retract your claws, Astrid. Emily’s had it rough the last few years.”

“Yes, so have you,” said Astrid. “But you’re not rude beyond all reason to people for it. Okay, I get what happened to her sister was awful but that doesn’t mean she gets a free pass. Say the word and I’ll kick her butt to Kingdom Come.”

“And I love you for it. You’re the best sister I could ask for,” said Sierra, meaning every word. “But I think that’s enough socializing for one night. I’m tired and I want to curl up on my new couch with some ice-cream and have a *Supernatural* marathon with my bestie. You in? Robbie’s spending the night at a friend’s.”


Sierra silently thanked whoever was listening and headed for the door. Just a few more feet and then she’d be free of this awful place and away from the judging freaks that were her former peers. She was almost home free when she picked up another thought from Emily, one she wished she hadn’t.

*I’m so sick and tired of trying to fit in with these people,* thought Emily. *Thank goodness that in forty-eight hours, I’ll be dead and gone.*

Sierra felt sick to her stomach. Sometimes, she really hated her powers.

XXX

Early the next morning, Sierra went to the Lair to get filled in on John’s plan.

She didn’t know exactly what it entailed and she had a sinking feeling about it, but it was probably better than what she’d been doing since she’d signed up at Ultra. What John’s plan promised if it worked, stopping their kind from being stripped of their abilities, was worth the risk. Sierra had seen from images in John’s mind of what happened to paranormals who were subjected to Jedikiah’s serum. It wasn’t something she ever cared to see again, which was why she was forced to admit their plan was a necessary one.

“So, what is it you want me to do?” asked Sierra.

“You said you wanted to be a double-agent. It’s game time, baby,” said Russell.
“TIM, pull up the schematics,” ordered Cara.

TIM projected blueprints of a secure area at Ultra, an area that Sierra had never been in.

Sierra raised an eyebrow. “You want me to break into my own office?” Did they not realize how insane that sounded when said aloud?

“A highly restricted part of the facility,” corrected John. “We’ll guide you through it, step by step. Cara’s the strongest telepath here besides you and Robbie, so she’ll be close enough to be inside your head and theirs the whole time.”

“If you’re up for it, that is;” added Cara. “If you’re not comfortable with me yet—”

“It’s fine,” interrupted Sierra. She was getting better. This was just the opportunity to test how far she’d come and prove something to herself. “I trust you.”

Cara nodded, pleased.

“Ultra is linked to a whole web of classified material. Medical files, police reports, psych records, you name it. They even have their own algorithm for identifying potential breakouts. It’s sort of like an alarm system that lets them know when someone’s secretly one of us. That’s where this comes in.” John held up a tiny computer drive that looked like a metal key without the teeth. “You’ll place this drive inside their firewall. It’ll install software that syncs their system directly to TIM. It’ll give us all their intel on new breakouts.”

“Tap into that system and there’s no more head start for Jedikiah,” said Cara.

Sierra took the drive and turned it over in her hand. It was so small but it felt so heavy in her hands.

John noticed. “Sierra, I know it’s dangerous. If you get caught, it won’t matter that you’re Jedikiah’s niece or that you’re immune to D-chips and the power-stripping serum. He’ll—”

“Kill me, I know,” said Sierra, as she pocketed the key. “I won’t lie to you. I’m scared stiff, John. But this is the best plan we’ve had in ages. We don’t have a choice. I have to do this.”

Ready or not, Sierra had to do this, for the sake of her species’ survival.

XXX

At Ultra later that day, Sierra concealed the drive in her pocket and practiced her telekinesis while she waited for her supervising agent and partner, Agent Nichols to come and train her.

Sierra was apprehensive about working with the older woman as Nichols seemed cold, unfeeling and ruthless, qualities that had made her the best pick to Sierra’s partner in Jedikiah’s mind. Someone who would break through to Sierra and forge her into a perfect Ultra agent, something that Sierra had no desire to be.

“Take off your shirt.”

Startled, Sierra dropped the objects she levitating, stood up and stared at Nichols. “Excuse me?”
Nichols held up a little device. “Bio-metric transmitter. Only works on bare skin.”

“Ah, okay.” Sierra took off her jacket and shirt, stripping down to her bra. “So, just out of curiosity, what’s your first name?”

“This isn’t a get-to-know-you luncheon. I’m here to train you,” said Nichols. “But for the record, it’s Darcy.” She opened up a black case, pulled out a standard nine millimeter gun and cocked it.

Sierra folded her arms across her chest. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“According to your file, you’re talented in the three T’s and a few other gifts most of us have never even dreamed of: biological manipulation and you can stop time,” said Darcy.

Of course, my ability of temporal manipulation. Should’ve guessed that’s what this is about.

“Yeah, and while I can perform the former whenever I want, the same can’t be said for the latter. It’s only happened a handful of times since I broke out,” said Sierra. “I can’t control my ability of temporal manipulation. What do you think shooting me is going to achieve?”

“Plenty,” said Darcy, coolly. “I saw the tape of your first day here. You did it before.”

Sierra glared. “What part of ‘I can’t control it’ don’t you get? That was an accident!”

Darcy approached Sierra. “Your power is tied to your emotion. The stronger your emotion, the stronger your power, which was why you were able to save those rebel paranormals, because you were scared. Which only follows that if I scare you again, you’ll be able to stop time.”

Sierra was willing to admit that Darcy had a point, but that was it. Pointing the gun in Sierra’s face wasn’t going to do anything.

“This won’t work,” said Sierra. “I’m not scared.”

“We’ll see,” said Darcy. “On the count of three. I’m going to shoot you and you’re going to stop time. One…two…three!”

Darcy squeezed the trigger, setting off a lot of noise, but that was it. There were no gunshots, no injuries, and no sudden stop of time.

Darcy looked disappointed as she examined Sierra’s results on the medical device. “Nothing. Not even an elevated heartbeat. Why weren’t you scared?”

Sierra gave Darcy a look. “I wasn’t scared because you didn’t fool me. I know a real gun when I see one and even if I didn’t, our kind can’t kill, remember?”

Sierra was starting to think Darcy had a really low opinion of Sierra’s intelligence.

“Hmm,” said Darcy. “Well, next time I’ll just have to try something else.”

Sierra gave Darcy a cold look. “How about not? If you’ll excuse me, I’m due for a break.”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra got dressed and headed out, desperate for a bit of time away from Darcy and get her mission over and done with. Darcy was definitely not on Sierra’s list of people she liked. Not at all.

Your partner’s a real sweetheart, said Cara.
Sierra chuckled. Cara had been listening in ever since Sierra arrived at Ultra. *Yeah, I know. I think if our kind could kill, she’d get rid of me in a heartbeat. She doesn’t trust me and she hates me. The feeling’s mutual."

She said that?

*She didn’t have to. I can tell by the look in her eyes, said Sierra. Now, where do I go?*

_Do you see that bald agent? Follow him, said Cara. He’s headed for the restricted area._

Carefully and quietly, Sierra followed the bald-headed agent to the door that would take Sierra into the restricted area. Sierra frowned when she saw the keypad lock on the door.

*Damn it, cursed Sierra. What’s the problem? asked Cara. There’s a keypad, said Sierra. Hang on, I’m going to see if I can get it._

Sierra took a deep breath and peaked into the agent’s mind, which granted her the code.

*You got it? asked Cara. Yeah, I got it, said Sierra. I think I’m getting better with this. I’m feeling more comfortable with my telepathy. Why weren’t you before? asked Cara, curiously. It’s second nature for our kind._

_That’s a story for another day, I’m afraid, said Sierra. The coast was clear, allowing Sierra the time needed to punch in the access code. “Two-two-six-zero-one,” she murmured to herself._

The keypad lit up with green light, granting Sierra access to a hallway that formed into a labyrinth. *I’m in, Cara. Now, which way to the mainframe?*_

_Left, replied Cara. Go all the way to the end of the—wait! There’s someone headed your way, hide!_ Sierrafroze in her tracks at the sight of the agent headed back in her direction and quickly hid before she could get spotted. She waited until Cara gave the all-clear before she resumed her mission. She took a left and journeyed to the end of the hallway, where she came upon another door.

Sierra carefully closed the door behind her and walked down the pathway until Cara told her to stop, that she’d arrived at her intended destination. But there was one little problem. The hallway was empty of everything and there was no sign of anything electronic except for the ceiling lights.

*Cara, there’s nothing here, said Sierra._

_Look above you. Do you see the panel? Third one up. Can you reach it? _ Sierra looked up and saw the panel up above. It was practically invisible and way too high for her to reach normally.

*I can do better than that, said Sierra. She waved her hand and the panel opened, revealing a bunch of cables and wiring. Jeez. What the hell is this?*
It’s the primary data cable for the mainframe, said Cara. See that port? Stick the drive into it.

Got it. Sierra took out the drive and clenched her fist around it, teleporting the drive into the panel where she then used her telekinesis to plug the device into the mainframe and then she closed the panel. It’s done. That was easy. Almost too easy for Sierra’s liking. Which way out? Am I clear?

Sierra awaited Cara’s instructions, but there was no reply from Cara, not even a whisper.

Cara? Cara, are you there?

What the hell was Cara doing? How could she go mute in the middle of a mission?

Sierra grew antsy as she waited for Cara to reply but again received no word. Realizing she had no other choice and that she was on her own, Sierra telepathically scanned the area to make sure she was safe before she made her way out of the restricted area. She was almost back to the training room when she bumped into Jedikiah.

“Easy there, Sierra. What’s the rush?” asked Jedikiah. “Where’d you come from?”

“No rush, boss,” lied Sierra. “I’m on a break and was just taking a walk. I’m just a little occupied.”

Jedikiah looked curious. “Anything you’d care to tell me?”

Sierra hesitated but then caved in, seeing no way around it. “Actually, I would. Could we talk in private? It’s kind of a personal matter.”

Jedikiah nodded and led Sierra into his office. “So, what seems to be the trouble?”

Sierra took a deep breath. “I’ve been practicing my telepathy, getting used to people inside my head and being inside others’ heads, so I don’t have a repeat of what happened with Vaughn.”

“I’m pleased to hear it,” said Jedikiah. “You need to continue branching out your skills if you ever hope to be a good agent here at Ultra. However, I’m guess it’s because of your telepathy that you’re having a problem. Am I correct?”

Sierra nodded. “The other night, I was at a party and I tapped into the mind of an old schoolmate.”

“I see. And?”

“And Emily’s been having some serious problems ever since her sister was killed a few years back. I’m worried she’s going to hurt herself,” said Sierra. She’d been unable to get Emily’s tragic thoughts out of her head. She was worried for the poor girl. “I don’t have a lot of experience with this sort of thing and I wouldn’t object to a little advice. Should I just help her? Or do I just ignore her problem and pretend I didn’t hear anything?”

Jedikiah gave Sierra a sympathetic look. “Listen, Sierra, I understand your predicament, I really do. Your dad had the same problem when he first broke out.”

Sierra couldn’t conceal her curiosity. “He did?”

Jedikiah nodded. “He did. And I’m going to tell you the same thing I told him. You know what happens if you use your powers to help this girl, you run the risk of not only exposing yourself but
also the rest of your species to the entire world. The human race wouldn’t take kindly to knowing that there’s a secret race living amongst them that can read their thoughts, steal their secrets and prey upon them. Humans would either try to exploit you or kill you.”

*Present company included,* thought Sierra.

“Millions would die, including your species and mine,” continued Jedikiah. “And that would be a tragedy. I know it seems harsh, but the truth is, you can’t save everyone. The sooner you accept that, the better off you’ll be. Do you understand?”

Sierra nodded. She understood Jedikiah perfectly. As much as Sierra wanted to admit it, he was right. Exposure was *not* a good idea. If Sierra was to help Emily out, then she would have to turn to alternative methods. She didn’t know how or what she’d do, but somehow she’d figure something out.

“Thanks for the advice. I really appreciate it,” said Sierra.

Jedikiah nodded. “My pleasure.”

Sierra left Jedikiah’s office.

XXX

When Sierra returned to the Lair on her lunch break, she was applauded by Russell.

“Huzzah! Hail, the conquering hero!” he said.

John smiled at Sierra. “Good job. TIM’s uploading from Ultra as we speak. Just to be certain, are you sure you got out clean?”

Sierra was about to tell John what had happened but the worried look in Cara’s eyes convinced her not to, for the moment.

“Yeah, yeah. Cara was with me every step of the way,” she lied. For once John didn’t notice that Sierra was lying, for which she was glad.

John smiled again and hugged her before returning to TIM’s room.

Once they were alone, Cara looked gratefully at Sierra. “Thank you, Sierra, for not making a big deal out of—”

“Actually, it *was* a big deal,” hissed Sierra. “I almost got caught up there because of you going mute on me in the middle of a mission.” If Sierra hadn’t used her own telepathy, she would’ve gotten caught by a guard or worse, Jedikiah. “What the hell happened?”

Cara looked away from Sierra’s angry gaze. “Sometimes my powers work a little too well up there. I can get overwhelmed by all the noise and I get these…episodes.”

“Episodes?” echoed Sierra, incredulously. Cara had *episodes*? And she couldn’t have spoken up before?

Cara nodded. “I’m sorry. I should’ve warned you beforehand. It was a mistake.”

“Yeah, it was,” said Sierra. She folded her arms across her chest and scowled. “It must be
tough.”

“What?”

“Being such a crap liar,” said Sierra. She wasn’t fooled by Cara’s excuse. Something was up, something the other woman wasn’t telling her. “I don’t know what’s going on with you and I won’t ask because it’s not my business, but all the same, let me know when you get your head on straight and decide to be honest with me.”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra stormed off, not noticing the look of pain on Cara’s face. Nearly getting caught left Sierra on edge. She didn’t have the time or the patience for Cara’s problems at the moment. Whatever was going on in Cara’s head was not Sierra’s concern, not until if or when it ever happened again

XXX

Five years ago...

Cara sat on a bench at the police station, wearing a borrowed sweatshirt three sizes too large and handcuffed.

When Cara had awoken, the police had arrived and placed her under arrest, not caring about her disability or showing her even a moment’s kindness after what she’d endured. In their eyes, with Tyler dead from Cara’s attack and her being the only suspect, she was not the victim. But Cara hadn’t paid any attention to that. She was occupied by the new world that had been opened up to her.

Every single sound, no matter how loud or soft made her jump. She loved being able to hear at long last, but it still frightened her. She wasn’t used to the sounds that seemed common to everyone else there, but they were amazing to Cara. Was this what it was like for other people? And even so, how had it happened to Cara?

Cara felt relieved when her father appeared, looking worried.

“Cara? Are you okay?” he asked, as he carefully signed it out. He sat down beside her. “What happened, honey?”

With some difficulty as the handcuffs were pinching her wrists, Cara told her father that she’d been attacked.

“Who did this to you?” asked Mr. Coburn, looking distraught.

“Mr. Coburn?” Officer Jefferies and his partner appeared, giving Cara cold looks. “Tell her she’s under arrest.”

Mr. Coburn stood up. “For what?” he demanded, incredulously.

“For the murder of Tyler Miller.”

“Murder?” echoed Mr. Coburn. He looked at Cara for an explanation.
Cara became scared and tears glistened in her eyes as she furiously signed out that she hadn’t murdered Tyler, it had been self-defense. Someone had to believe her. What happened to Tyler was an accident and she’d only been defending herself.

Mr. Coburn translated for Cara. “My daughter says she just shoved him, that she was defending herself.”

Officer Jefferies didn’t buy it. “Well, it was some shove. The kid’s head was cracked open.” The policeman looked at Cara. “What’d you hit him with, a rock? Where’d you hide it? The truth is going to come out.”

Cara tried to explain the situation to her father, hoping he could get someone to believe her but Mr. Coburn was denied even a moment alone with his terrified daughter and Cara was hauled down to the cells with advice to get an attorney.

When Cara was taken down to her cell, she closed her eyes and wished she was home so badly that her wish came true. Like magic, Cara disappeared from the police station and arrived at home, her wrists free of the handcuffs. Cara felt a wave of relief. She didn’t know what had happened or why, but she was glad it had.

XXX

The hallway was packed full of students chatting and making their way to their classes and other appointments and Sierra was waiting outside Astrid’s classroom at the local college.

Sierra was picking up Astrid from school and then as soon as Sierra picked up Robbie, they were going out for dinner. Sierra was also taking the opportunity to double-check with Emily, who attended Astrid’s college, about what she’d overheard the previous night. Sierra wanted to believe she was wrong, but she had the sinking feeling that she wasn’t.

As Emily walked past Sierra, she picked up on the human’s thoughts. 4-15, then 5-44, 7-23 and then 9-16.

Sierra flicked her wrist, causing Emily’s notebook to fall from her bag and give Sierra the chance to pick it up. Hopefully the notebook would give Sierra some clues as to what Emily was doing.

“I saw that.”

Sierra’s head whipped around and she saw Astrid standing behind her. “Saw what?”

“That,” said Astrid, pointing to the notebook in Sierra’s hands. “You’re stalking Emily now?”

Sierra chuckled. “No.”

Astrid scoffed, but not unkindly. “Liar. What’re you up to?”

“Nothing,” insisted Sierra. “I’m just worried about her. I think she’s been more depressed than usual.”

Astrid gave Sierra looked. “Oh, and this based on what? The ten seconds of scintillating
conversation you had with her at the reunion?”

“No. I, uh…I overheard her talking to herself about the accident and her sister and something about forty-eight hours,” said Sierra, telling a half-truth. “Look, I know it’s not cool, but I know what I heard and I’m hoping that I’m wrong.”

Astrid looked concerned. “I think that’s noble of you, but why the concern? Emily doesn’t even like you. So, what aren’t you telling me?”

There’s a lot I’m not telling you. I don’t know where to begin. Sierra sighed. “Back in high school, Emily and I both attended the nurse’s office for our medication. We were the freaks. But I eventually stopped needing it and I had you for a support system. Emily wasn’t that lucky.” Sierra remembered all too well when Emily had lost her sister. More than once, Sierra overheard Emily say that Emily’s parents looked at Emily like Emily was a murderess. “I don’t care if she likes me or not. Emily’s in a dark place and I’m worried she might try and hurt herself.”

Astrid looked more worried now. “So, you stole her notebook.”

“I didn’t steal it,” said Sierra.

Astrid gave Sierra an incredulous look.

“Okay, I stole it,” admitted Sierra. “But I’m going to give it back. I just needed a way to check in with her and find some proof that I’m right about this. I don’t want to be, but I have this horrible feeling that I am.”

Astrid was quiet for a moment then held out her hand. “Then why don’t you let me take care of it? Emily’s chiller around me than you. After dinner, I’ll give her the notebook back and talk to her, see what I can find out. I’ll call you if I learn anything.”

Sierra smiled and felt relieved. “Thanks, Astrid.”

Astrid smiled back.

XXX

Later that evening at the Lair, Cara sat alone on the couch in TIM’s room.

It was dark and quiet, which was exactly what Cara needed. She was a mess, just like she always was this time of her. What she’d been put through when her powers manifested always haunted her in a way no one should ever have to endure. It was like she was reliving it and rather than confiding in someone of her problems, Cara was hiding it from those closest to her.

“Cara?”

Cara turned to see Robbie sitting beside her. She hadn’t even heard the boy come in. “Hi, Robbie.”

“Are you okay?” asked Robbie.

Cara nodded. “Yeah, I’m fine. Why?”
Robbie looked worried. “My dad’s worried. He says you’ve been upset lately. And you look like my mom does when she has her bad day.”

Cara’s brow wrinkled in confusion. “Her bad day?”

Robbie hesitated. “She got hurt once,” he confessed. “I can’t say anything else, because I promised not to, but every year she gets upset about it. She’s getting better, but I still get worried for her. You look like the same way she does, so I’m scared for you.”

Cara’s face softened and pulled Robbie in for a one-armed hug. “You don’t need to worry so much about me, kiddo. I’m just having a rough time. This time of year’s hard for me, that’s all.”

Robbie meant well and Cara wanted to confess about her problems. Cara knew she couldn’t tell Robbie the painful truth of her past and why she was such a mess. Children should never be exposed to such things.

Robbie snuggled in closer. “You don’t have to be so alone. Why don’t you let me or my parents in? We’d help you.”

“I know you would and I really appreciate it, but sometimes grown-ups have to handle things by themselves,” said Cara, sighing. “You’ll understand someday when you’re older.”

Silently, Cara hoped that was true.

XXX

The next day, Sierra decided to check with TIM to see what the numbers that Emily had been thinking about meant, see if they held any significance. Astrid hadn’t found much in Emily’s notebook and the girl had told Astrid to buzz off when Astrid spoke to her, which hadn’t eased Sierra’s worries in the slightest.

“TIM, I need you to run some numbers for me, see if they mean anything.” Sierra took the paper with the numbers out of her pocket. “4-15, 5-44, 7-23 and 9-16.”

“They could signify anything,” said TIM. “Time intervals, departure or arrival for a flight, train, ferry, bus…”

“Train!” said Sierra, quickly. Emily’s sister had died because of a train. It couldn’t be a coincidence. “Search all train schedules, see if there’s a line that hits those times.”

TIM searched but nothing came up, much to Sierra’s frustration.

“Damn it,” muttered Sierra. “Are you sure about this, TIM? You searched everywhere?”

“I am a supercomputer.”

Sierra sighed. Even a machine as powerful as TIM could come up empty-handed. “Thanks anyway.”

Just then, John and Cara entered the room. Sierra stuffed the paper into her pocket and hoped she wouldn’t questioned.
“What’re you doing?” asked Cara, suspiciously.

“Nothing that’s any of your business,” snapped Sierra.

Cara folded her arms across her chest. “Does this have anything to do with your former classmate? The one who’s mind you’ve been reading? Robbie told me. He picked up a stray thought from you.”

Sierra scowled and made a mental note to ground Robbie. “As I said, it’s none of your business.”

John seemed to share in Cara’s feelings. “We do not help humans.”

“I’m aware of that, thank you. I already got the lecture,” snapped Sierra. “You don’t need to explain why it’s not worth the risk, because if you do, you’re just being hypocritical considering I risked my life to save yours. I hacked into Ultra’s mainframe to help your species track down the new breakouts.”

Cara gave Sierra a cold look. “It’s your species too, Sierra.”

Sierra returned Cara’s cold look. “And I almost got caught thanks to whatever the hell’s going on inside your brain! Look, I don’t know what your issues with humans are, but they’re yours, not mine. Just because you can’t deal or don’t give a crap about humans, doesn’t mean that I—”

“What’s she talking about?” interrupted John. He folded his arms across his chest and looked at Cara for an explanation. “Cara? What is Sierra talking about?”

John was ignored.

“You’re right, Sierra. I don’t care about humans,” said Cara, coldly. “The real reason not to help these people isn’t because it’s reckless, it’s because it’s pointless. They don’t deserve saving.”

Sierra scoffed. “I don’t believe that. Astrid’s human and without her help, Robbie and I wouldn’t be here right now.” If it hadn’t been for Astrid’s generosity, Sierra and Robbie would still be on the streets, scrounging for scraps or possibly dead.

John looked distraught to hear this. He hadn’t known just how bad things had been for Sierra after their breakup. Clearly, there were still things Sierra was keeping from him until she decided she fully trusted him with her secrets.

“And yet you haven’t told her what you and Robbie are, have you?” challenged Cara. “Just like you never told your mother or your brother, and you know the reason why. It’s because the people that you love, those who don’t know the truth about you, if or when they discover there’s a freak living in their midst, they’ll turn on you and then you’ll see who you really are.”

Sierra’s hand clenched into a fist. Sierra had kept the truth of her identity secret from Astrid and the rest of her family, but not because of what Cara said. It was just because Sierra wasn’t ready for that and because Ultra had made it clear what would happen to humans who learned about Sierra’s kind. Sierra didn’t intend to tell Marla or Luca the truth as she was still learning to trust them again, but when the time came, Sierra would tell Astrid everything and when that happened, they’d still be family.

“You don’t know a damn thing,” she hissed.

“Sorry to interrupt,” said TIM. “But I just received an alert via Ultra’s mainframe. It seems
“Facial recognition’s coming through,” said TIM.

Moments later, a young brunette woman’s identification popped up.

With this new information in hand, the three of them left TIM’s room.

“TIM’s put us ahead of Ultra. Let’s move,” said John, to Russell, who was slouching in a chair.

Cara looked concerned, if not agitated. “I didn’t get any kind of telepathic read on this girl.” Usually whenever they tracked down a breakout, Cara sensed it telepathically. It made her rather dependent on her telepathy and she felt unsafe and distrustful without it.

“Maybe that’s because your powers are fritzing out,” said Sierra.

John stopped in his tracks and looked at Cara. “Russell and I can handle this if you’re not feeling a hundred percent.”

“Stop coddling me! I’m fine,” snapped Cara, as she stormed off.

John shook his head in Cara’s direction and then held out his arm, keeping Sierra from moving. “You’re staying put. You’re the inside woman at Ultra. We can’t risk you getting exposed.”

Sierra sighed in frustration. “Fine.”

John was right but that didn’t mean Sierra had to like it.

Having some time to kill, Sierra took a book from John’s room to read. She’d just hunkered down into an armchair and was about to start reading when Robbie teleported in, carrying his sketchpad and looking frantic.

Sierra immediately tossed the book aside and knelt down in front of her son. “Sweetie, what is it? What’s happened?” She could feel Robbie’s distress as if it were her own and it worried her.


Sierra nodded. “They left two minutes ago to get the new breakout. Why? What’s wrong?”

“It’s a trap!” blurted out Robbie. He showed her the image he’d just drawn. “I just saw it. Cara’s going to get captured by Ultra and they’re going to kill her! I tried to warn them, but Cara’s not answering me!”

Sierra’s blood ran cold. Jedikiah must’ve found the drive. Oh, crap.

John, you need to get out of there! Robbie’s had a vision. It’s a trap! yelled Sierra. She felt panicked when she didn’t receive a reply. John, answer me!

Moments later, John and Russell appeared without Cara. They looked agitated and were sporting fresh bruises.

Sierra’s heart sank. “They got Cara?”
“They got her,” said John. “There were at least half a dozen TP agents there waiting for us. They got Cara. She’s gone.”

“We don’t know that,” said Russell, weakly. “Maybe Cara just bolted with the new breakout.”

“She didn’t!” Robbie looked distraught as tears slid down his cheeks. “There was no breakout. It was a trap. It’s all my fault. I should’ve seen it happening sooner. Cara’s going to die because of me.”

“Hey, don’t talk like that.” John’s tone was gentle and he picked up Robbie and held him close. “This isn’t your fault, kiddo, I promise.”

If anything the blame lay with Ultra for capturing Cara and if not the enemy, then Sierra and the others for planting the drive and playing right into Ultra’s hands.

Robbie sobbed as he buried his face in his father’s shoulder.

“What is going on in Cara’s head? She clearly wasn’t a hundred percent,” said Sierra. None of this would’ve happened if Cara had just admitted something wasn’t right and gotten help.

John sighed and put Robbie down. “Cara told me once of what happened the night she broke out. This scumbag attacked her, tried to hurt her in a way no one should be hurt. Cara fought back and that’s how she discovered she had powers.”

Sierra felt physically sick as well as guilty and ashamed. She’d given Cara unnecessary grief for a past trauma when she should’ve been more supporting. She of all people should’ve recognized the signs that Cara was showing. Sierra knew what it was like to lose control on an anniversary of a bad day. It was no wonder Cara felt such disdain for humans after what Cara had been through.

“Let me guess, today’s the anniversary of that event,” said Sierra.

John nodded. “It was five years ago exactly. This time of year’s always rough. It’s like she’s reliving it all over again.”

“So, what do we do now?” asked Russell.

“We don’t do anything,” said Sierra, firmly. “After what just happened, they’ll be expecting you. I’m the inside woman, remember? I’m going to Ultra and I’m going to bring her home before they kill her or worse, use her to expose all of us. All of you stay here.”

Robbie still looked scared. “What if you get caught? I can’t lose you too.”

Sierra placed her hands on Robbie’s shoulders. “That’s not going to happen. I don’t want you worrying yourself sick about this, so I’ll be connected to you and your dad telepathically the whole time so you can see and hear what’s happening. I promise you, everything’s going to be okay. Stay with your dad. I’ll be back as soon as I can with Cara.

Robbie just hugged Sierra’s legs tightly in response.

“Be careful,” said John.

Sierra nodded and then disappeared.
When Sierra arrived at Ultra, she went straight to Jedikiah’s office.

The head of Ultra was watching Cara struggle against the power suppression restraints from a security feed in his office. He looked up and smiled when Sierra knocked on the door.

“Sierra. Do come in,” said Jedikiah. He beckoned to the video. “Impressive, isn’t it?”

“Very,” said Sierra. “How’d you get her?”

Jedikiah produced the drive key. “Does this look familiar?”

Sierra feigned ignorance and shook her head. “No. What the hell is it?”

Jedikiah gave Sierra a disbelieving look. “Oh, it’s just something that mysteriously founds its way into my computer system after I found you coming in the direction of the restricted area.”

By a miracle, Sierra remained stoic. “I’ve never seen it before. You can get Darcy to give me another telepathic brain scan if you don’t believe me.”

Thankfully, Jedikiah didn’t question Sierra further. “No, I prefer to take you at your word. Learning otherwise would put you in the same boat as your little friend there.”

“What’re you going to do to her?” asked Sierra, not liking the implications in Jedikiah’s tone. “I mean, you can’t kill her.”

Jedikiah laughed. “I certainly can. Quite easily, in fact. She’s useless to me. But I must admit, she’s quite impressive. Our strongest telepaths couldn’t get a shred of intel on her compatriots.”

Sierra’s heart skipped a beat and she felt scared. “Jedikiah…boss…please, don’t do it.”

Jedikiah looked intrigued by Sierra’s response. “Well, you seem awfully attached.”

Sierra shook her head. “It’s not Cara I’m attached to. It’s Robbie.” Sierra sighed. She didn’t want to tell Jedikiah this, but there was no choice. “Cara shares a psychic bond with Robbie. He’s closed it off ever since I started working here, but it’s still there in the back of his mind. If the connection suddenly severs from Cara’s death—”

“It could damage your son’s psyche, perhaps even kill him,” finished Jedikiah. He’d seen such a thing happen before, it wasn’t pretty. Jedikiah looked worried, which was a first for him. “We can’t have that, now can we? It’d violate the terms of our agreement and more importantly, hurt my grandnephew.”

“No,” agreed Sierra, relieved that Jedikiah was seeing things her way. “We can’t.”

“Well, it seems we’re at an impasse. I can’t very well justify letting Cara walk out of here. She’s a murderess, an unrepentant fugitive.”

“Which is why you should just take away her powers,” said Sierra, quickly. “Cara would be harmless then and the loss of the psychic bond wouldn’t hurt Robbie.”

Jedikiah raised an eyebrow. “It’s a good idea, but it still seems like I’m letting her off too easily. Why would I do that?”
“Because of John,” said Sierra. She was going to tell one of the biggest lies of her life. “John and I are over, but he’s moved on to Cara. She’s his new girlfriend. They’re in love. You take away Cara’s powers and you’ll turn her into the very thing he hates, human. Without her telepathy, she’s useless to him.”

Jedikiah rose up from his seat and looked directly into Sierra’s eyes. It was hard to tell if Jedikiah was trying to catch Sierra in a lie or if he was impressed with how cold and ruthless she was being.

“I can’t tell if you’re being sadistic or self-serving,” he murmured.

“Maybe both,” admitted Sierra, coolly. “It’s how a good agent should be, right? After all, we can’t save everyone and Cara’s one of those people. If you want proof that I’m serious about this, then why don’t you let me give her the injection myself while you watch?”

Sierra waited with bated breath for Jedikiah’s response.

XXX

Cara struggled against her bonds, trying and failing to get out.

She couldn’t do anything, not even send out a telepathic signal for help. Cara hated how helpless and useless she felt. It was like she was human again.

Suddenly, there was a swishing sound and the door swung open as Sierra entered the room. Cara sat up straight and her eyes narrowed when she saw Jedikiah and Sierra’s partner on the other side of the door, watching through the Plexiglas.

Sierra didn’t even glance over her shoulder. She just looked at Cara with guilt and pain in her eyes. “I’m sorry. For everything.”

Cara just shook her head. She knew what Sierra was apologizing for but it didn’t matter. “It’s okay. It’s in the past. What happens now?”

“Now, I’m going to get you out of here,” said Sierra. She picked up an empty syringe and filled it with the power stripping serum.

Cara’s heart skipped a beat. “What’re you doing?”

“I have to take your powers. It’s the only way I can save you and Robbie,” said Sierra, sadly.

Cara shook her head fiercely. “No, Sierra, no! Please!”

“I’m sorry. The best I can do is give you back your old life,” said Sierra.

Cara began to cry as she tried to pull away. “No! Sierra, I can’t go back to who I was! You don’t understand what it was like for me to be human!” The fear, the helplessness, the deafness…Cara couldn’t go back to that. It was a fate worse than death for her.

“No, you don’t understand that if I don’t do this, they’re going to kill you!” yelled Sierra, angrily. “If you die, your bond with Robbie is severed in the worst way and then I lose my son!”
Cara stopped struggling at this. She hadn’t realized what would happen if she were to suddenly die. The last thing she wanted was to hurt that little boy. But nevertheless, Cara still had no desire to be human again and tears still made their way down her cheeks.

Sierra looked regretful but determined. “I’m sorry, Cara. You’ve been a good friend, but I have to put my son first. You’re a survivor. You’ll find a way to make it.”

“There has to be another way!” cried Cara. “Sierra, please!”

Sierra pushed Cara’s head back down and placed the needle against Cara’s neck, but before the serum was injected, Sierra thrust her empty hand into the air and suddenly everything in the room went flying before it was suddenly frozen in mid-air.

Cara felt a wave of relief but still looked shocked as she and Sierra looked behind them and saw that time had indeed stopped for all except for the two of them.

“Holy cow…Sierra,” whispered Cara.

Quickly, Sierra pocketed the serum and replaced the syringe’s contents. “Okay, I’m going to inject you with saline. Are you a good actress? Because you need to give the best performance of your life here real quick.”

Cara nodded and looked at Sierra gratefully. “Thank you.”

Sierra just nodded and they resumed their positions just as the time-stop ceased. Everything fell to the ground and either shattered or clattered and Sierra injected the saline into Cara’s neck. Cara then gave an award-winning performance of the loss of her powers while Sierra covered her face in her hands and gave her boss and partner a distraught, cold look.

If there had been any doubts as to Sierra’s loyalty, they were gone now.

XXX

Later that day, on the way home to the Lair, Cara sat close with Sierra on the subway car.

They’d been holding each other close, like sisters, throughout the ride, as though they were afraid something might happen if you let go. Cara hadn’t stopped smiling fondly at Sierra since they’d left Ultra’s premises.

“Sierra?”

“Yeah?”

“How’d you know you could do it again? Stop time, I mean?” asked Cara.

Sierra’s smile faded. “I didn’t, not for sure. I just hoped I could. It was a big risk, I know, but it was a risk I had to take. I didn’t want to lose someone else I cared about and I couldn’t put Robbie through that kind of pain.”

Cara squeezed Sierra’s arm. “I’m glad you did it. You saved my life. When Ultra had me, I thought that I might—”
“Hey, it’s okay.” Sierra covered Cara’s hand with her own. “You’re safe now.”

Cara looked worried. “What about you? If Jedikiah ever sees me using my powers again, you know what will happen to you.”

Sierra sighed. She knew all too well what would happen. Jedikiah would terminate their deal and destroy Sierra in every way possible and do worse to her son. “I know. I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it. Besides, you would’ve done the same for me.”

Cara nodded. “Yeah, I would’ve. That’s what family does.”

Nothing more needed to be said for the rest of the journey home. When they arrived, Cara was tightly hugged by Robbie, who’d been worried sick. John was also relieved that Cara was safe and praised Sierra for her quick thinking. Sierra decided to give them all some privacy and was dragged off by Russell, who wanted to hear Sierra’s story.

“Seriously, girl, you have got to teach me how to stop time!” said Roger, excitedly. “There are still a few casinos I haven’t been banned from. We could do some major damage!”

Sierra laughed at Russell’s antics.

“Pardon me for interrupting,” said TIM.

Russell groaned. “Oh, TIM! We’re having a moment!”

TIM ignored Russell. “Are you aware you have twelve missed calls, Sierra? I believe the eager young woman’s name is Astrid Finch.”

Sierra frowned in surprise as she examined her phone. It was fully charged but she had no signal. “How do you know that? My phone doesn’t work down here. Never mind, stupid question.”

All cell reception was blocked in the Lair for security purposes.

Russell looked interested. “Ooh, who’s Astrid? When can I be introduced?”

“A week from never,” said Sierra, laughing. Suddenly her cellphone’s signal returned. “Thanks for unblocking this, TIM.” She dialed Astrid’s number and soon her friend picked up. “Hey, Astrid, it’s me. What’s up?”

“Nothing good. It’s Emily,” said Astrid. She sounded worried. “Nobody can find her and her mom’s been calling everyone. I think you were right. She’s hiding something. Her mom said that this last week she’s totally shut down on them.”

Sierra’s heart sank and she had a horrifying thought. “When did Emily’s sister die? Do you remember the date?”

“I think it was around now,” said Astrid. “You don’t think she’s—?”

Sierra nodded even though she knew Astrid couldn’t see her. “Yeah, it’s the anniversary. Listen, Astrid, I’m sorry. I’ve got to go check something.”

“Okay. Call me back

Sierra hung up her phone and ran into TIM’s room. “TIM, those numbers I gave you didn’t match any train schedules?”

“That is correct, Sierra,” said TIM.
Sierra exhaled sharply. If it wasn’t a schedule, it had to be something else. “What about time intervals? Do they match that?”

“That is interesting. They match the westbound blue line,” replied TIM. “Only the times are off by exactly three minutes.”

The supercomputer projected the information onto the screen and Sierra felt a wave of horror as she realized what Emily was planning to do. Emily had been obsessing over dying the same way her sister did and now she was going to do it. Sierra couldn’t let that happen.

Sierra ran out of TIM’s room and informed Cara, John and Robbie of what was happening and what she wanted done. Though John was wary of the risks involved, he and Cara agreed to accompany Sierra topside to try and save Emily while Russell watched Robbie. When they got there, Emily’s car was parked on the train tracks. Moving the car with telekinesis was too risky, so Cara teleported into the car and managed to talk Emily out of her plan.

“I don’t know what you said back there, but thanks,” said Sierra, gratefully.

Cara smiled. “We should go before we’re spotted.”

The three of them then teleported away, unaware that Astrid had pulled up in her car and saw it.

XXX

Sierra and Cara watched from a distance as Emily walked up the steps to her house.

Sierra had wanted to make sure Emily had gotten home safe, so she and Cara had followed the girl home, where hopefully she would get the proper care and affection she needed.

“What do you think will happen?” asked Sierra.

“Let’s hope it’s a wake-up call,” said Cara. “Maybe now, they can stop living in the past.” She smiled when she saw Emily and her parents embrace. “I hope Emily realizes how lucky she is.”

“A mystery woman just talked her off the edge,” Sierra pointed out. “I think she’s feeling pretty lucky.”

Cara gave Sierra a look. “I meant that she gets to go home. Something I can never do.”

Sierra sighed and looked sympathetically at Cara. Having been cast out of her home once before, she had an inkling of how Cara felt.

“What happened?”

Cara sighed. “You trusted me with something personal to you, something you’d never shown anyone. Now it’s my turn. I want to show you something, if you’ll let me.”

Sierra hesitated but then held out her hand for Cara to take. When Cara gripped it, Sierra was whisked away into Cara’s memory.
Cara ran up to the front door of her house and pounded on the door.

She’d just escaped police custody and was eager to tell her family of the changes she’d undergone, how she could hear and do such incredible, impossible things.

Mr. Coburn answered the door but he didn’t look happy to see her. “Cara? What’re you doing here?”

“Dad,” said Cara. It amazed her how easily she could speak and it shocked her dad too. “I can hear.”

Mr. Coburn looked confused. “What do you mean you can hear? It doesn’t make sense.” He signed out every single one of his words, like he didn’t believe her. “Cara, a boy is dead. That boy, do you know who his father is? No one’s going to believe that you’re innocent. No one’s going to believe that you can suddenly hear.”

Tears pooled in Cara’s eyes. How could her dad, a man she loved and admired and respected, be so cruel to his own daughter?

“Look, if you want a life then you turn around and you go,” said Mr. Coburn. “And you never come back here, ever.”

Go? Leave her home, her sister and all she’d ever known? No! She couldn’t!

Cara shook her head and her eyes were pleading as she tried to enter the house but she was forced back.

“Cara, stop,” said Mr. Coburn. He reached into his shirt pocket and handed her a wad of money. “This is the best I can do. Take this and go.”

Cara hesitated but then a stray thought from her father, we’ll be better off without her, finally convinced her to go. Tears streamed down Cara’s cheeks and she sobbed with heartbreak as she slowly walked away from her home and the only life she’d ever known.

“Cara!”

Cara looked up to see her little sister, Sophie, watching her from the balcony.

“I love you, Sophie,” said Cara. “Good-bye.”

Sierra wiped away tears of her own as she returned to reality.

“I’m sorry, Cara. I had no idea,” she murmured.

“It’s okay,” said Cara, as they started walking away. “You can’t change what happened.”

“No, I can’t. But you don’t have to let it define you,” said Sierra. “Maybe we were given these powers for a reason. You know, for all the times I’ve hated my powers, I know that without them, I never would’ve met John and I wouldn’t have Robbie now. And we can do some good with them, like with Emily. It’s not playing God, it’s just being human.”

Cara laughed. “You’re a real cup’s-half-full kind of girl, aren’t you? I like that. You did good today, really good.”
When Sierra took Robbie home that night, she found Astrid sitting outside the door. Astrid’s face was unreadable, which didn’t bode well.

“Hey, girl. What’re you doing here?” asked Sierra, as she unlocked the door and scurried Robbie inside. “I’m just about to make dinner. Do you want to join us?”

Astrid shook her head. “No. Is there something you want to say to me?”

“Uh…yeah. Text me before you randomly show up at my front door like something out *Paranormal Activity*,” said Sierra.

“Anything else?” asked Astrid. She looked right into Sierra’s eyes. “Like about Emily, maybe?”

Sierra mentally winced. How could she have forgotten about the phone call? “I’m sorry I hung up on you and didn’t call you back. My phone’s signal went out, but I heard that Emily’s fine.”

Astrid gave Sierra a hard, disbelieving look. “You know she’s fine. You were there at the train tracks. I was there in my car. I just pulled up when I saw you and two other people just disappear into thin air. Do you want to explain that to me?”

Sierra was speechless. *Oh, crap.* How was she going to explain this? Sierra wanted to tell Astrid the truth, but it was too much of a risk. If Ultra found out that Astrid knew Sierra’s secret, they would kill her and Sierra couldn’t bear that.

“Astrid, I appreciate the credit but I wasn’t anywhere near the train tracks,” she lied.

Astrid saw through Sierra and looked angry. “You’re really going to stand there and lie to my face? After everything we’ve been through together and all I’ve done for you?”

Sierra looked hurt. “Astrid…”

“I’m onto you,” said Astrid. “So, if you don’t want to tell me the truth, then I will go and figure it out for myself.”

Without waiting for a reply, Astrid stormed off, leaving Sierra feeling lost and alone.

Today was supposed to have been a victory. Instead, it felt like a loss.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

Fifteen years ago...

Foster kid, John Young was grinning and belting along to the loud rock and rock music that was playing in the car. He was driving a stolen vehicle and had a duffle bag of stolen food in the passenger seat. He was driving at dangerous speeds and had attracted the attention of the local cops, but he didn’t care. His mysterious abilities made him cocky and he loved the rush.

John’s thrill came to an end when he spotted a roadblock of at least two cop cars at the end of the street he was driving on. Quickly, John slammed on the breaks and teleported away with his stolen goods.

When John arrived at his foster dad’s, he dropped the duffle bag of food and then his four younger foster brothers, Aaron, Luke, Mitchell and Mark all crowded around it before tearing into the food. As the oldest and the only one with powers, John made it his responsibility to look after and provide for the younger boys.

“Chill guys. There’s plenty more where that came from,” said John.

“Shh!” said Aaron, as he pointed to the living room.

John’s eyes darkened with anger as he left the hallway and entered the living room where his foster dad, Jacob, sat. Jacob reeked from not having showered in days, his beard needed trimming and he was downing a glass of bourbon. It wasn’t surprising, considering Jacob was one of those foster parents who only cared about his monthly paycheck from the state and he couldn’t hold a steady job longer than two weeks, but John was still furious.

“I have to steal booze and you blow our foster money on booze?” said John, disgusted.

Jacob gave John a scornful look. “We need another lesson on who owns this house, John?” Jacob rose up and knocked down the little table that had held his dinner. “Now, clean up this mess!”

John glared but did as he was told. He started cleaning up the mess when he picked up the steak knife. A thought came to John. What would happen if he finally got rid of Jacob for good? They’d all be better off. No more cruelty and they could maybe finally start to live like regular kids.
But when John took a step towards Jacob, who had his back turned to the teenager, a painful scream went off in John’s head and he dropped the blade.

Jacob turned around when the knife clattered to the floor. “Something going on in that thick skull of yours?” When John didn’t reply, Jacob beckoned to the knife. “Well, go on. Pick it up.”

Jacob’s tone was sneering and patronizing, and it worsened when John didn’t move or speak.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought,” sneered Jacob.

John’s eyes burned with unshed tears as Jacob picked up the knife and then backhanded him rather hard, sending him crashing into the wall.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door and an unfamiliar man entered the house. He was a great deal taller than John with blond hair, blue eyes, and a face like a gargoyle. He was clearly well-off, judging by the state of his expensive suit, which made John all the more curious as to what the man wanted.

“Excuse me. My name is Doctor Jedikiah Price. Would you mind putting down the knife?” he asked, politely. He didn’t seem very bothered by Jacob. He even smiled when Jacob dropped the blade. “Thank you. I’m looking for a foster child called John Young. I was told he lives here.”

Jacob looked back at John, giving him a disbelieving look.

“May I come in?” asked Jedikiah.

Jacob grunted as he nodded.

John stood in the living room, listening as Jacob and Jedikiah talked.

He didn’t know exactly what was going on but he didn’t think he was going to like it. He couldn’t explain it, but he had a bad feeling about it.

“I’m head of a firm that’s very interested in John here. John’s aptitude testing blew away the other children at his school. Literally, off the charts. That’s why we were alerted.”

Jacob scoffed in disbelief. “You’ve got the wrong kid. This one’s an idiot.”

Jedikiah smiled softly in John’s direction. He clearly didn’t share in Jacob’s feelings. “Yes, well. The testing often recognizes gifts that go unnoticed by other people.”

John swallowed nervously, not liking the way Jedikiah was looking at him.

Jedikiah looked directly into John’s eyes. That was you in the stolen car, wasn’t it?

John was shocked and felt a wave of fear from Jedikiah’s thought. No one had ever given the slightest hint that they shared in John’s miraculously abilities, much less knew about them. Jedikiah seemed polite but appearances could be deceiving. If he knew about the stolen car, did that mean Jedikiah was the enemy?

It’s okay, I know you can read my mind. I’m not going to hurt you and you’re not in trouble, thought Jedikiah. I want to offer you a chance to get out of here, John. Lead a life you never dreamed of. I’ll even arrange for your foster brothers to be placed elsewhere, in a better, happier home. But I can’t do what you can, so nod if you can hear me and want to come with me.

John had always wanted to leave Jacob’s place, for his foster brothers to be in a better home
and the desire to learn more about what he could do and why was just too a chance to pass up. He decided he believed Jedikiah and nodded.

Jedikiah winked and smiled before pulling out a thick envelope. “I understand you’re compensated to look after these children. This should more than cover your loss and there’s a little extra for any emotional loss you might experience. I’ll be taking him away immediately. Unless, of course, you have any objections?”

Jacob grinned as he counted up the money in envelope. “Whatever’s best for the boys.”

And that was the end of that. From that moment on, John would never be the same.

Present day…

“Ow!”

Sierra landed painfully on the stone floor of the Lair.

It was Sierra’s day off. She and John were practicing hand-to-hand combat, enabling her to defend herself without having to rely solely on her powers. She’d been holding up her own fairly well until John had gotten a lucky shot in that sent her stumbling down.

“You’re getting better,” said John, as he held out his hand.

Sierra took John’s hand and stood up. “Really?”

While Sierra had done her best over the years to stay up to scratch on her martial arts skills and practiced regularly at Ultra during training hour, John thought she needed more work on it.

“Nope. You’re rustier than an old bike chain,” said John, grinning as he handed her a water bottle.

“Very funny.” Sierra down a large sip of her water before rubbing her aching shoulder. She was definitely going to feel that tomorrow. “I’ve been trying hard not to forget everything you and Ultra taught me, but there’s so much to remember! Plus, it’s not like I have that much experience fighting in the real world and not during practice.”

“It’s all in your head. You’re letting yourself get daunted,” said John. “And you’re still expecting to be telekinetically blasted by your opponent.”

“Can you blame me? It’s what happens at Ultra,” said Sierra. “Besides, what’s the difference as long as I’m prepared and ready for an attack? I need to be in defensive, combat mood. Prepared for anything that might happen.”

“Sierra, come on. You’re talking to Jedikiah’s former star pupil,” said John, as he leaned against the railing. “Your uncle wrote that handbook to boil our abilities down to brute tactics, but fighting hand-to-hand combat isn’t about intellect. It’s about instinct, emotion. Read your opponent’s body language and visualize your opponent’s attack in your mind, then attack before they can make their move. Do you understand?”

Sierra nodded. She understood, even if it was sometimes difficult to remember.
“That handbook ignores everything that makes our species special,” said John.

“Well, I’ll be special tomorrow. I’ve got to pick up Robbie from school and then get cleaned up before I head to Marla’s for dinner,” said Sierra, as her watch beeped, reminding her of the hour. She put down her water bottle and dabbed at her sweaty face with a clean towel. “Oh and don’t forget, Robbie’s expecting you to come over tomorrow at five.”

John smiled and nodded. “I won’t forget.”

Robbie had gotten a new video game and was dying to play it with John. As John never passed up a chance to spend time with his son, he was really looking forward to it.

Sierra smiled at John and her hand brushed against his, sending goosebumps up John’s skin, as she departed for the day.

XXX

Due to some poor time management on Sierra’s part, they arrived a little late to Marla’s house.

When they went inside, they quickly discovered that the house smelled delicious from Marla’s cooking, and it made Sierra’s mouth water and Robbie’s stomach rumble. Luca wasn’t surprised by his sister’s lateness, she had a reputation for that. Marla looked relieved when they came in, as if she’d been expecting a phone call with bad news.

“Hey. Sorry we’re late. I got held up at work and I have the absolute worst time management skills,” said Sierra.

Marla frowned and gently brushed her hand against the fresh bruise on Sierra’s face from sparring with John. It was accidental but still quite ugly.

“Sweetie, what happened to you?” asked Marla, sounding worried.

“Nothing,” said Sierra. She wished she’d had Robbie fix her bruise before she’d left the house but in all the fuss, she’d completely forgotten. “I wasn’t paying attention to where I was going and I face-planted on the sidewalk. I’m fine.”

“That’s it?” said Luca, looking disappointed. “I thought it might be a fight club and I could join in.”

Sierra gave Luca a look and then began dishing out food for Robbie and then herself.

“So, how’s life been treating you two?” asked Marla, as they began eating.

“We’re okay. I made some new friends and I got an A+ on my book report on Percy Jackson at my new school,” said Robbie.

Recently, Robbie had transferred schools. It was proving to be a good decision as everyone seemed so much nicer and welcoming than they had at Robbie’s old school. Robbie was becoming happier, less shy and more outgoing with every passing day.

“Good for you, kiddo. Have you read the last one yet?” asked Luca.
Robbie shook his head. “I’m still on the third one.”

“Trust me, you’ll love it,” said Luca.

Robbie beamed.

Sierra chuckled. Oh to be a kid and enjoy the simplest pleasures in life and not worry about much of anything else. It was truly freeing.

“So, Sierra, I saw Astrid at the grocery store this morning. She seemed unhappy when I asked about you. Did something happen between you guys?” asked Marla.

Sierra took longer than necessary to chew and swallow her bite of food before replying. “We had a falling out a few days ago. It’s nothing to worry about. We’ll be fine.” If or when Sierra could ever convince Astrid to get past the feelings of betrayal Astrid felt from Sierra keeping secrets from her, or at the very least, if Sierra could convince Astrid to drop the matter entirely.

“I see.” Marla moved some of her food around her plate. “So, where’ve you been working these days? It must be quite the job for you to be so busy all the time.”

“It is. It’s—”

Sierra fell silent when Marla held up Sierra’s spare employee badge.

“You dropped this last time you were here,” said Marla. She seemed disappointed. “Why didn’t you tell me you’re working for your uncle? I thought we were getting better at talking.”

Sierra bit back a sigh and resisted the urge to roll her eyes. “We are. But there are still things about my life and my past that I’m not comfortable talking about with anyone. Besides, it’s not any of your business what I do for work or who I work for, and I knew how you’d react. I know you associate Jedikiah with Dad leaving.”

Marla looked hurt, if not angry. “It’s more complicated than that!”

Sensing a fight was about to brew, Robbie and Luca took their dinner dishes to the living room.

“That’s not good enough for me!” snapped Sierra.

Marla sighed. “I don’t trust him, Sierra! And neither should you! Jedikiah’s not the kind of man Robbie should be exposed to!”

Sierra’s eyes darkened with anger. “First of all, don’t lecture me on parenting.” Marla had lost the right to do that a long time ago. “Second, I don’t trust Jedikiah either and FYI, he’s only met Robbie once when he visited me to recruit me. Robbie stays away from him. Third, just because you have issues with Jedikiah, doesn’t mean that I do. He can help me figure out what happened to Dad.”

“Jedikiah’s talking to you about your father?” asked Marla, surprised.

Sierra sighed again. “We’re working up to that. In the meantime, Jedikiah’s paying me a generous salary, he’s given me a new place to live and Robbie’s at a better school where’s he making more friends. So, like it or not, I need Jedikiah right now. But I promise you, there’s nothing dangerous about what I’m doing with him.”

Sierra hoped that her tone and argument was firm enough for Marla to stop asking unwanted
questions and leave her alone. She’d been harsh, but sometimes being harsh was the only way to get through to Marla’s thick skull.

“Fine,” said Marla, admitting defeat. “Why don’t you invite him over for dinner here? That way I can talk to him about what kind of work he has you doing. I can’t make you do it, you’re a grown woman, but for the sake of my peace of mind, I would appreciate it.”

Dinner with Jedikiah? That was going to be loads of fun and that was assuming Sierra could persuade Jedikiah to even do it. Sierra may be Jedikiah’s niece but they weren’t really family and Sierra got the impression that Jedikiah wasn’t the type of guy who liked to do that.

“I’ll talk to him. I can’t do more than that,” said Sierra.

Thankfully, Marla accepted this and the rest of the evening went by without any further arguments or any other incidents.

XXX

That night, Sierra’s slumber was disturbed when Robbie had a nightmare.

He was thrashing out, screaming something terrible in his sleep and in his distress, was sending out a painful telepathic attack that sounded like a high-pitched screaming that threatened to make Sierra’s brain explode.

Sierra wasted no time in teleporting out of bed to her son’s side. “Robbie? Robbie, sweetie, wake up! I’m right here. You’re safe.” When Robbie didn’t responded, Sierra placed her hand on Robbie’s head and repeated the words telepathically.

Robbie’s eyes shot open and he sat up, looking terrified. “Mom, I saw him. I saw him! He was here and he hurt you. He—”

“Shh,” soothed Sierra. She wrapped her arms around Robbie and rubbed his back as he held her tight and cried. “It’s all right, sweetie. It’s okay. I’m right here. It was just a nightmare. Shh.”

Just then, John teleported into the room, wearing a plain T-shirt and sweatpants, and he was looking scared. “I heard you screaming telepathically. Are you guys all right? What happened?”

“We’re fine. Robbie just had a nightmare,” said Sierra. She was glad he’d come. She knew Robbie needed his father as much as he needed his mother right now. “It was a bad one.”

John sat down beside them on the bed and rubbed Robbie’s shoulder as the boy turned to look at him. “Hey, kiddo. Daddy’s here. You want to talk about it?”

Robbie sniffled. “I know it was just a dream, but it felt so real. I saw him.”


Robbie swallowed painfully. “The man who hurt Mom. McCrane. He came back! I saw him in the city! It was him!”

The blood drained from Sierra’s face and she shared a worried look with John. McCrane? Back? It couldn’t be true. McCrane had been on the brink of death after Sierra’s last encounter with him.
Not to mention, Robbie had never had a vision when he was asleep, only when he was awake. It couldn’t be possible. It just couldn’t.

Sierra wiped away her son’s tears with the pads of her thumbs. “It’s all right, honey. McCrane’s not here now, it’s just us. Everything’s fine. Okay?”

Robbie nodded. “Can I sleep with you guys tonight? Please?

Sierra’s face turned bright red as the thought of sharing a bed with John again. She was hesitant but Robbie needed their comfort right now. She looked at John, who also seemed a little nervous but even so, he nodded.

“Sure, sweetie. Why don’t you go get comfy in my bed while I make us some hot chocolate with marshmallows?” It was tradition for them to have hot chocolate after a nightmare. It always helped Robbie sleep better. “John, would you come with me?”

Robbie scurried off to Sierra’s bedroom and his parents went to the kitchen so they could talk while Sierra whipped up hot chocolate with whipped cream and cinnamon. It was quiet for a few moments until Sierra couldn’t take it anymore.

“Please tell me what Robbie saw was just a dream,” she blurted it out. “There’s been no sign of McCrane at all, has there?”

John hesitated but then sighed and shook his head. “I’ve been tracking the news. I figured there’d be no reason to worry you if it turned out to be nothing.”

Sierra’s heart sank. “It’s not nothing, is it?”

John shook his head again. “There’ve been four major explosions moving east. The next big city in line is us, our home. It’s McCrane’s M.O. and Robbie’s visions confirmed it.”

Sierra gripped the edge of the counter so hard her knuckles turned white. There was no denying it now. McCrane, the monster who’d tortured Sierra and nearly killed both her and her unborn baby was back. Sierra was twice as dangerous now and could handle him but she also had twice as much to lose if she failed to stop him.

“Why’s he come back now? Why’s he taken so long to claim his revenge?” asked Sierra. Revenge could be McCrane’s only motive. McCrane had good reason to hate both Sierra and John. If McCrane found out about Robbie, he would undoubtedly use their son in his twisted plans.

“I don’t know,” said John. He gently pulled Sierra away from the counter and had her look into his eyes. “McCrane thinks you’re dead, so that gives us an advantage over him. I’m not going to let him hurt you again or our son.”

Sierra felt the burn of tears in her eyes and she forced them back. “John…can…can you hold me tonight? Please?”

John nodded. “Of course.”

When they were snuggled up in Sierra’s bed with their son and after the hot chocolate had been drunk, John lay in between his ex-girlfriend and their son. Robbie was sound asleep on John’s left side, curled up in the crook of his father’s arm and Sierra was on John’s right side, her head was rested on John’s chest while he stroked her hair. Sierra was eventually lulled to sleep by the soothing sound of John’s heartbeat.
At Ultra the next day, Sierra went off in search of Jedikiah and found him in the nerve center.

While she knew Ultra was the reason McCrane had been weaponized in the first place, Sierra also knew that she had to get Ultra’s help if McCrane was to go down. Plus, she had to breach the topic of Marla’s dinner to him as well.

“Sir, I need to talk to you. Do you have a minute?” asked Sierra.

“No. If you want to talk, then walk with me,” said Jedikiah, briskly, as he was escorted to the parking garage with some of his senior agents. “What is it?”

Sierra sighed. “It’s two things, actually. I need to ask a favor and talk to you about a certain former Ultra agent.” She quickly filled Jedikiah in about Marla’s dinner invitation.

“Dinner?” said Jedikiah, incredulously. “It’s not going to happen. I don’t have time to handhold your mother at the moment, Sierra. Deal with it yourself. Familiarize yourself with Killian McCrane. He’s a suspect in fifteen bombings and is responsible for ten fatalities.”

Darcy attempted to hand Sierra the file, but Sierra pushed it back. “I know about McCrane. John told me everything a long time ago. He and John were the only survivors of the Annex Project, an experiment to weaponize Ultra agents using brutal drug therapies. The Prime Barrier in McCrane’s brain was burnt out, allowing him to kill.” Sierra’s species wasn’t wired for killing but Jedikiah had found a way around that. “He worked with you until he went nuts and on his first rampage.”

“Hmm. Aren’t you a well of information today?” said Darcy, patronizingly.

Sierra ignored Darcy as they stood in front of Jedikiah’s car. “It also what I wanted to talk to you about. According to some research, that maniac’s back and I want to help bring him in. McCrane’s too dangerous to be on the loose. If I can get close to him, I can make him easy for capture. I know I’m still a rookie, but if I’m going to prove that I was brought in for more than just shared blood, then I need get out on the field.”

Jedikiah placed his hand on his chin as he considered this. “You make a good point. Very well. You deal with your mother.”

Sierra was surprised that Jedikiah’s terms were so simple but she didn’t question it. “Yes, sir.”

Jedikiah looked pleased and then slammed his car door shut.

Sierra and the other agents began to walk away but then Sierra heard a bad noise just as Jedikiah started his car. She turned around to see flames quickly growing beneath the black
vehicle. The car was booby-trapped and Jedikiah was about to die.

Quickly, Sierra teleported into the car, grabbed Jedikiah and out to safety just as the car exploded in a mass of flames.

Jedikiah looked shaken and gave Sierra a rare, grateful look as Sierra helped him stand up.

There was no doubt in anyone’s mind now that Killian McCrane, the rogue TP Ultra agent, was back with a vengeance.

XXX

Back at the Lair, John and Cara were watching the security video of Jedikiah’s near-death experience.

Cara, who’d been informed of McCrane’s past, looked terrified.

“It’s got to be him. It’s got to be McCrane,” said John.

“After all this time. McCrane decides to come back for Jedikiah?” said Cara, puzzled.

John nodded. “Well, he certainly has grounds for wanting to see the man incinerated.”

Sierra knocked on the door, making her presence known as she entered the room.

“You couldn’t have waited another two seconds?” asked John. “This is a much easier fight without Jedikiah alive.”

Sierra gave John an incredulous look. What kind of person did he think that she was? “So, what, I’m supposed to let him die? Killing’s not in my DNA, John.” Not to mention that for the time being, Sierra needed Jedikiah alive.

“It’s in Jedikiah’s. Flip the roles, he’d have let you burn,” said John.

Sierra narrowed her eyes. “Well, they weren’t. So, why don’t we focus on the problem at hand? Ultra’s in full lockdown over Killian McCrane’s return. Jedikiah’s agreed to let me be on the team that brings him in.”

Cara looked at Sierra incredulously. “You can’t be serious. Do you know how many agents McCrane tore through when John was at Ultra trying to hunt him down? You shouldn’t be involved in this when it’s Jedikiah’s fault that McCrane’s out there killing humans, the one thing your uncle’s sworn to protect.”

“It’s all the more reason for him to be grateful when I bring that piece of garbage in,” said Sierra. “McCrane’s a psychotic killer. Putting him away is what’s best for everyone and if I’m the one to do it, maybe I can get my uncle off my back and get a higher clearance at Ultra.”

“You’re willing to go up against a killer for the sake of a promotion?” said Cara, incredulously.

Sierra gave Cara a cold look. “No. I’m willing to go up against McCrane because he’s a monster who made me so scared of even considering letting others into my mind and who’s haunted my nightmares for long enough. He needs to be dealt with and quickly. Heaven alone knows what he’ll do if he finds out about Robbie being John’s son.”
Cara was quiet and her eyes glistened with unshed tears. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

Sierra was forgiving but it changed nothing. “I don’t care what it takes. McCrane needs to be stopped for good, with or without your help.”

At that point, John got in between them. “All right. Enough. Cara, keep an eye on things. Sierra, let’s go work out.”

Sierra nodded and followed John. They both needed a chance to work off some of their excess anger and energy.

XXX

Sierra and John were either side of the punching bag in the room.

They were both sweaty and getting more tired by the minute as they turned their emotional pains into weapons of power. And it was no wonder that they were doing this when one considered the past and their pain.

Having suffered horrible trauma at the hands of Killian McCrane and wanting to be free of him once and for all, Sierra was delivering more power to her punches and came close to breaking the bag. For John, it was just as bad as he’d grown upon alongside McCrane and they’d been friends as often as they’d been rivals. John had witnessed Ultra ultimately destroy McCrane and they’d almost taken John down with him.

Sierra kept flashing back to the first and last time she’d met McCrane.

Eight years ago...

It was sunset in the city of Manhattan.

Sierra was crying as she walked alone on the streets. Her life was a mess.

She was not human, she’d had to drop out of school, she’d been kicked out of her childhood home, her boyfriend had ended their relationship out of the blue and ditched her, she had neither a job and she had very little money and to top it all off she’d recently discovered she was pregnant with John’s baby.

Sierra tenderly stroked her stomach. It wasn’t visibly swollen yet, but she could sense the little life growing inside her. John had broken her heart and she didn’t know how she was going to survive, but one way or another, she would. If not for her sake, then for the sake of her most precious treasure, her child.

“Nice night, isn’t it?”

Sierra whipped her head around to see Killian McCrane, a crazy fugitive from Ultra that John had warned her about, leaning against the alley wall. McCrane had been one of Ultra’s best agents, but he was also a victim of child abuse and he’d turned that anger into dangerous
weapons. McCrane had been the only other survivor of the Annex Project, which turned him into the perfect weapon as well as a madman. Ultra wanted him swept under the rug and John had been in charge of capturing McCrane, which led McCrane to feel that John had betrayed him.

McCrane had a look on his face that unsettled Sierra, like the cat who’d swallowed the canary.

“We haven’t been properly introduced. Name’s McCrane, Killian McCrane,” he said. “You must the girl I saw in John’s mind, his secret girlfriend.”

Sierra began backing away. “You’ve made a mistake. I’m not this guy’s…John’s girl. I’m not anyone’s girl, secret or otherwise.”

McCrane began approaching her. “Oh, I beg to differ. Sorry to have to do this. You really are gorgeous. But if I’m going to hurt John, then I have to hurt his heart and that, unfortunately, is you.”

Quickly, Sierra kicked McCrane where it was most painful and telekinetically tossed him into a dumpster. She ran for her life and when she was sure she wouldn’t get caught, she teleported away. But when Sierra arrived at her destination, a rooftop on a famous building in the next city over, Sierra clutched her shoulder in pain. A knife had been thrown and just cut her. Before Sierra could react, she was suddenly assaulted telepathically.

It was McCrane. He’d tracked her down and was pulling out all the stops to make sure Sierra suffered before he killed her and by doing so, ensured that John suffered.

Sierra screamed as McCrane broke through her defenses and violated her mind. McCrane saw each and every one of Sierra’s memories, felt everything she felt and then he turned it on her. She was forced to endure her worse nightmares and experience horrible pain. Despite Sierra’s efforts and her struggles to get free, she was starting to fade as McCrane pinned her down to the ground and he was about to end it.

Just when Sierra realized she and her unborn baby were going to die, something incredible and unexpected happened. A fire ignited in her and she grasped McCrane’s face as power surged through her. McCrane cried out in horribly agony as his health deteriorated and he pulled away.

Sierra sat up, trembling from McCrane’s assault on her mind and gasping for breath as she thanked her lucky stars that she and her baby were physically unharmed.

“What did you do to me?” yelled McCrane. “You little—”

McCrane fired off his gun, but when Sierra thrust out her hands, the bullet stopped in mid-air unexpectedly. She’d frozen it in time. How she’d done that, Sierra had no idea. But she did know that she wasn’t going to die. She felt stronger, far more powerful than she could’ve imagined. She wasn’t helpless anymore. She had to fight and she was going to make McCrane pay for what he’d done.

A telepath could give someone multiple spontaneous aneurysms if they were strong enough and focused hard enough, and that was what Sierra did. She lashed out at McCrane, causing him horrible pain, and when he was on his knees clutching his head, she decked him and threw him across the roof, rendering him unconscious.

McCrane was in a horrible state thanks to Sierra, but she did not kill him. But she also knew she couldn’t just leave him and run the risk of him coming after her again, so she knelt down and placed her hands on his temples. She then placed false images in McCrane’s mind. He would think
she’d died from the bullet he’d fired. He would think he’d won, he’d leave town and she would live. It was the only way to survive.

Present day…

Sierra yelled as she blasted the punching bag, breaking the chain and sending both it and John across the room.

“Ow,” moaned John.

“Oh, jeez.” Sierra felt like crawling under a rock from embarrassment as she got the punching bag off John and held him up. “Sorry. Are you okay?”

John nodded. “My back’s a little bruised, but it’s all right. I’ve had worse.”

“Well, even so. I should fix them,” said Sierra. “Turn around.”

John turned around and Sierra placed her hand on John’s back where the bruises were forming. John trembled and goosebumps broke out on his skin as Sierra mended his injuries.

“Thanks,” said John, quietly.

“No problem. I really am sorry. It was just an accident,” said Sierra.

“Good. I’d hate to see what you’d do if you actually meant to do something,” joked John. While John didn’t enjoy being injured, he was glad to see Sierra was channeling her emotional pain into power and slowly getting past it.

They both laughed but Sierra quickly became serious again.

“How’re you doing with all this?” asked Sierra. They’d been so focused on Sierra and her problems with McCrane that they hadn’t given much thought to John’s pains. Sierra didn’t need her psychic connection with John to know that he was hurting and keeping it bottled up. “Is there anything you want to talk about?”

“I’m fine,” said John, briskly. “Besides, what’s there to talk about?”

Sierra gave John a disbelieving look. “Come on, John, it’s me. McCrane was your friend and if I hadn’t put those memories into his head, if I’d done what had to be done, things would’ve been so different.”

John might’ve found Sierra sooner, made amends and they might’ve raised Robbie together like they should’ve in first place had McCrane not attempted to murder Sierra and had she not implanted the false memories in McCrane’s mind. In a way, McCrane was just as responsible for the rift in Sierra and John’s relationship as they were.

“Was, past tense. He lost that right when Ultra turned him into a killer and he almost killed you,” said John. There was anger and regret in his eyes. “And I don’t care what you had to do to survive, he would’ve killed you and Robbie if you hadn’t. My only regret is not catching him. I should’ve killed him when I had the chance. Instead, I screwed up and he got away from me. I won’t let that happen again.”
When John had caught up with McCrane, he’d gloated to John of how he’d killed Sierra. John had refused to believe it until he’d read McCrane’s mind and saw the false memories. Normally any trained TP Ultra agent knew the difference between a fake memory and a real one, but Sierra’s work had been too good. John’s moment of grief at Sierra’s demise had left him vulnerable to attack. McCrane took advantage of John’s pain and knocked him out, allowing McCrane the chance to escape.

Sierra’s face softened as she placed her hand against John’s cheek. “We’ll find him, John, I promise. If Ultra doesn’t, then you and I will, I swear it. Do you believe me?”

Letting McCrane go all those years ago had been a mistake on Sierra’s part. She wished she hadn’t done it, but there was nothing she could do to change the past. However, there was nothing that would keep her from making things so they could make a better future.

“I do.” John’s face softened as he covered Sierra’s hand with his own. “Sierra…”

Sierra’s breath caught in her throat as John moved in closer and rested his forehead against hers. She knew what was happening, but it just couldn’t happen.

“John…no,” she whispered. Sierra was regretful but no less firm as she pulled away. “We can’t.”

“Why not?” asked John, sounding hurt.

“You know why.”

Sierra had felt the pull of her heart just now, but she couldn’t give in. Part of her still hurt from their past. She couldn’t just ignore that. She and John were still becoming friends again. It was too soon to begin rekindling their romance. Sierra had forgiven John for their past, but she wasn’t ready to make something more of their future.

John’s face was unreadable. “Don’t say you don’t love me.”

“You know I won’t,” said Sierra. As much as she wanted to sometimes, Sierra couldn’t deny that she still loved John more than she could say. “But I can’t do this. Not now.” Perhaps not ever.

“Then take your time,” said John. He looked sorrowful by Sierra’s decision but at least he was respecting her boundaries. “I don’t care how long it takes before I’ve earned your trust again. I’ll wait for you forever if I have to.”

Sierra’s face was unreadable and before she could reply, her pager went off. “That’s work. I’ve got to go. I’ll see you later.”

And with that, Sierra left the Lair. Suddenly work at Ultra seemed very appealing.

XXX

When Sierra arrived at Ultra, Darcy was waiting for her at the nerve center.

The older woman was crouching down by computer and McCrane’s image was on the screen.

“I got your message. What’s happened?”
“We just got a hit from a PD camera, there’s been a facial match for McCrane,” said Darcy. “He walked into a downtown warehouse five minutes ago. Are you ready for this?”

“As I’ll ever be,” said Sierra.

Sierra was apprehensive about seeing McCrane again but she was no less determined to get McCrane out of her life once and for all. She wasn’t the same weak girl she used to be. She was stronger now and McCrane would regret ever crossing her path.

When they arrived at the warehouse, the Ultra agents took tactical positions like a S.W.A.T. team did. They lined up outside the warehouse, aware from the windows or anywhere that allowed the person inside an outside view.

Sierra tightly gripped the stun gun she’d been issued while she stood behind Darcy. Her orders were to stay in line and stay silent, but Sierra had no intention of following them. For too long she’d been afraid of McCrane and now she was going to end it for good.

When the kill squad got the warehouse door opened, they all trailed in one-by-one and then went off in different directions in pairs. They did a quick sweep of the room, but when they found nothing, Sierra did a telepathic search and then her head perked up when she got a signal.

“What is it?” asked Darcy.

“McCrane,” whispered Sierra.

Right on cue, Sierra saw McCrane’s shadow and immediately chased after him.

“Sierra!”

Sierra ignored Darcy as she ran into the other room, only to find that it was empty. Darcy followed close behind and then both women turned around at the sound of a familiar voice.

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t John’s little girlfriend back from the dead.”

McCrane was standing in the doorway, dressed in dark-colored clothes and sporting facial hair, a difference from the last time Sierra had met him and that wasn’t the only thing. McCrane was sickly pale and still showing the same injuries Sierra had left him the last time—he was covered in pus and boils, patches of his skin was falling off and bloody and so much more. Clearly, he’d been unable to heal properly after their last meeting.

McCrane narrowed his eyes at Darcy. “This doesn’t concern you. Get lost.”

Darcy tried to shoot a tranquilizer at McCrane, but he just lazily tossed her across the room with one flick of his hand. Darcy hit a desk and landed painfully on the floor.

“Leave her alone,” growled Sierra. “This is between us.”

“Got that right,” said McCrane, as they circled around each other like wolves. “I don’t know if I should be insulted or impressed that you managed to overcome me and trick me the last time we met. Either way, I promise you, it won’t happen again.”

Sierra very much doubted it.

“So, where’s John?” asked McCrane. “If we’re going to have a proper reunion, we need to have the whole party here. This isn’t complete without him. We have unfinished business.”
“John isn’t here, but by the time I’m through with you, you’ll wish it was him instead of me,” snarled Sierra. She let out a ferocious cry as she thrust out her hand and tossed McCrane around like a rag doll until she finally dropped him on the floor.

McCrane groaned in pain. “Nice trick. Jedikiah teach you that one?”

“Shut up,” spat Sierra, as she kicked him in the head.

Sierra knelt down and was about to slap the power suppression cuffs onto McCrane when he suddenly blasted Sierra into the wall and then fired off a bullet into Darcy’s chest when she tried to stand up and capture him. McCrane then disappeared before Sierra had a chance to even try and capture him.

Sierra’s head ached like nobody’s business as she rose up. She felt disgusted with herself for being so stupid and reckless. It was her own fault that McCrane had gotten away and she knew it. Jedikiah was going to be furious.

But she put all that aside as she focused her attention on her partner, who was whimpering in pain as she clutched her bullet injury.

“Hold still,” warned Sierra. “This will feel strange, but it’ll fix you.”

For once, Darcy made no form of protest and nor did she lecture Sierra. She was just silent and she held perfectly still as Sierra healed Darcy’s bullet wound.

“Thank you,” murmured Darcy. Her voice was unusually soft and kind. “I owe you one.”

Sierra was tempted to tell Darcy to forget it, that the senior agent would’ve done the same thing, but she knew it was a lie. So, instead she said something else, “If you want to repay me, then check Ultra’s computer files, and see if McCrane went through them.”

Given how McCrane had reacted to Sierra’s presence, no surprise or shock, just anger, Sierra had the horrible suspicion that Jedikiah wasn’t McCrane’s intended target.

Much to her surprise, Darcy nodded.

Great. She’d finally won over Darcy. Now if only she could do the same with Jedikiah.

XXX

When they reported back to Ultra, Jedikiah hadn’t been pleased but he’d been a lot less angry than Sierra had expected, which was a good thing. Still, despite her insistence that she was fine, Sierra had to get checked over by the doctors while Jedikiah and Darcy watched.

“No concussion. No broken bones,” announced the doctor. “Aside from some bruises, you’re in good health, Miss Jameson. I would, however, recommend you get some rest.”

Yeah, I’m just full of good luck. Not! Sierra faked a smile. “Thanks, doc.”

“Well, you’re very lucky, Sierra,” said Jedikiah. “You don’t know how lucky.”

“I’ve got an idea,” said Sierra.
Considering McCrane’s skills and his being able to kill, Sierra had gotten off very luckily.

Jedikiah beckoned for Sierra to come with him. “May we talk?”

Sierra nodded and followed Jedikiah to a corner of the room. “What is it, sir?”

“Agent Nichols mentioned you had a very interesting conversation with our fugitive. So, as you can imagine, I’m curious about how you and McCrane seemed so familiar with each other,” said Jedikiah. “Remember when we agreed to leave your past in the past unless it became relevant to your work here at Ultra? I think now’s that time, wouldn’t you agree?”

Sierra sighed and nodded. She was quiet for a few moments as she figured out how to begin. “Not long after John and I ended it, when I was still pregnant, McCrane caught me by surprise. He’d read John’s mind and thought we were still together. McCrane wanted to hurt John so McCrane attacked me. I defended myself as best I could but McCrane still got inside my head and he did unspeakable things to me. Things…that you can’t begin to imagine.”

Sierra swallowed painfully as hot tears came to her eyes. It’d been years, but she still had nightmares about McCrane’s attack. That night when he’d attacked her, Sierra had been so afraid that McCrane would succeed in his plan and kill her and her baby like he’d killed so many others.

Much to Sierra’s surprise, Jedikiah handed her a tissue and sounded gentle and soothing as he spoke. “Take a deep breath. It’s all right.”

Sierra didn’t question Jedikiah’s out-of-the-blue benevolence. Her uncle’s mind was just too warped to understand. “McCrane was brutal. Just when I thought I was going to lose my baby and die, my powers evolved.” That and Sierra suspected that her son’s powers had also manifested and he’d helped his mother save both their lives. “I was able to use my ability of biological manipulation to save myself and my baby. McCrane was left on the verge of death and unconscious by the time I was done. I couldn’t kill him but I also couldn’t risk him coming after me again, so I put false memories in his head to make him think I’d died and then I ran. I wanted to believe that was the end of it.”

“But it wasn’t.”

Sierra shook her head. “No. That’s why I wanted to help catch him. I need him gone, not just for the sake of the innocent lives he’ll take if we don’t, but for my own sanity. I’ll understand if you think I’m too close to this now.”

Jedikiah shook his head. “Quite the contrary. I think your desire for vengeance gives you an edge. If it were me, I’d want the same thing. However, I would strongly advise that you work on curbing that anger. I understand you want McCrane gone, but the real world is full of dark, warped, cunning individuals and what brings them down is not puppy-dog eagerness but tactics, training and experience. Understand?”

Sierra nodded, relieved that she wasn’t being punished or taken off the case. “Perfectly, sir. I’ll be more careful in the future.”

“Good. Now, two things before you go. Did McCrane seem surprised or shocked at all when he saw you in the warehouse?”

“No, not at all.”

Jedikiah didn’t like the sound of that. “That’s not good. I’ll get our surveillance footage checked. It may be that I wasn’t McCrane’s intended target after all.”
Sierra shrugged. “Your guess is as good as mine, sir. So, what was the other thing you wanted to ask me about?”

“This dinner with your mom. Do you think she can do tonight?” asked Jedikiah.

Sierra was taken aback as she nodded. “Probably. I’ll talk to her and call you when I have the info. Anything else?”

Jedikiah made a face. “Maybe drop a hint to stay clear of the Brussel sprouts?”

Sierra laughed as she nodded and then departed.

XXX

Moments after Sierra left, Jedikiah turned to Darcy.

“Dig up all surveillance footage for this facility up to and after the explosion,” he ordered.

Darcy nodded and began doing just that on her tablet. “What’s your thinking, sir?”

“That if McCrane wanted me dead, I wouldn’t still be here,” said Jedikiah. He knew McCrane. He’d trained the maniac, practically raised him and therefore was one of those who knew him best of all. The car bomb had been too simple for McCrane. If he’d truly wanted Jedikiah to die, Killian wouldn’t have risked Jedikiah being rescued, which meant something else was afoot. “I’m starting to doubt that I’m his target.”

Jedikiah hadn’t wanted to say anything to Sierra until he had concrete proof, lest he risk upsetting her and the delicate state of their agreement. But if Jedikiah was right, Jedikiah wasn’t McCrane’s sole target and he hoped to heaven he was wrong.

Darcy nodded. “I’m on it, sir.”

And with that, Jedikiah and Darcy went about their business until Darcy pulled Jedikiah to the ops room with a grim look on her face.

“Sir, we have a situation,” she said. She pulled up the facility’s security footage from before and after the explosion. “The explosion happens here. Jenkins…” Jenkins was one of the dayshift security guards assigned to monitor the cameras and computer files. “…reacts. He leaves his post. And there’s McCrane.”

Right on cue, McCrane teleported into the secured room and immediately began searching through Ultra’s files. This did not bode well.

“He searched for two files but stole three,” said Darcy. “The third file was heavily encrypted. He almost got caught with the time it took to break through the firewall, but McCrane still got what he wanted.”

Jedikiah inhaled, deeply and slowly. “Whose files did he steal?” Jedikiah had a horrid suspicion but he needed it to be confirmed.

Darcy looked as grim as her boss, if not more. “John Young’s, Sierra and Robbie Jameson’s.”
This was bad, if not worse than Jedikiah thought. McCrane had found Robbie’s file, a file that Jedikiah had sworn to Sierra would be kept safe and away from unwanted, prying eyes so her child would be safe. Now McCrane had found it, which meant he knew that John and Sierra had had a child together, which also meant McCrane had found another target, one he could use as leverage.

Jedikiah refused to let that happen, which left only one option: they had to find McCrane and quickly, before it was too late.

XXX

Fifteen years ago...

It was time for sparring practice.

John and McCrane were supposed to use their ability to teleport while beating the snot out of each other. John was doing poorly compared to his partner. McCrane was bigger, more aggressive and also merciless. Though they were sometimes friends, McCrane was often jealous of Jedikiah’s affection for John and sometimes took it out on the younger boy.

John tried to punch McCrane, but McCrane teleported to behind John and punched him in the back. He took advantage of John’s moment of weakness to nail him in the stomach, winding John. He continued to punch and kick John until the younger boy was down on all fours.

Jedikiah, who was watching with some concern on his face, shook his head.

John was breathing hard as he stood up and took a defensive stance. Before he could blink, McCrane decked him multiple times from the top of John’s head to his stomach. In one final desperate move, John ran and then teleported to behind McCrane, but McCrane grabbed John and pinned him to the floor.

“Keep your guard up!” snarled McCrane, as he punched John in the face.

Jedikiah clapped his hands, catching the boys’ attention. “All right, all right, all right. Time!” he said. “C’mere kid.”

John rose up and walked towards Jedikiah. John knew he was about to get lectured on how he kept getting his butt handed to him and immediately tried to defend himself. “I know what you’re going to say, but it’s not my fault. Killian’s twice my size! I don’t have enough guard to go around!”

Jedikiah gave John a sympathetic look. “I know, kiddo. It’s not fair. But you see, Killian’s learned to turn his fear and aggression into a weapon. You figured out how to use your powers to survive. But the real world is full of dark, warped, cunning individuals, son.” Jedikiah placed his hand on John’s shoulder. “Look, you are our youngest recruit ever and I have no doubt that you are destined for great things.”

John smiled under Jedikiah’s praise, but the man wasn’t finished yet.

“But tap into that anger and aggression. Don’t be afraid of it,” said Jedikiah, as John nodded
After picking up Robbie from school, Sierra dropped him off at Marla’s house for some quality time with his grandmother and uncle. Sierra was hesitant to leave Robbie there with McCrane on the loose, but the kid had really been looking forward to it and after the night that Robbie had had, Sierra hadn’t had the heart to refuse him. She, did, however make Robbie promise to call her and teleport to the Lair at any sign of trouble.

When she arrived at the Lair, Sierra informed John of what had happened. John, having grown up alongside McCrane and knew his tactics, didn’t think it was a coincidence that McCrane had simply led Sierra and the rest of Ultra to the warehouse and decided to check the place out.

“You don’t have to be here, you know,” said John, as they descended the stairs in the warehouse. “If I find Killian, I promise to do to him what he did to you and knock him out so you can turn him into Ultra, be the big heroine.”

Sierra chuckled. “Well, I’d love to take you up on that offer but McCrane and I have unfinished business. He almost killed my partner. I want to personally make sure he goes down.”

John nodded understandingly.

Sierra then decided to broach a subject that had been bothering her. “You know, all those times you talked about Ultra, what you did there, I never really understood why you stuck around for so long if you hated it so much.” Considering what kind of person John was—kind, loyal, self-sacrificing, protective and brave—it was hard to picture him working for someone as heartless as Jedikiah.

John sighed. “It was out of a sense of obligation, to be honest. Jedikiah took me in from less than nothing. He gave me a roof over my head, enough to eat and a lot of the time, he was kind and fatherly to me. It was all new to me and I loved it. But then it went from being Superkids Summer Camp to people dying. Breakouts getting experimented on, their powers extracted and then they were killed. It was the opposite of what your dad wanted.”

“And what did my dad want?”

“A place where our kind could be safe,” replied John. “Right before he disappeared, Roger asked me to fulfill his vision, to protect our people. After I thought I lost you, I decided to fulfill his wishes and that’s what I’ve been doing ever since, trying make things better the way I think he would’ve wanted.”

Sierra’s face softened but before she could reply, she frowned when a certain noise hit her ears. “Do you hear that? It sounds like music.”

John frowned as he nodded and then they went to the nearest window. A truckload of people, both adults and kids of all ages, were piling into the building next door.

“We’re right over the Youth Orchestra Auditorium,” said John.
Sierra had a sickening feeling. “McCrane’s going to blow it up, isn’t he?”

John looked disgusted as he nodded. “Definitely. Follow me.”

Sierra followed John into the next room, where they discovered that the concert hall was adjacent to the warehouse. There was an empty cello case on a table and beneath it was the flyer for the event that was about to take place in that building.

“McCrane wasn’t just hiding here. He was casing his next target,” said John, softly.

Sierra felt sick to her stomach. Blowing up a building full of kids. Was there no end to McCrane’s cruelty and madness?

“Johnny boy!”

Sierra’s head whipped around to see McCrane on the staircase up above, wearing a true villain’s evil grin on his face.

“Long time,” said McCrane. “And I see you brought your girlfriend with you as well. Perfect. It’s just what I wanted.”

“Watch your back, Sierra!” warned John.

McCrane teleported down to Sierra’s level, attempting to catch her by surprise but Sierra was ready for him. She clenched her hand into a fist, causing McCrane to clutch his chest with pain as Sierra was squeezing his heart. She then kicked him in the head, knocking him down.

McCrane looked furious as he rose up. “You’re going to pay for that, you cheating little—!” He moved to strike at Sierra, but John got to McCrane first. John teleported to McCrane, jammed his knee into McCrane’s stomach and then tossed him into the wall.

“Touch her again and I’ll put a bullet into your head, Killian,” growled John. The ex-Ultra agent had been itching for revenge for a long time. He just needed an excuse. “You’re looking for me. What do you want?”

“That is no way to start a reunion,” said McCrane as he picked himself up. “Maybe I just wanted to see you, catch up. Ask a few questions. Like, why’d you leave Ultra? What did he do, John, to finally push you over the edge?”

“Will you turn yourself in if I tell you?” asked John.

“You were his golden boy. Must’ve been pretty bad if you couldn’t stomach it,” said McCrane.

John ran and then teleported to McCrane but this time, McCrane got the jump on John. He teleported to the back of John and kicked him down.

“I’m back for you, John. When I discovered you were no longer hunting me, I needed to know why. So I stole your files. Imagine my surprise when I discovered you left the company and that your little girlfriend is Jedikiah’s niece. And that’s not all I discovered, John,” said McCrane. “You’re a fugitive now, just like me.”

John’s eyes darkened with anger. “The hell I am.”

“And that makes you a man without a country!” said McCrane, Something strange then happened, McCrane became desperate and pleading. “Join me, John! C’mon, it’ll just be like old
times, the two of us working together.”

John snorted. He would never work with McCrane, not after what that scumbag did to Sierra. “For what? What could we possibly work together for?”

“Revenge,” said McCrane, furiously. “Jedikiah, for starters. As soon as his filthy nieces fixes me—” McCrane shot Sierra a dirty look. “—we can burn that place to the ground!”

Sierra scoffed. Just how stupid was McCrane? For all his strategy skills, he was an idiot. “You really think after what you did to me, that I’m going to heal you? Why can’t you do it yourself?”

“You think I haven’t tried?!” yelled McCrane. “Everywhere I’ve gone, I’ve seen every doctor of every profession! None of them can make me better, only you or someone with your ability can make me better. Unless you fix me, I’m dead in less than a month. I want my strength back, and you’re going to give it to me!”

“Never,” spat Sierra. She would never heal McCrane, not in a million years. He deserved to die a slow, painful death after what he’d done. “I won’t do it and you can’t make me.”

“And I won’t join you,” said John, his voice was as hard as a flint. “Not after all you’ve done. Jedikiah might be a monster but you’re no better than he is!”

McCrane looked furious. “Well, then I guess I’ll just have to apologize in advance, then, and find someone else to fix me.” He pointed his finger towards the wall to his left. “That what you were looking for, you two?”

Before they could question McCrane, he disappeared.

Sierra and John looked at the six support beams that McCrane had been pointing at and were horrified to see six bombs, all set off to go at once in less than a minute.

John acted quickly. He broke open a fire extinguisher case with his elbow and picked up a large piece of the broken glass.

“John, there’s twenty seconds left. What’re you doing?” demanded Sierra.

John handed her the piece of glass. “The bombs are in a circuit. They need to be disarmed all at once. Cut the black wire in the right in the middle at the exact moment I cut the other five. A fraction of a second early or late and we’re looking at the tenth of a megaton.”

Sierra did as instructed. “I take it you’ve done this before?”

“It’s been a while, but yes,” said John. “I just need to build up to it, gauge the distances. Listen for my signal, Sierra.”

John took position in the center of the room and then Sierra saw something incredible she couldn’t describe as John suddenly teleported across the other five support beams simultaneously before he shouted out, “NOW!”

Sierra sliced through the black wire with just a second to spare as John landed painfully on the floor. The physical strain from what he’d had to do had left John depleted of his energy and he was weak as a young kitten.

Sierra ran to John’s side, helped him stand and lean against her. “Are you all right?”

Sierra helped John sit down in the nearest chair so he could rest. “What was McCrane hoping to accomplish here? Six bombs all at once. What was he trying to do, send a message?”

John shook his head. “He was testing me, seeing if I was still a worth adversary.”

“Well, I think we’ve both proved him right,” said Sierra. Just then her phone went off. “Hang on, it’s my mom. One sec.” She hit the receive call button and pressed the phone to her ear. “Hey, Mom. What is it?”

John’s heart skipped a beat when the blood drained from Sierra’s face as she listened to her mother’s phone call. “What’s happened?” he asked, with a growing sense of dread.

Sierra looked shaken as she hung up the phone. “The police are at my mother’s house. There’s been a break-in. Robbie’s been taken. McCrane took our son.”

XXX

It was a disaster.

Sierra’s earlier suspicions had been confirmed. McCrane hadn’t intended to kill Jedikiah, the car bomb had just been a distraction so he could go through Ultra’s files. He’d only been looking for John’s but when he found Sierra’s name, McCrane’s curiosity caused him to search deeper, leading him to discover the truth of his last encounter with Sierra and find the heavily encrypted file on Robbie. McCrane had broken through it and discovered John’s connection to the boy.

With the information at McCrane’s fingertips, it’d been easy for him to track down Sierra’s family. He’d launched an attack on Marla’s house during which he’d trapped Luca in the closet and forced Robbie to go with him and undo the damage Sierra had done, claiming he would kill Marla and Luca if Robbie didn’t comply. Robbie had been forced to agree and left with McCrane. McCrane had also left a message behind: if he didn’t get John alone and soon, Robbie would pay the price.

Marla cancelled dinner as a result and called the police. She blamed herself for Robbie’s kidnapping and swore she’d do all she could to help. Sierra didn’t fault Marla for what happened. If anything, she was angry with herself for not making sure Robbie was safer, and she was furious with Jedikiah for being so reckless with the files. She didn’t care that Jedikiah was her boss and could easily kill her, Sierra confronted Jedikiah and threatened to expose Ultra and make him beg for death and worse if he didn’t make things right and soon.

Jedikiah disliked being threatened by his employee and niece, but nevertheless, he deleted the file on Robbie from Ultra’s server and had every resource at Ultra working to find McCrane and Robbie while Sierra and Cara tried to use their combined powers to locate Robbie, but it was all fruitless. No one at Ultra could locate McCrane or Robbie and it was logical to guess that Robbie was being kept somewhere that TP powers didn’t work, for there was no other reason why Robbie wouldn’t answer. John was also trying his hardest to find his son, but to no avail. There was no sign of them.

Later that afternoon while Sierra was at her desk, trying to locate McCrane, Jedikiah got her attention by placing his hand on her shoulder.
“Did you find anything?” asked Sierra, without looking up.

“No, but I might’ve found a way for us to get ahead of McCrane if you’re willing to listen.”

Sierra sighed and turned to look at her uncle. “What’ve you found, sir?”

Jedikiah took a seat across from Sierra. “I have a task for you. John Young, Robbie’s dad. Is there any way you can get him a message? I know it’s a lot to ask, but you did bring in his most recent girlfriend, you were the last person to see his people and you are his ex. Can you contact him?”

Sierra swallowed painfully and tried to conceal her nervousness. “I can try, but you know what John’s like. Once he’s hidden himself, he gets dug in pretty deep.”

“I know, but even so, I don’t think Ultra can take out McCrane alone. So, I need you to arrange a meeting between John and I, if you can. If you find him, tell John I’m willing to meet at the location of his choice, blindfolded and alone. I’ll call a temporary ceasefire for Robbie’s sake,” said Jedikiah. “John may not be part of your lives anymore, but I imagine that like any good father, John would be prepared to take a few risks for his son’s life.”

*You’re right about that. There’s nothing John won’t do for Robbie’s sake. He’s a good father.*

“I’ll see what I can do,” said Sierra.

Desperate times called for desperate measures but there was no way this was going to go smoothly.

XXX

When Sierra met up with John, Cara and Russell at the Lair and informed them of Jedikiah’s proposal. Their reactions were just as Sierra had predicated.

“No! No way, it’s a trap!” said Russell.

“What you just said could be interpreted in the negative, meaning there is no possibility of it being a trap,” said TIM.

Russell scowled at the supercomputer. “I meant, no way it isn’t a trap, you literal-minded hunk of crap!” he snapped.

John, who’d been quietly standing in front of Sierra with his arms folded across his chest, spoke up. “Where does he want this meeting?”

“You’re not actually considering going?” said Cara, incredulously.

Sierra gave Cara a warning look before turning to John. “Your call. I’ll teleport him in blindfolded.”

“Hey, I want to save Robbie as much as everyone else here, but we don’t work with these butchers! Seriously, how did I become the voice of reason around here?” said Russell.

Russell was ignored.
“Noodle Shop, five o’clock,” said John.

And with that, John walked away, intending to head to the Noodle Shop. Cara followed and Sierra attempted to do the same, but Russell pulled Sierra back so they could map out logistics and security for the arranged meeting.

Cara grabbed John’s arm, stopping him in his tracks and forcing him to look at her. “John, talk to me. What’s this about?”

John placed his hands on his hips and shrugged. “I’m out of ideas on how to find McCrane.”

“As much as Jedikiah wants McCrane, he wants you more,” reminded Cara. “I don’t get it. He took a shot at you, he’s blackmailing Sierra to work for him and he tried to kill me and yet you still jump to when he calls. What aren’t you telling me? What is his hold over you?”

John sighed. “I don’t expect you to understand, Cara, you’re not a parent. McCrane has Robbie, my son. I lost him once and I will not lose him again. Now if that means I have to work with Jedikiah to get my child back, then so be it.”

Cara looked hurt. “I love Robbie like he was my own. I want him safe too. But working with Jedikiah isn’t just dangerous, it’s reckless. We can find another way.”

John shook his head. Cara didn’t understand. How could she? “I’m sorry, Cara, but my decision’s final. I’m going, alone.”

Without waiting for a reply, John left the Lair and went straight to the Noodle Shop. Fifteen minutes later, Jedikiah arrived on Sierra’s arm, blindfolded as promise.

Jedikiah took off the blindfold and sat down beside John at the bar. “Hello, John. You’re looking well. You—”

“What do you want?” interrupted John.

Jedikiah paused for a moment. “Well, in case you haven’t heard, your friend Killian’s back in town.”

“I know,” said John.

“And he’s taken yours and Sierra’s son because he wants to get at you,” said Jedikiah.

John’s face was unreadable and nor did he reply but he did seemed to tense up.

“You can relax, John. When Sierra joined Ultra, I swore to her that no harm would come to her family and friends and I’m a man of my word,” said Jedikiah. “Besides, Sierra’s made it perfectly clear that the two of you have been over for quite some time. So, there’s no real threat or reason to go back on my word, is there?”

“Exactly,” said John. He silently prayed Jedikiah would believe that. If Jedikiah knew of Sierra’s true loyalties…John didn’t even want to think about the consequences. “Anyway, I doubt you came here to talk about my former relationships. So, I repeat, what do you want?”

“Well, I would like to avoid sacrificing the twenty or so agents it would take to get to him without you,” said Jedikiah.

“From where I sit, that’s a win,” said John, coolly.
Jedikiah sighed. "Look, McCrane is after you. Why can’t we use that to our mutual advantage?"

John scoffed incredulously. "McCrate can’t get me."

"Oh, but he can. Through your son,” said Jedikiah. “If you don’t do what he wants, he’ll kill Robbie. I don’t think that’s something you want, is it?” When John looked away, Jedikiah continued, “And let’s not forget, McCrane’s being reckless. How long before he’s blown off the lid on your kind? All of that, that’s both of our problems. So, what you say, you and me call a temporary cease fire?"

John was willing to admit that Jedikiah was right on all accounts. McCrane hated John, he could and most certainly do anything to hurt John, including harming Robbie or worse, killing the boy. And was just as bad was McCrane’s recklessness. Exposure of the Tomorrow People to the human race was not an option at all. It was too risky and far too dangerous. But just because John was willing to agree to Jedikiah’s terms didn’t mean John didn’t have some of his own.

"The extent of us working together will be you providing me with Ultra resources so I can track him down,” said John.

Jedikiah looked amused and chuckled as he folded his arms across his chest. “You and your band of sewer rats running point? Not a chance, John.”

John shook his head. “No need to involve anyone else but me on this one.”

Jedikiah gave John an incredulous look. “He’ll shred you alone, kid.”

John smirked. “That’s a win for you, also.”

Jedikiah winced. “Oh, come on. It doesn’t have to be this way. We can work together, find common ground son.”

John gave Jedikiah a cold look. “I’m not your son. The only reason I’m here is because you have resources that I need to save my son’s life. I may not be part of it, but I’m not about to risk him dying because of you. Besides, you’re not in a position to refuse my terms.”

“Meaning?” asked Jedikiah, not liking John’s tone.

John smirked again. “Sierra. She’s worse than any angry mother bear. We both know what she’s capable of. She’s tearing the world apart trying to get Robbie back as we speak. What do you think she’ll do to you and to Ultra if you don’t bring back your grandnephew in one piece?"

Jedikiah was forced to concede to John’s point. Sierra was a force to be reckoned with and if any harm fell to Robbie, she could argue that Jedikiah had violated the terms of their agreement and disappear forever or expose Ultra’s actions to the world if she wanted or worse, use her abilities to make Jedikiah’s life a living nightmare and a very short one at that.

“Find McCrane, then I’ll handle it,” said John, firmly. “No agents.”

Jedikiah gave John a disbelieving look. “So, all those years meant nothing to you? All the knowledge I imparted? The training? I raised you, son. I saved your life. Have you forgotten that?”

“How could I?” spat John.

There had been a time in John’s early years at Ultra when he’d left the program and went back to his foster dad’s, but it’d ended in a disaster. Jacob hadn’t wanted John back and there’d been a
fight. John had had to use his powers to defend himself before Jedikiah shot Jacob to save John’s life. It had been a harsh reminder of the reality of the world and the true meaning in the law of nature, kill or be killed. John was led to believe that Jedikiah was the only human who’d ever accept him but it was all a lie, just like everything else.

John rose up from his seat. “You have my terms. Take it or leave it.”

“Fine!” said Jedikiah, quickly. “We’ll do it your way. We’ll continue as we’ve been doing, putting every agent on him, every resource. When we get a fix on him, we’ll call you.”

“And then you back off,” growled John.

“I’m going to give you a ten-minute lead, John. Either you catch him and send Robbie home safely or I call in Plan B,” said Jedikiah, coldly. “I’m not risking anything with McCrane, son.”

John glared at Jedikiah. “I am not your son.” He turned to leave, but Jedikiah grabbed his arm.

*If you catch him, you know what to do,* said Jedikiah.

John said nothing. He just took Jedikiah’s hand off his arm and left the restaurant.

XXX

That night, Sierra stood beside her uncle at the nerve center.

She was to correspond between Ultra and John and she was keeping an eye on things, searching for any sign of her son. The slightest sign, any hiccup, was to be reported to Jedikiah immediately. Ultra would rather chase down a thousand false leads than lose McCrane’s. Eventually, her prayers were answered and a tele-signature popped up.

“We’ve got a tele-signature at the parking garage near the Rose Gardens,” said Darcy. “It could be the ones we’re looking for.”

Jedikiah looked at Sierra. “Go ahead. Clock’s ticking.”

Sierra nodded and called out to John. *John, we’ve got them. The parking garage near the Rose Gardens.*

*I’m on it,* said John.

XXX

John teleported into the parking garage.

It was full of cars but otherwise devoid of life. Nevertheless, for the first time since Robbie’s abduction, he could sense his son’s presence.

“McCrane!” yelled John. His voice echoed around the parking garage. “You wanted me. Here I
am! Bring me my son!”

McCrane teleported in. He was perfectly healthy and back to his full strength thanks to Robbie’s biological manipulation ability. “How did you find me?”

John gave McCrane a cold look. “I’ve done as you’ve asked. Where’s my son?”

“Right here.” McCrane stepped to the side to reveal Robbie, who was unharmed but pale and crying. The poor boy was shaken up from his kidnapping. “A deal’s a deal. You’re free now, you filthy brat.”

John glared at McCrane before turning to Robbie. You okay, buddy?

Robbie nodded. Can we go home now?

Soon, I promise. For right now, go straight to your mom and stay with her. Understand? said John.

Robbie looked as though he wanted to protest but he held his tongue. Promise you’ll come home?

I promise, assured John. Now go.

Without further ado, Robbie teleported away.

XXX

Sierra nearly jumped out of her skin at the sound of someone teleporting into the room, and then she was silently crying as she swept up Robbie into her arms.

The poor boy was in hysterics, sobbing into his mother’s shoulder and hugging her so tight she could barely breathe, but she didn’t care. All she cared about was having her son safe and unharmed.

Oh, Robbie, sweetie, I’m so sorry. I should’ve protected you better, said Sierra. She felt horrible. What had she been thinking, leaving him at Marla’s when she should’ve left him at the Lair where he’d be safer? She’d been so foolish and it’d almost cost Robbie his life. Forgive me.

It’s not your fault. You didn’t know, said Robbie, as he hiccupped.

Sierra would never cease to be amazed by Robbie’s compassion and wisdom. Are you hurt at all?

No. He just scared me. Robbie burst into tears again. I’m sorry! I’m so sorry! It’s all my fault! I didn’t want to go with him or make him better, but he said he’d hurt Grandma and Uncle Luca if I didn’t obey him. I wanted to call you, but he was listening and wouldn’t let me. I’m sorry, Mama. Please, don’t be angry with me!

Shh, it’s okay, I’m not angry, soothed Sierra. Her son had been placed in a bad situation. She couldn’t very well fault him for doing something she herself would’ve done. It hardly mattered. All that did was that Robbie was safe and she wasn’t letting him out of her sight anytime soon. You were such a good boy. You were so brave and you did so good. It’s okay, sweetheart. You’re safe
now. It’s all right.

I love you, Mommy, said Robbie.

I love you, too, Robbie, said Sierra.

“We’ve got confirmation, sir. Both targets are at the site,” said Darcy.

Sierra’s head perked up and her eyes narrowed at Jedikiah as she put Robbie down at her feet. “‘Both targets’? Jedikiah…”

“Deploy Alpha Unit,” said Jedikiah, as though Sierra hadn’t spoken.

Sierra grasped Jedikiah’s shoulder. “That’s the kill squad!” she hissed. “You used me to set John up as bait?!” She wasn’t surprised, just disappointed, if not angry.

Jedikiah gave Sierra a hard look. “I saved Robbie. Now, that that’s done, I have to do what’s necessary for the greater good. These men are Ultra fugitives, Sierra. That comes at a price.”

Sierra looked disgusted before she warned John. John, you need to get out of there! Jedikiah lied about the head start. A kill squad’s headed your way!

There was nothing more Sierra could do. She could only pray she wasn’t too late.

XXX

Once Robbie was safe, John and McCrane turned on each other.

The two former Ultra agents encircled each other like wolves going in for the kill, neither one of them was taking their eyes off the other.

“So, let me guess what you want to happen here. You expect me to turn myself in to Ultra, don’t you?” said McCrane.

“Much as I would love that, I’ll settle for you wearing a suppression cuff, disappearing and never coming back,” said John. “Go spend your life on whatever beach you want.”

McCrane’s eyes darkened with anger. “Sipping mai-tais, trying to forget? What if I can’t forget?”

John was tossed across the parking lot and into a car. “This doesn’t end well for you, Killian. I’m offering you one final chance. Leave and I promise I won’t hunt you.”

McCrane teleported to John and tried to punch him, only for John to teleport away and McCrane to end up punching the broken windshield.

John reappeared and telekinetically blasted McCrane across the room twice. There was no longer any hint of compassion or mercy in John’s eyes, there was only a hardened look like that of a soldier’s.

McCrane laughed as they encircled each other again. “Who says I won’t hunt you? There is no beach, John! You want me to live underground like a worm, hidden in your supernatural refugee
John’s eyes widened. “How did you know—?”

“It’s all in your file, John!” yelled McCrane. “You’re moving backwards, devolving. A hundred million years ago, we crawled out of the mud and you want to go back?”

“I’d rather go back than be like you!” snarled John.

And with that, the two men began punching and kicking the living daylights out of each other, neither of them gaining an advantage as they were both very evenly matched in power and skill. It remained like that until John received Sierra’s warning and then suddenly there was a screeching sound as the kill squad’s cars drove into the parking garage.

“Ah, you had call Daddy in to come save you,” sneered McCrane.

McCrane and John then took shelter behind the cars as they avoided a shower of bullets.

“This is between you and me!” growled John, as he grabbed McCrane and teleported away.

They landed in a forest, a few hundred miles out of the city.

“Ha, a little trip to nowhere,” said McCrane. He smacked his hand against a leafy branch.

“What is this, John?”

“This is where it ends,” said John. “For you, anyway.”

McCrane grabbed John by the lapels of his leather jacket and punched John in the stomach.

“You know what I think your problem is?” He teleported and then reappeared on John’s other side, taking advantage of John’s momentary confusion to punch John in the head again. “You’re jealous! Jedikiah gave me the gift and not you!”

John tried to defend himself but McCrane either blocked or dodged John’s blows. Soon, John was crawling on the forest floor towards some large rocks.

“Go ahead, pick it up. It won’t do you any good.” McCrane kicked John, causing him to roll onto his back. McCrane snatched up one of the rocks. “But it’ll do me plenty. Why did you even try to find me, John? Because of what I did to Jedikiah’s pathetic niece? She deserved it, John. She’s no better than him. Besides, you never stood a chance against me. I’ll always have the edge as long as I can kill and you can’t!”

McCrane was about to finish John off when there was the sound of a gunshot. McCrane looked in confusion at his fatal chest wound and then at the gun in John’s hand.

During all the fighting, John had reached for the gun hidden in his pocket. “You want to know why I left Ultra? It’s because they made me like you and destroyed my life.” John had wanted revenge for Sierra but even so, he took no pleasure in killing even if it was justified.

McCrane made no reply as he fell to the forest floor, stone dead.

John took a moment to catch his breath before using his telekinesis to create a grave for McCrane, which he buried the murderer in.

_Sierra, tell Jedikiah it’s over_, said John.

_I will_, said Sierra. _Oh, and John. Would you care to have a sleepover tonight at your place?_
John smiled to himself. Sierra wasn’t letting Robbie out of her sight anytime soon and John shared in his ex-girlfriend’s feelings. He wanted to keep an eye on Robbie for a few days, just to reassure himself that his son was safe.

*That sounds wonderful. I’ll see you back at the Lair in twenty minutes,* said John.

XXX

Sierra heaved a sigh of relief.

“It’s over,” she announced. “But that’s all I can hear. John’s gone.”

Jedikiah looked disappointed but not surprised. “It’s a small victory, but it’s a victory, nonetheless.”

Sierra couldn’t believe the words coming out of her uncle’s mouth. She ordered Robbie to stay put with Darcy while she followed her uncle into his office.

“You used me to set John up!” said Sierra. “How could you do that to me?”

“Oh, come on, Sierra. These are complicated times,” said Jedikiah. “Powers like yours and McCrane’s have to be harnessed properly or it’s disaster. That’s why allegiance is paramount.”

Sierra scoffed. “Allegiance? Both John and McCrane worked for Ultra and you ruined them! You turned McCrane into that monster and you destroyed John’s life!”

Jedikiah’s face was unreadable. “I suppose your ex-boyfriend didn’t tell you that everything that happened to him and McCrane was voluntary. Sierra, your kind is one gene away from perfection.”

Sierra gave Jedikiah a disbelieving look. “Perfection? Perfection by *killing?* Could there be anything more insane? Killing destroyed people’s souls. It most certainly was not perfection! “I thought you wanted to protect the human race from my kind!”

“What better way to do that than to have the ultimate guardian on *my* side?” said Jedikiah. “One that no breakout could ever contend with. Your only genetic weakness amidst so many strengths. Finding a fix was worth a few McCranes.”

Sierra just looked at Jedikiah in disgust. There were no depths which Jedikiah could not sink to.

XXX

Back at the Lair, John was being hailed as a hero.

As the Tomorrow People didn’t know of John’s ability to kill, they all believed he’d simply fought off McCrane and scared the former Ultra agent back into hiding. While Cara struggled to find a reason why McCrane would suddenly just bolt as John claimed, neither she nor anyone else questioned their fearless leader’s story and they were all determined to celebrate their latest victory.
John would be lying if he said he didn’t secretly enjoying the satisfaction of knowing his loved ones and his people were safe from McCrane and that he was enjoying the attention, but the attention he loved most came from those closest to him.

When Sierra arrived, she didn’t speak. She just wrapped her arms around John’s neck.

“I’m glad you’re home,” she murmured.

“Me too,” said John. He returned Sierra’s embrace and buried his face in the crook of her neck, relishing in being in her arms again.

Sierra eventually pulled away and mended John’s wounds. “I’m proud of you. I know it wasn’t easy for you to do what you did. I’m just sorry you had to make that kind of choice.”

Sierra had known of John’s ability to kill for quite some time. Out of respect for John’s privacy, she’d told no one except for Robbie. If John wanted others to know, then he would be the one to tell them, not her. It wasn’t her secret to tell.

“Don’t be. There was no choice to make. I did what I had to do. McCrane’s never going to hurt you or Robbie again,” said John.

Sierra just smiled softly in response.

John’s face then lit up when Robbie came out from wherever he’d been hiding and he scooped the boy up into his arms. They murmured incoherent words to one another for several long moments until Robbie buried his head in the crook of John’s neck.

“I love you, Daddy,” said Robbie, sleepily.

John’s grip on his son tightened. “I love you too, Robbie.”

Sierra smiled and there were happy tears glistening in her eyes as she rested her head on John’s other shoulder and his free hand snaked around her waist. The little family remained like that for what seemed like forever.

The war was far from over, but the battle had been won. And maybe just for a moment, the three of them could be happy together.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I'm one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T's—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There's a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

Jedikiah sat alone in his office, going over the footage from Sierra’s latest training exercise with her supervising agent, Darcy.

Jedikiah was pleased to see that Sierra was improving with her hand-to-hand combat skills and marksmanship with the stun gun. Her TP abilities were also growing and improving with every passing day, for which he was extremely pleased. What did concern him, however, was Sierra’s lack of respect for authority. She was still defying Darcy’s orders more frequently than Jedikiah liked and she tended to go off alone not wait for the “goon squad,” as she called it. Jedikiah had had to reprimand her for that more than once.

Jedikiah’s cell phone went off. He didn’t even need to look at the caller ID to know who it was. “Is this important? I’m in the middle of—”

“Reviewing Sierra’s training exercise?” said Corbin. “Perhaps you should’ve started off with the simulations instead of sending your niece after Kurt Rundle, our paranormal bank robber who still has his powers and is still at large. Or Killian McCrane, the Annex Project reject target who tried to kill you.”

Jedikiah rubbed the space in between his eyes. This wasn’t going well. “Yes, I understand there have been some…less than optimal operations recently.”

“It’s time you brought her in, Roger’s daughter,” said Corbin.

“She’s not ready,” protested Jedikiah.

“Jedikiah, as I’m sure you know…it’s not me who’s asking,” reminded Corbin. “Just be thankful it’s her and not her son.”

Jedikiah sighed. “Understood.”

The Founder wanted to meet Sierra. Jedikiah had known this was bound to happen one of these days, given Sierra’s abilities and her lineage, but even with all his preparation, he was not ready for the fear and dread that threatened to overwhelm him. Jedikiah had the horrible feeling that Sierra’s meeting with the Founder was not going to go well.
Meanwhile, Sierra and Robbie headed for the Noodle Shop.

Astrid was there and after two solid weeks of no communication between them, Sierra was lonely and ready have her best friend back. And if Astrid didn’t accept Sierra’s apology, then Sierra was prepared to call in the cavalry, namely Robbie and his puppy-dog eyes.

Astrid was sitting at the bar, a college textbook and a notebook was on her right and a bowl of dumplings was on her left.

Sierra gave Robbie some quarters for games so he could have something to do while she talked with Astrid. Robbie swore to stay within Sierra’s line of sight and come straight to her after he was done with his game.

Sierra took a deep breath before speaking.

“Hey.”

Astrid looked up at the sound of Sierra’s and then raised an eyebrow. “Seriously? We don’t talk for two weeks and all I get is ‘hey’?”

Sierra took a seat next to her best friend. “Well, I’m not the best at starting conversations. I’m a hopeless social reject.”

“No, you’re not,” said Astrid, chuckling. “You’re just a bad liar.”

Sierra winced and sighed. “So, the Harvest Moon dance festival…you going to go?”

Every year, there was a big party and dance on the outskirts of town and every year, Astrid and Sierra went together for fun and games.

Astrid pursed her lips together and then shrugged. “Hadn’t thought about it. You?”

“Well, normally, I would go stag with my best friend but since we’re not speaking…”

“Because you lied to me.”

Sierra bit her lip and sighed. “I am sorry, Astrid. But whatever happened at the train tracks, it’s in the past. So, will you please accept my peace offering and hit up the festival with me?” Sierra reached into her pocket and pulled out a small key on a silver keyring.

“What’s this?” asked Astrid.

“A spare key to my apartment. So, next time you won’t have to wait outside in my hallway when you want to see me and Robbie,” said Sierra, smiling. “And if you don’t accept my apology, I’m prepared to bring in the big guns.”

Astrid playfully groaned. “Not Robbie’s puppy-dogs eyes! You taught him that just to torture me, didn’t you? You’re evil.”

Sierra laughed. “In that order? Yes, and yes. And by the way, Robbie’s prepared to give you a card begging to come back. He’s missed his favorite aunt. So, please?”
Astrid sighed and then after a moment, nodded. “Apology accepted. But you’re not off the hook.”

“I figured as much,” said Sierra. It would’ve been too easy if Astrid had just accepted Sierra’s apology and forgotten the incident. “Let’s get some take-out and head to my place for some TV.”

“Sounds great.”

Their friendship was mended and Sierra’s life was back on track. But how long would it last?

XXX

The next day at the Lair, Sierra and Robbie found Cara in TIM’s room looking over a breakout’s file.

Someone else for Sierra to snatch up and wipe from Ultra’s records, no doubt. She had the feeling she wasn’t going to like this.

“Hey, guys. How’s life topside?” asked Cara.

“Boring. It’s more fun down here,” said Robbie.

Cara and Sierra laughed.

“Are you doing okay? For reals?” asked Cara.

Ever since Robbie was abducted by McCrane, everyone had been more careful with keeping an eye on Robbie and making sure he was safe and comforted.

Robbie nodded as he sat down on the couch and pulled out his thick coloring book and crayons from his backpack.

“He really is fine. He’s a little trooper,” assured Sierra.

Robbie had the occasional nightmare and he wasn’t comfortable being alone, but other than that, he was all right despite what had happened.

Cara nodded in relief.

“So, who’s this unlucky idiot?” asked Sierra, pointing to the screen.

“Mark Menendez. He’s being held by your uncle and he’s scheduled to have his powers extracted later today,” said Cara.

Sierra’s face fell. “Please, don’t tell me you’re going to ask me to spring him from Ultra. It’s too soon and Jedikiah’s suspicious enough as it is.”

Cara shook her head. “I wasn’t going to. As much as I hate any of us being subjected to your uncle’s ‘cure,’ this guy deserves it. Mark teleported into maximum security prisons and freed every type of scum you can imagine. Trust me, it’s better if he’s human.”

Sierra sighed in relief but was still puzzled. “What is it you want me to do, then?”
“I want you to be there when he gets the injection and get a vial of that serum,” said Cara.

“Ah,” said Sierra. “What do you want with the serum?”

Before Cara could reply, there was a knock on the door and then a small girl with curly blond hair and nerd glasses came in.

“Ah, someone I want you to meet,” said Cara, smiling. “Sierra, Robbie, this is our resident genetics expert, Irene. She’ll explain the plan.”

Sierra shook hands with the younger girl. “Pleasure to meet you. Please don’t take this the wrong way, but how old are you? Sixteen?” She looked awfully young to be an expert.

“Seventeen,” corrected Irene. “I graduated from Yale when I was fourteen and I would’ve finished my PhD at MIT last year, not to brag, if I hadn’t accidentally TK’d my jerk of a college advisor into the wall and ended up for six months on a 5150.”

Sierra fought the urge to laugh.

“Irene has a theory about Ultra’s serum, the one that takes our powers,” said Cara. “If you can get a sample, she thinks she can create an antidote.”

“The serum utilizes our DNA, which inserts palindromic sequences, chimeric strands into our code, substituting human nucleotide patterns for our own,” explained Irene. “But if we change the sticky end of the RNA into a blunt end, then we all know what that means.”

With science not being Sierra’s best subject in school, Sierra didn’t understand a word Irene just said. She could swear she actually felt her brain turning into goo and leaking out her ears, but managed to keep a straight face.

“It means the cure will be useless?” guessed Sierra.

Irene nodded and then looked jealous. “Beauty, the affections of our handsome leader, an adorable kid, powers and brains. Is there anything you don’t have?”

Sierra blushed under Irene’s praise. “Oh, stop.”

Cara chuckled as she folded her arms across her chest. “So, do you think you can get us a sample?”

“Already done.” Sierra reached into her pocket and pulled out the vial of power-stripping serum she’d taken when she ‘cured’ Cara of her powers.

“Where the hell did you get that?” demanded Cara.

“I held onto it after you got caught. I didn’t know what to do with it,” said Sierra. She handed it to Irene. “Looks like I was just saving it for a rainy day.”

“Thank you so much. I’m going to work miracles with this,” said Irene, excitedly.

Just then, they all looked up at the sound of Kurt’s angry voice.

“Seriously, what the hell is your problem, man?”

The three women exchanged concerned looks as they and Robbie left the room to find Kurt storming away from John, the latter of whom was furious.
“I told you to keep an eye on him,” growled John to Russell, who threw up his hands in a surrender position.

“Why’re you having your brat spy on me?” demanded Kurt.

John’s eyes darkened. “First of all, don’t ever talk about my son like that again! Second, Robbie’s not the one who broke the rules and was being reckless!”

Kurt scowled as Robbie hid behind Sierra’s legs, cowering under the furious look on Kurt’s face.

“What is going on here?” demanded Sierra.

What had Kurt done, rob another bank?

“Robbie told me he saw Kurt sneaking out of his mom’s house,” said John. “So, I followed Kurt just to be sure and guess what, Robbie was right.”

Ah. Well, that explained why Robbie had asked Sierra what to do when someone you cared about did something wrong. Robbie had worried about getting into trouble and being regarded as a tattletale, but Sierra had explained the difference between a tattletale and one who told for the right reasons. She’d encouraged Robbie to tell the truth and not worry. Robbie must’ve seen Kurt’s forbidden visit topside and told John.

“I was careful!” protested Kurt. “No one else saw me, all right? I just wanted her to know I wasn’t dead, that’s all!”

“You are dead to her, Kurt! To her and everyone else you know!” said John, sternly. “We do not make contact with humans! You go topside on your own and Ultra’s kill squad follows you back down here, you get us all killed!”

“And we can’t kill them back,” said Russell.

Sierra longed to speak but she held her tongue. She understood why Kurt was going topside, it was human nature and perfectly natural. It wasn’t easy to give up your old human life. But at the same time, John was right. Kurt going topside without backup was reckless and he could get them all killed.

Kurt wasn’t done yet. “Sierra gets to live at home. She visits her family all time and you don’t lecture her. How is that fair?”

Some of the Tomorrow People murmured in agreement.

John leapt to Sierra’s defense. “Sierra gets to live at home and visit her family because she’s risking her neck as a double-agent and find her father!”

“I thought Roger was dead,” said Kurt.

“Sierra’s father is the only one who can lead us to the Refuge,” said Cara.

Kurt scoffed. “Yeah, some kind of mythical safe haven for our species.”

John gave Kurt a cold look. “It exists.”

“Yeah? How do you know? Have you seen it?” challenged Kurt. He glared at Sierra. “Have you been there, Chosen One?”
Sierra was silent but she clenched her fist in anger. How dare Kurt act like this when Sierra was the only reason Ultra hadn’t put a bullet in his head?

Kurt tried to storm off but John grabbed his arm. “Here’s what I know: there have to be more of us out there. What if Sierra’s father found the Refuge and just hasn’t been able to make it back? What if the rest of us are with him?”

Kurt yanked his arm free of John’s grip.

John faced the crowd. “Anyone who thinks that’s a fairytale, feel free to leave. And Kurt, if you even think of sneaking off to visit Mommy again, don’t bother coming back.”

Kurt looked upset as he walked away.

The crowd dispersed and John walked away as Sierra and Robbie followed him. John was found pressing his head against the wet, stone wall of the training room. He was upset and Sierra didn’t need to read his mind to know what was wrong. With Kurt’s defiance and all the recent run-ins with Ultra, it was no wonder John was such a terrible mood.

“Are you okay, Dad?” asked Robbie, softly.

John looked up and his face softened as he nodded. “Yeah, buddy. I’m okay. It’s just a bad day, that’s all. I’ll be okay. Kurt’s just being a knucklehead. You did the right thing telling me about him.”

Robbie looked comforted at this.

“I’m sorry, John,” said Sierra.

“Sorry for what?” asked John. “It’s not your fault.”

“It feels like it is,” said Sierra. She wasn’t an idiot, she could see what was happening. Before she came, no one questioned John’s rules about their lifestyle but things had changed. “I’m putting you in a difficult position because of my decision and I’m sorry for that. I never meant for any of that to happen. I think you’re right with how you handled it back there. This isn’t a game and they need to know that.”

“But?” prompted John, knowing she wasn’t finished.

Sierra sighed. “Don’t get angry, okay? I’m not saying I agree, I’m just saying it’s probably how they feel. They’re going a little stir-crazy down here. Remember when we used to teleport into Yankee Stadium just to play softball or when you ‘borrowed’ Princess Grace’s diamonds for me on my birthday? They want to do things like that, have fun, and lead a life.”

John sighed and nodded in agreement. “It doesn’t matter. It’s too dangerous. Cara was almost lobotomized two weeks ago and McCrane came after us not long after that. It’s too big of a risk.”

“I’m not arguing that. But someone like Cara or Russell is probably going to try and persuade you to permit a night out, say it’s in everyone’s best interests,” said Sierra. “You have to do what’s best for all of us, even if it means they don’t agree.”

“And you’ll always have us,” piped up Robbie, making John smile.

Sierra squeezed John’s shoulder. “You’re a good leader, John. Don’t ever doubt that. One day, they’ll all see that.” She smiled softly and pulled away. “I’ve got to head back to work now. Why
don’t you and Robbie work on his science project until I get back? I’ll grab us some dinner after my shift.”

Robbie’s face lit up as John nodded.

“Can we get takeout from Olive Garden for dinner?” asked Robbie.

“Sure, kiddo.”

XXX

When Sierra returned to Ultra, she’d barely set foot in the lobby when Jedikiah appeared out of nowhere, startiling her.

“Sierra, we need to talk,” said Jedikiah. “Walk with me.”

Sierra disliked the look of fear on Jedikiah’s face. When had he ever been scared? She followed him as they walked through Ultra. “What’s wrong?”

“Someone wants to meet you,” said Jedikiah. “You and I are going to be taking a little trip tomorrow.”

Sierra was taken aback. “Seriously? Who am I meeting and why? Where exactly are we going?”

“Why wouldn’t he be the real question you should be asking, Sierra. You’re my brother’s daughter and your powers are impressive,” said Jedikiah. “As for the where, you could say we’re going to Ultra headquarters.”

“What? This isn’t headquarters?” Had Sierra been working in a subdivision the whole time?

“We’re merely the tip of the spear,” replied Jedikiah.

Sierra felt worse. “Sir, what is this about? Why do I feel like I’ve done something wrong?”

Jedikiah stopped walking and looked at her. “Have you?”

Sierra’s face was unreadable as she met her uncle’s piercing gaze. “No. I haven’t.”

Morally, Sierra had done no wrong, so it wasn’t a lie.

“Then you have nothing to worry about,” said Jedikiah. “Now, to answer your other question, you once asked about who it I work with, my partner and superior. He’s called the Founder, as in the Founder of Ultra. And he’s very keen on meeting you.”

Sierra inhaled sharply. The Founder of Ultra? The one who’d ordered the hit on her father in the first place? That’s who she was going to meet?

“What does he want with me?” asked Sierra.

Jedikiah shrugged. “The Founder’s reasons behind his actions are his own. I don’t ask unwanted questions. It’s best not to.”
This did not nothing to pacify Sierra and she suddenly worried for Robbie. “What does he know about my son?” hissed Sierra.

“Only what I’ve told him—that Robbie is your son and therefore, Roger’s grandson. Nothing about Robbie’s abilities or his paternal lineage,” assured Jedikiah. “I’ve kept my word, Sierra, I promise you. Now, take a deep breath and relax. I’ll have a car waiting for you. Oh, and Sierra? Don’t go wandering off on me. If your father had come when he was asked, he might still be alive. Understand?”

“Perfectly,” said Sierra. “Is there anything else, sir?”

Jedikiah shook his head.

Sierra swallowed painfully as she was then left alone in the hall. This was going to be bad, she just knew it. She was snapped out of her thoughts when Robbie called her.

Mom, you need to get back here.

Why? What’s happening? asked Sierra.

Cara’s challenged Dad to a jaunt, said Robbie.

Sierra groaned. Just what she needed, more trouble.

XXX

In an effort to persuade John to grant the Tomorrow People one night of freedom, Cara had researched an invitation-only party at Club Barcelona celebrating Molly Batchelder’s twenty-first birthday, an upper east-side girl blowing it all on daddy’s dime. TIM had gotten them on the guest list and with the club having a lot of dark corners and minimal security, it was perfect for the Tomorrow People.

John had still refused, remembering all too well what happened the last time Russell drank too much (Russell levitated a bus to impress some girls) and declared it being too risky until Cara challenged him to a jaunt for it. John agreed on the condition that if he won, the party subject would be dropped all together for good.

Right before the scheduled match, Sierra found John in TIM’s room, shirtless, lacing up his combat boots and wearing leather fingerless gloves on his hands.

“I’m kind of in the middle of something here,” said John.

“I know. Robbie told me everything,” said Sierra. She took a deep breath. “Look, I’ll make this quick. I need you to be prepared to take Robbie in if I don’t come back tomorrow.”

John’s head shot up, and he looked alarmed. “What’s happened?”

“Jedikiah’s taking me to Ultra headquarters to meet the Founder tomorrow,” confessed Sierra. “I’m trying to be optimistic about it, but I need to be prepared in case this goes south. Did you ever meet the Founder when you were at Ultra?”

John shook his head as he finished lacing up his boots. “No. But this is a good thing.”
Sierra raised an eyebrow. “How is meeting the guy who ordered a hit on my dad and holds a
sword over my head a good thing?”

“Because we can use this to our advantage and cut the head off the snake one day if you can
lead us back there,” explained John.

“What if I never come back?” demanded Sierra. “What if I’m being summoned because Ultra
found out I’m helping you guys or worse because the Founder knows about Robbie’s heritage?”

She was frustrated and rightly so. Was John missing the point on purpose?

“Hey, calm down. You don’t know that. I’ll take care of Robbie whatever happens,” assured
John. “It’s going to be okay. Besides, this is what you signed up for.”

Sierra scowled. She saw where this was going. Why do I even bother?

“Wow. I took your side
in this and you’re blaming me? I thought you said it wasn’t my fault. Ultra’s acting like it’s Defcon
One and I’d like to figure out what’s going on before you lot take your little spring break topside.”

“I’m not and it isn’t, not entirely,” said John. “But Sierra, just because I feel that way doesn’t
mean that others don’t. I’m glad you and Robbie are here, that’ll never change. But I’m about to
fight Cara because she and nearly everyone else down here thinking that we can live like humans
just because you and Robbie can.”

Sierra sighed in anger. This was not her fault and regardless of his problems, it wasn’t fair for
John to blame Sierra. “Fine. If we’re such a problem, why don’t I just take Robbie and leave? I’ll
deal with Ultra on my own and you’ll never hear from us again. No one will ever question your
authority just because of some rebel TPs. Would that be better?”

“Don’t put words in my mouth!” snapped John. “That’s not what I want and you know it!”

“Don’t make me your scapegoat then,” snapped Sierra. “Quit blaming me for your problems
and be the leader I know you’re capable of being.”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra attempted to storm off but John grabbed her hand.

“Where’re you going? You wouldn’t want to miss the big fight,” said John, with a glint in his
eyes.

Sierra was about to tell John to drop dead and leave with Robbie, but then changed her mind as
the idea of watching John get his butt kicked was just too good an opportunity to pass up.

Everyone gathered outside TIM’s room to watch the fight. Robbie stood in front of his mother,
looking excited. Though he loved Cara like an aunt, Robbie was supporting his dad in the fight and
was even holding up a poster he’d colored that read: Go, Dad! Victory is Yours!

Russell was in the center of the room, holding the combat stick in his hands and speaking all
dramatically like an announcer at a wrestling match. “Ladies and gentleman, let’s jaunt!” He
pointed to John. “In this corner, fresh off of wins against all of us, John Young!” There was a small
round of applause for John, apparently John didn’t have a lot of fans in this fight.

You really brought the fans, John, thought Sierra, as she shook her head.

Russell pointed to Cara, who was at the opposite end of the room. “And in this corner, the
challenger, fighting for your right to party…Cara Coburn!”
This time there was a big round of applause and cheers. Everyone was in favor of Cara winning the fight so they could party for one night.

Sierra rolled her eyes. No matter how this ended, it was going to end badly, she just knew it.

Russell placed the combat stick in the middle of the room. “Kick his butt for me, will ya?” He squealed in the delight like a little girl. “Begin!”

For the first few moments, nothing happened other than Cara and John dancing around each other and smacking each other’s hand off the combat stick. Then it got exciting. Cara quickly knelt down and blasted John, but he teleported just in time and slammed into Cara, sending the both across the room. Cara quickly got up and summoned the combat stick to her hand.

“It’s not too late to give in,” teased Cara.

John smirked. “Where’s the fun in that?”

Cara raised the stick but before she could land a blow, John teleported over to her and punched her. He then teleported behind her just as she whacked him one, twisted her arm up her back and grabbed the combat stick before forcing her onto the ground, literally she was bending over backwards.

“Normal friends talk about their differences, you know?” grunted Cara.

“We’re not normal and you challenged me, remember?” said John.

Cara teleported out of John’s grip and appeared on the other side of the room, looking weary but no less determined to secure a victory. Cara then teleported to John where he met the blows she attempted to deliver before she stole the combat stick and hit him on the back with it multiple times, sending him down onto his knees. John quickly rose up but Cara was relentless, she kept hitting him until John grabbed her arm and forced her down. Cara teleported away again and then they wrestled together until Cara pushed John up against the wall with her telekinesis and pinned him from behind with the combat stick, claiming her victory.

John had lost the match and everyone could now go up topside to party. They were all cheering and jumping for joy, all except for John and Sierra. Sierra worried about the consequences of going topside and John was not happy about losing and his orders being defied, but he smiled a little when Robbie rushed over to him and gave John a hug.

“That was so cool! You were amazing, Dad!” gushed Robbie. “Will you teach me how to do that?”

“Sure, buddy. When you’re a little bigger,” promised John, after Sierra gave him a warning look.

John may have lost the jaunt match, but he’d won Robbie’s support and affection, that was the biggest victory of all.

XXX

The next day, Sierra and Robbie were at Astrid’s house, helping her pick which of the dresses
she’d bought to wear to the dance festival. Or rather, Sierra was giving her opinion on Astrid’s dresses and Robbie was kneeling beside Astrid’s coffee table, coloring in his coloring book.

Sierra liked shopping and picking out the perfect outfit, but after spending half the day shopping and going through Astrid’s seemingly endless supply of outfits, she was becoming quite bored. Sierra had picked a nice red dress with gold beading for herself right off the rack, but Astrid was pickier about what she wore and it seemed like it was never going to end.

Astrid came out of her bedroom wearing a sparkling black and pink short dress. “Ta-da!”

Sierra smiled. “Perfect.”

Astrid’s face fell. “You said the last one was perfect.”

“The last three were perfect,” said Sierra, in exasperation. Astrid was Sierra’s best friend but she was notoriously difficult to work with sometimes. “Besides, we do this every year. It’s a dress for a public dance festival!”

“Yeah, exactly,” said Astrid, nodding. “Work with me here.”

Sierra groaned and fought the urge to start banging her head against the wall.

Astrid disappeared into her bedroom again and her voice drifted out across the living room. “So, now that we’re besties again, maybe it’s time that you tell me about what really happened on the train tracks with Emily.”

Sierra sighed in annoyance. She’d hoped she’d have a little longer before Astrid questioned her again. Wishful thinking.

“There’s nothing for me to tell you,” said Sierra. “I don’t know what you want me to say.”

“The truth would be a nice start. I was there, Sierra, and so were you,” said Astrid. She emerged wearing a dark blue ruffled dress. “The only question is, how you managed to disappear.”

Sierra avoided Astrid’s eyes as she made a face and a so-so motion with her hand. “You know, on second thought, maybe you shouldn’t pick that dress. It’s not really your color.”

Astrid frowned but she still gave Sierra a look. “Don’t smokescreen me.”

Sierra sighed again. “Look, we just made up, okay? I don’t want to argue with you, especially not with the present company.”

“Neither do I,” said Astrid, as she disappeared again. “So, why don’t you just come clean?”

Why don’t you trust me enough to respect my privacy and leave me alone? Sierra wanted to say, but didn’t. Instead, her face brightened at the sight of Astrid in a short, pink dress with white lace. The coloring was perfect on Astrid and the style suited her really well.

“Wow,” she said.

Astrid smiled but she still gave Sierra a look. “Don’t smokescreen me.”
Sierra just held up her hands.

“You look really pretty, like a flower,” said Robbie.

Astrid smiled. “Thanks, Robbie. It’s cute, right?”

Both Sierra and Astrid nodded.

“Is that all of them?” asked Sierra. *Please say yes.*

“There’s just one more,” confessed Astrid. “Just one more and then we’re done, I promise.” She left the room again for the final dress before Sierra could protest.

But Sierra just laughed as she leaned back on the couch. *How do I get into these situations?*

“Mom, why’s Aunt Astrid so picky about her dress? She looks pretty in all of them,” said Robbie.

Sierra chuckled. “It’s a girl thing, honey.”

Robbie made a face and went back to his coloring book, adding more emerald green with a lighter green shine to the scales of the dragon he was coloring.

Sierra’s cellphone rang and she groaned. It was Jedikiah. What did he want now? “Boss, what —”

“Come outside,” interrupted Jedikiah. His tone was clipped and left no room for argument. *Your chariot awaits you.*

Sierra cursed her uncle’s timing. “What, now?”

“Tell your friend something came up,” said Jedikiah, shortly before hanging up.

Sierra sighed as she pocketed her phone. “Astrid, I’m sorry to have to do this, but my uncle just called. Apparently, there’s some emergency at work he wants my help with right now.”

Astrid frowned in concern as she reentered the room, dressed in a purple gown. “An emergency? Is it really bad?”

“No, it’s nothing serious. My uncle tends to exaggerate,” lied Sierra. “But he’s still the one who signs my paycheck, so I’ve got to go. Would you mind watching Robbie until I get back?”

“Not at all,” said Astrid.

Sierra sighed in relief. “Thank you.” She knelt down to Robbie’s level. “Be good for Aunt Astrid while I’m gone, okay, sweetie?” *And go straight to your dad’s if anything happens,* she added telepathically.

Robbie looked concerned at the worry in Sierra’s tone but just smiled and nodded. “Okay.” He hugged her rather fiercely. “I love you, Mom.”

“I love you too, honey,” said Sierra, as she kissed his head.

Sierra’s heart was pounding with fear. Would she ever see her beloved son again?
Sierra went outside and took a seat in blacked-out SUV beside her uncle.

A black bag was placed over her head until they arrived, afterwards it was an eternity of silence until Jedikiah took her arm led her outside. Eventually, he took the bag off Sierra’s head and she found herself in completely unfamiliar surroundings. They were on the grounds of a large estate with a luxurious mansion, a very wealthy one by the looks of it.

“Was that really necessary? I thought we were past all that!” said Sierra, referring to the black bag.

“Yes, my apologies,” said Jedikiah. “C’mon, kiddo.”

“Can you tell me anything about the Founder before I go in?” asked Sierra, as they walked up the front steps. “Who is he, your boss or your partner?”

“A bit of both, to be honest,” admitted Jedikiah. “There are various facets to our organization, Sierra. The department you work for is just one of many.”

_One of many. Just great. Just when I thought this couldn’t get any worse_, thought Sierra.

When they reached the front door, Corbin came out, his face was unreadable. “You must be Miss Sierra. Am I correct?”

Sierra nodded.

“Follow me,” said Corbin.

Sierra moved to follow Corbin inside but then froze when Jedikiah didn’t follow. “You’re not coming with me?” she hissed. She knew how childish it sounded but for some strange reason, Sierra didn’t feel comfortable going into the Founder’s lair alone.

Jedikiah shook his head and placed a hand on her shoulder. “Just be honest and you’ll be fine.”

Sierra nodded and then reluctantly followed Corbin inside the mansion. She was led to a sitting room and left alone with the door closed. The room was filled with a lot of luxurious furniture including a hand-carved marble fireplace, interesting artifacts and knickknacks. The Founder clearly had expensive but good taste.

Sierra scanned the room telepathically, trying to get a feel for it when she felt an unfamiliar presence attempt to communicate with her.

_Thank you for coming, Sierra. Or do you prefer Miss Jameson?_

The voice was a man’s, British and he also sounded a great deal older than Sierra. This was the Founder. Something about him down a chill down her spine.

_Sierra’s fine, she replied. May I inquire as to your name?_

_So polite_, remarked the Founder. _Normally, I would say we’re not ready to be on a first-name basis, but in this case, I’ll make an exception. In private, you may call me Hugh Bathory. But in public, I’m the Founder. Understand?_
Perfectly, said Sierra. Why all the secrecy, may I ask? Why aren’t we talking face-to-face?

Everything will make sense in due course, Sierra, I promise, said the Founder. In the meantime, I’d rather just get to know you first. Why don’t you ask me a question or two? I’m sure you’ve got plenty to say.

Now that you mention it, yes. You’re one of us, so why’re you hunting down your own kind? asked Sierra. Why would the Founder, a powerful member of Sierra’s race, be leading a shadow war against his own?

It’s simple. Someday this war between our species is going to end and when it does, I’d like to be on the side that’s still standing, said the Founder. Wouldn’t you? If not for your own sake, then for your son’s.

Sierra felt a wave of anger and protectiveness. Leave my son alone. He’s got nothing to do with this!

Calm yourself, dear girl, soothed the Founder. While I am curious about the grandson of the great Roger Price, I have no desire to bring someone so young into our world. Your son’s still an innocent child. Let him enjoy that until he’s grown. I have a child of my own, so I understand your reaction.

Sierra relaxed a little but still kept her guard up. Thank you. But I’m still curious. What is it you want from me?

Your abilities are powerful, said the Founder. He’d taken on an edge to his tone, he sounded like a creepy villain from a Disney flick. But also dangerous. I understand they’ve evolved beyond that of any other our kind. Biological and temporal manipulation, as I understand it. Your abilities are rather like your father’s, he could stop time as well.

Sierra froze. Is that why you had him killed?

His death was unfortunate, said the Founder, regretfully. It could’ve been avoided. That’s why I brought you here, to see how alike you are.

Sierra’s eyes narrowed and she resisted the urge to break something. I’m not my father! How many times did she have to say it? Sierra believed in her father’s cause and loved him but she wasn’t Roger!

That remains to be seen, said the Founder. So, Sierra, show me what it is you’re hiding from your uncle and from your new friends.

The Founder then attempted to read Sierra’s mind. She acted quickly, closed her eyes and blocked him out the best she could. The Founder was one of the strongest telepaths she’d ever encountered, almost too strong. By the end of it, Sierra was clutching a nearby chair for dear life and breathing hard. She’d done her best to block out the Founder, but had she succeeded? She had no idea.

XXX

Later that night, Cara entered TIM’s room dressed in a short blue dress with blue eyeshadow and
her hair curled. She was smiling and carrying a clothing bag with John’s suit.

“I had to guess your measurements but I think I did alright.”

“I’m not going,” said John, not looking up from the tech he was working with.

Cara sighed. She could practically smell John’s wounded pride. “You’re mad because you lost a fight?”

John put down his work. “I’m mad we had to fight at all! This last month, I’ve been shot at, you’ve been captured, and we’ve had more run-ins with Ultra in the last two months than we’ve had in the last two years. We can’t go topside and of all people, I’d expect you to support me!”

John may not have reciprocated Cara’s affections but they were still best friends and she was his SIC. Sierra had warned John that Cara might pull a stunt like that, but even so, he’d expected Cara to support his decisions and she’d let him down in more ways than one.

“I do,” insisted Cara.

“You undermined me in front of everyone!” protested John. “How’re they supposed to respect my decisions when you don’t?”

“Respect or obey?” challenged Cara. “You know, when I was being held down, afraid my powers were going to be stripped, I thought about how we’d spent the last two years. Hiding. Living in fear.”

“Surviving!” insisted John. Everything he’d done had been to protect everyone down in the Lair. He only enforced the rules and protocols for everyone’s own good. The last two years hadn’t been a picnic, but they were two years more than they would’ve had if they’d been topside. But no, everyone was being ungrateful and complaining.

“It’s not enough anymore!” said Cara, sounding upset. “And maybe you’re right, maybe that’s because of what Russell and I did, maybe it’s Sierra’s fault, but I didn’t challenge you for her or for Robbie or for anyone else. I did it for us.”

John opened his mouth to speak but no words emitted and there was a look of distress in his eyes. “Cara…” he said, finally. “I care about you, but—”

“But not in the way you care about Sierra, I know,” interrupted Cara. Her blue eyes glistened with tears. “You still love her. I know. But that’s not what I’m getting at. Remember what you said to me, when I first told you how I felt about you? You said it would be impossible for us to be anything but friends. But what if it’s impossible for us to even be that? What if us only exists down here in the dark? How’re we suppose to survive like this, John?”

“We’ll find a way,” said John, quietly. “I’ll find a way.”

Cara’s eyes were pleading as she grasped John’s arm. “Come with me. One night. Let’s pretend to be two normal best friends.”

John, knowing that Cara was actually hoping for one night to pretend John’s heart was hers, shook his head and pulled away.

“Cara…we’re not,” he murmured.

Cara looked disappointed but not surprised as she pulled away. “Your call. Have fun guarding
an empty subway station, then.”

And with that, John was left alone and he sighed as he slumped onto the couch.

XXX

Far across town, Sierra emerged from her bathroom, dressed in her party gown.

Sierra’s dark hair was in a bun with small curls on either side of her face. She was wearing her red dress with gold beading, light touches of gold eyeshadow, red lipstick, a gold and ruby necklace and matching earrings.

She was just slipping on her red high-heeled shoes when she was startled by the sound of someone teleporting into the room. She smiled in relief when she saw it was just Cara.

“What?” asked Cara, as Sierra stared at her. “You called me.”

“Sorry, it’s just… you look like a movie star,” said Sierra. “Blue’s a good color on you. You should wear it more often.”

Cara smiled and blushed. “Thanks. So, where’s Robbie?”

“He’s at a sleepover at a friend’s house,” said Sierra. She finished strapping on her shoes and stood up. “I take it John’s not going to your little shindig?”

Cara shook her head. “I tried to talk to him, but he insisted on holding down the fort. You know how stubborn he is.”

“Unfortunately, yes,” said Sierra. John was hardcore and that was putting it lightly. “So, anyway, I asked you here because I need a favor. I had to meet Jedikiah’s partner/boss, the Founder today. He was one of us, Cara. We talked telepathically the whole time. He tried to get inside my head and I did my best to block him but I’m still wondering if it was enough.”

Cara looked concerned but quickly concealed it. “I’m sure it was, Sierra. You’re one of the strongest telepaths I’ve ever met.”

“There’s always someone stronger, Cara,” said Sierra. “I’m scared that the Founder got inside, saw my secrets. What if he found out that I’m helping you or that Robbie is John’s son?”

“It sounds like John’s the one getting in your head. You’re the one who reminded us to be brave. Tonight wouldn’t have happened without you,” said Cara.

Sierra was not comforted in the least by Cara’s words. “That’s what I’m worried about. If Jedikiah gets his hands on you again or if he manages to catch John—”

“If Ultra comes after us, I’ll sense them coming a mile away and we’ll teleport out,” interrupted Cara. Her tone was gentle and soothing. “And in case you haven’t noticed, I’m kind of a badass.”

Sierra chuckled and nodded. “You really are.”

“And so are you,” added Cara. “You look gorgeous, by the way. I think you’re going to turn a lot of heads at the festival tonight.”
“Thanks.”

Cara cleared her throat. “So, you said you wanted to ask me a favor. What was it you wanted me to do, exactly?”

Oh, that. Sierra took a deep breath. “Before I tell John about all this, I was wondering if you could do a check, make sure the Founder didn’t find out anything from me. Please?”

It was a big show of trust for Sierra to ask Cara to do this. And regardless, there was no one else she could turn to. If Sierra was right and the Founder had gotten something he shouldn’t have from Sierra’s mind, then she’d rather find out from Cara than from John. The anger and disappointment from him would be too much to bear. Sierra needed to know, just for her peace of mind.

Cara’s face softened as she nodded. “Sure.”

Sierra held out her hands for Cara to take but before Cara could touch Sierra’s mind, they were interrupted.

Cara! We’re going to be late! said Russell.

Cara hesitated but Sierra waved it off. “It’s all right. It can wait until you get back,” said Sierra. She’d just glanced at the clock and realized she was going to have to leave soon too. “Just promise me you’ll be careful.”

Cara nodded. “I promise.”

And with that, Cara disappeared.

Not long after Cara left, Sierra heard a knock at the door. “Hey, you don’t need to knock. Did you forget I gave you a key to the front door?”

But when Sierra opened the front door, her face fell to see Jedikiah was on the other side. “Uncle Jed. What a surprise. What brings you here? I thought I was off work tonight.”

“There’s been a change of plans,” said Jedikiah. “You need to come with me. Now.”

Sierra wanted to protest that she had a prior appointment, but she could tell it’d be useless to argue with her uncle. “Okay. Let me grab my purse.” Sierra grabbed her purse, a black bag with a long shoulder strap that contained her phone, wallet and house keys, off the kitchen counter and followed her uncle out of the apartment.

Sierra sent a quick text message to Astrid, who was supposed to pick up Sierra for the festival.

Running late. Meet you there? XO, Sierra

Sierra then switched off her phone and tried to calm down.

Whatever was going to happen had Jedikiah upset and on edge, not a good combo. Something bad was going down, she just knew it.
Meanwhile, at Club Barcelona, a place that was full of pounding lights and head-splitting music, drinks, food and people chatting and dancing, was the place to be. The Tomorrow People, who were all dressed in the latest fashions courtesy of the no-finger discount, were having the time of their lives, having finally gained the chance to feel like regular people for once.

Russell grabbed two champagne glasses and handed one to Cara. “To TIM and civilization.”

“To TIM,” said Cara, smiling. They clinked their glasses together. “How’s everyone doing?”

“Looking sharp, player,” said Kurt, grinning before he disappeared into the crowd.

“They’re great, except for Irene,” said Russell. He grimaced at the sight of Irene, who was wearing a short white dress and dancing in the most bizarre way. “Except for Irene, who appears to be having some sort of seizure. Oh, wait, that’s just her dancing. Oh, now she’s twerking. I can’t… I can’t watch.”

Cara playfully smacked Russell’s shoulder. “Be nice.”

“Dude?” said Carlos, as he pointed to a hot brunette at the bar, who was dressed in red and couldn’t keep her eyes off Russell. “That girl is totally checking you out.”

“Oh, hello! You know what red means, don’t you? Ready,” said Russell. He downed some liquid courage. “If you’ll excuse me.”

“I’ll keep an eye on him,” said Carlos, as he followed Russell.

Cara laughed and then sighed. Kurt was dancing with Irene now, all the Tomorrow People were either hanging out with each other or had found a new bestie. Cara hadn’t. Cara was in a roomful of people and yet she was all alone. No one was talking to her or paying her much attention. It was lonely and a bit boring. Cara’s self-pity party ended when she felt a tap on her shoulder.

“Care to dance with your best friend?”

Cara smiled at the sight of John, who was dressed in the dark blue shirt and black suit she’d gotten him and smiling broadly.

“I’d love to.” Cara took John’s hand as he led her out to the dancefloor. “You really wear that suit.”

“Well, you went to all the trouble to steal it for me, I figure I should at least try it on,” said John, as they started to slow dance.

Cara loved dancing with John. She just melted in his arms. Though she knew they could never be a couple like Cara wanted, Cara secretly loved being able to pretend just for one night, that John was hers. Even so, there was still something about him that bothered her.

“Why’re you the only person I can’t read besides Sierra?” asked Cara. “Why won’t you let me in?”

“I thought you wanted to be two normal best friends,” teased John.

Cara couldn’t help but smile as she rested her head on John’s shoulder. “I just worry about you.
I want to make sure you’re okay, that you have someone you can talk to.”

“I am okay and I do have someone to talk to,” promised John. “Trust me, I’m good.”

“Okay.”

They kept dancing until the song went from slow to upbeat, at which point, John spotted Russell taking his date to the VIP bar and Cara noticed that Irene was downing a lot of shots with Kurt over at one of the bars.

“I better keep an eye on him,” said John.

“I better keep an eye on her,” said Cara, frowning.

John chuckled. “Ever feel like we’re the parents? They’re more like kids than Robbie and he’s seven.”

Cara laughed and then they went off in different directions.

The party continued on and it was a blast until after an hour or two when Cara tried and failed to get Irene’s attention via telepathy. Thinking Irene wasn’t listening on purpose, Cara walked over to the younger girl and gave her a disapproving look.

“Why aren’t you listening? I’ve been screaming at you telepathically,” said Cara.

Irene looked surprised. “Sorry, I didn’t hear you.”

Cara was taken aback. Irene hadn’t heard her? That shouldn’t have happened. Cara frowned when she realized how quiet it was. Even when Cara wasn’t using her telepathic ability, there was always a soft hum in the back of her mind but right now there wasn’t.

“Neither can I.” Cara tried but she couldn’t hear the slightest telepathic whisper. “I can’t hear anything at all.” Something wasn’t right. Cara was nearly overwhelmed with dread and fear as she grabbed Irene’s hand. “Come on, we’re leaving.”

Knowing better than to argue with Cara when she was in that mood, the Tomorrow People on Cara’s end followed her out of the club.

At the VIP bar, Russell was at a loss to explain why he couldn’t make the olive in his martini float, other than him being drunk as a skunk. When he accidentally dropped a shot glass after deciding he’d had too much to drink and was cutting himself off, John bent down to pick it up. It was then that John spotted the D-chips lining the underside of the counter and he had a horrifying realization.

D-chips and Russell’s powers not working. One and one made two.

“It’s an ambush,” said John. Ultra was there. They had to leave and fast.

It was like a bucket of water to the face. Russell and Carlos ceased chatting and tried to jump, but failed. They couldn’t teleport away.

“I can’t jump,” said Russell.

“D-chips,” explained John. “We need to get everyone out.”

“I’m on it,” said Carlos.
Sierra was scared when they arrived at Club Barcelona, the place where John and the others were currently partying at. She panicked. This was no coincidence. Had she been right? Had the Founder picked up something in Sierra’s mind that revealed her true loyalties?

“What is this? Another test of my loyalties?” asked Sierra, as she followed Jedikiah into the back of the club. “Don’t you trust me?”

“Oh, I do,” said Jedikiah. “I’ve done everything in my power to protect you.”

*Protect me? Protect me how? By blackmailing and extorting me?* Sierra wanted to scream but didn’t. “Let me guess, the Founder doesn’t share in your feelings. He doesn’t trust me.”

“The Founder doesn’t trust anyone but himself, Sierra. And unfortunately, after what happened with your father, my colleague, the Founder has misgivings about you. He doesn’t want to repeat the same mistakes he made with your father.”

“Excuse me?!” Sierra couldn’t prevent the outrage in her voice. “With all due respect, I am not my father! How many times do I have to say it?”

“Until it’s fully believed,” replied Jedikiah, nonchalantly.

Sierra was furious. Even though she was a double-agent, she’d never given Ultra any reason to question her faithfulness to her uncle’s company.

“I’ve done everything I’ve been asked to and more! I’ve given Ultra no reason to question my loyalty!” she protested.

“Fidelity, Sierra,” corrected Jedikiah. “Loyalty is something a dog offers. It’s based on an emotion like love. Fidelity, on the other hand, is based on a moral obligation, a sense of duty. This is what we’ll examine here tonight.”

Sierra glared at Jedikiah but didn’t protest.

Jedikiah knocked on the door and Darcy opened it.

“Is the room secure?”

“Yes, sir. The civilians have all been cleared,” replied Darcy. She gave Sierra a kind look and nod. “You look nice, Jameson.”

“Thanks,” said Sierra, softly.

Darcy had been different around Sierra ever since the McCrane incident. Darcy was more patient, less cranky and patronizing and even—dare Sierra admit it?—friendly towards Sierra. Who knew that saving someone’s life could suddenly completely change the dynamics of their relationship? But even so, Sierra still didn’t trust Darcy with her secrets.

“And our containment system?” asked Jedikiah.
“It’s up and running, sir,” said Darcy.

Jedikiah nodded, pleased and then turned to Sierra. “I stuck my neck out for you, darling. Don’t make me regret it.”

Sierra faked a smile. “Why would I? I’m a woman of my word, as are you.”

“Pleased to hear it. Follow me,” said Jedikiah.

Without waiting for a reply, Jedikiah took Sierra’s arm and dragged her inside the club. They were on a balcony that overlooked everything happening down below. Much to Sierra’s horror, she was able to recognize the other guests as Ultra agents, human ones, and then she saw the Tomorrow People heading out of the club.

Cara was there and Sierra tried to warn her.

*Cara! Cara, it’s a trap! Get everyone out of here!* yelled Sierra. *Cara, you hear me?*

But Cara showed no sign of being able to hear Sierra. The place was full of D-chips, making it impossible for even Sierra’s powers to be of use. Just then, Cara looked up and her eyes briefly met Sierra’s before she spotted Jedikiah standing next to Sierra.

Cara quickened her pace but it wasn’t quick enough as Ultra’s kill squads suddenly fired at will upon the Tomorrow People, committing a horrible massacre. Three of the Tomorrow People were shot down and the rest were badly wounded. Being unable to kill or use their powers to fight back, the Tomorrow People were sitting ducks. The screams and the bloodshed were too much for Sierra to bear and after a brief moment of being frozen in fear, she turned her head away from it.

She couldn’t just stand there and do nothing. Remembering the fuse box she’d seen on her way in and what Darcy had said about the containment, Sierra closed her eyes and envisioned the fuse box. The circuitry fried like an egg and then suddenly the power died.

“Whatever this is supposed to be teaching me, I’ve learned enough!” growled Sierra, as she yanked herself free of Jedikiah’s grip. She’d been forced to learn a lesson about Ultra’s power, survival of the fittest and kill or be killed. Sierra got the message loud and clear.

With the D-chips down, the powers of the Tomorrow People were restored and after John beat back the kill squad, the Tomorrow People were able to escape to the Lair with their injured and their dead as quickly as possible.

Sierra wasted no time doing the same.

XXX

Outside, Cara and John were carrying Irene out beyond the range of the D-chips.

Irene had suffered a bullet wound to the side and was bleeding heavily. They were almost home free when they encountered a member of the kill squad. John was able to disable and disarm him just in time as another one showed up, firing off his gun.
What happened next shocked Cara to the core. John picked up the fallen agent’s gun and fired it at the other. There was no hint of pain or resistance from the Prime Barrier on John’s face, only regret that Cara had seen what he’d done and a soldier’s determination to do what had to be done.

Cara was frozen and couldn’t believe what’d just happened. John had used the gun and taken a life. John could kill. He’d lied to her.

XXX

When Sierra arrived at the Lair, it was one of the most tragic sights she’d ever seen.

Three dead bodies lay on the floor, others were injured, everyone was crying or clutching someone for dear life and Irene was propped up against the stairs while Cara and Russell tried to prevent her from dying. Cara was keeping pressure on the wound and hysterically talking to Irene while Russell rummaged through the med-kit. John had used his suit jacket to prop up Irene’s head but that was all he could do. Irene was going to die.

“Sierra!” said John, when he’d noticed her. “What’re you doing here?”

“What do you think I’m doing here? I’m here to help,” said Sierra, as she knelt down beside Irene.

“We were ambushed,” said Russell, miserably.

“Yeah, I know, I was there.”

John looked at Sierra sharply and grabbed her arm, yanking her up. “You were what?!”

“My sick uncle!” explained Sierra. “He dragged me to the club without a warning. I had no idea. I tried to warn you guys.”

John looked heartbroken. “We have three dead because of him!”

“Do you want to make it four?” Sierra yanked herself free of John’s grip and took her place back at Irene’s side. She placed her hands on Irene’s shaking body and focused on the healing of Irene’s wound. Before long, Irene was healed and breathing deeply as she sat up and looked at Sierra with gratitude. “You’ll be okay now.”

Everyone was staring at Sierra in shock but none more so than Cara.

“How did you…?” asked Cara.

“I’ll explain later,” said Sierra, briskly. “Right now, I have people to help.”

Sierra’s ability of biological manipulation had not yet been mentioned to anyone beyond that of John. She hadn’t been ready for anyone to know quite yet, seeing herself as a big enough freak as it was. Now hadn’t been the way to reveal her power but there was no changing it now.

Sierra rose up and offered to heal anyone who would let her. Needless to say, despite their shock, everyone allowed Sierra to mend their wounds. Sierra managed it with little difficulty until she tried to restore the life of the three who’d died. She’d never attempted to revive the dead before and it was risky to do so now, but she had to do it. Why, Sierra didn’t know, she just knew she had
Sierra placed her hands on two of them and focused hard as she used her ability. It worked, but she felt weak as a kitten and her nose was bleeding, but she still used her power one last time. No sooner had she completed her task, Sierra’s nose started to bleed more heavily and she couldn’t breathe. Her vision went black and she collapsed.

Sierra was in a black hallway that was lit at the end with a blue-green light.

It was so weird. Her pain and exhaustion was gone and everything moved as though it were water.

“Where am I?” she murmured.

“You’re in Limbo, Sierra.”

Sierra nearly jumped out of her skin at the sound of her father’s voice. Much to her shock, Roger was there, at the end of the hall. He looked like he had from the message he’d left her and was apparently in good health.

“Daddy?” gasped Sierra. “Dad, is that you?”

Roger smiled and his eyes glistened with tears. “It’s me, baby girl.”

Sierra’s heart leapt with joy and without thinking, she ran towards Roger, but he pushed her back with his powers. Sierra was both confused and hurt by her father’s reaction. Hadn’t he missed her? Did he truly not care?

“Dad, what’re you—?”

“Stay back!” he ordered. It looked like it was painful for him to say this. “You shouldn’t be here right now, Sierra. You need to go back before it’s too late.”

So that was it. Roger was trying to protect her at the expense of his own happiness. But Sierra couldn’t leave just yet. “Dad, I need your help. Please.”

“Save yourself,” said Roger. “Save all of them.”

“How?” asked Sierra, as tears slid down her cheeks. How was she supposed to save her race from extinction when she could barely protect those closest to her? “Dad, tell me what to do. Please!”

“Thanatos,” said Roger.

Sierra was more puzzled than ever. “Dad, I don’t know what that means. Dad, come on, give me something. Please!”

How could Roger expect her to do anything if she didn’t know what to do?

Roger opened his mouth to speak but then Sierra was pulled away and everything went dark.

Sierra’s eyes shot open, she inhaled sharply and began coughing fiercely.
Tears slid down her cheeks, her throat felt like it was on fire, her head ached something fierce and at least two of her ribs felt cracked. Her vision was momentarily blurred as she reached for and clutched the nearest thing, which happened to be John, who’d been performing CPR to resuscitate her.

“It’s okay. I’ve got you. You’re okay,” said John. His tone was soothing, but he almost sounded like he was trying to reassure himself as much as Sierra. “You scared the hell out of me. Don’t ever do that again. Promise me!”

“I promise,” said Sierra, as she gripped his shoulder. It terrified her how close she’d come to dying from the overuse of her power. What had she been thinking? What if John hadn’t brought her back? What would’ve happened to Robbie? Sierra silently swore she’d never do such a thing again. Then she remembered what she’d seen. “John, I saw my dad. He was there. He told me—”


Sierra made no reply as her exhaustion claimed her and she drifted off into unconsciousness.

XXX

While Sierra lay unconscious on the couch, Cara waited outside so she could talk to John in private. Sierra’s ability had been shocking enough, but John’s had been the worst. Petty as it sounded, Cara felt a sense of betrayal from John’s lack of trust.

“We need to talk, John,” said Cara, as John rose up from where he’d been kneeling. “Now.”

John looked like he wanted to refuse but then he changed his mind and led Cara into a private area where they could talk freely.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” were the first words out of Cara’s mouth.

“We should never have gone up there,” muttered John.

Cara glared. “You know damn well that’s not what I’m talking about. Now, answer me!” The trauma of the night had left Cara impatient and short-tempered.

John folded his arms across his chest. “Tell you about what, Cara? Sierra’s secret or mine?”

“Both!” Cara couldn’t believe John had to ask. “Why didn’t you say anything? Either of you?”

John sighed. “Sierra’s abilities evolved the night McCrane attacked her. She wasn’t ready for anyone to know and it wasn’t my secret to tell. Anything more about Sierra, ask her but wait until she’s ready. She doesn’t trust easily.”

Cara was forced to admit John’s reasoning made sense and her anger faded but not entirely. “And the rest of it?”

John looked away. “Cara…I don’t know what to tell you.”

Cara gave John an incredulous look. “How about the truth?”

John’s eyes were dull with pain. “That I’m a killer? Genetically enhanced freak.”
Cara shook like a leaf. “I don’t understand how…” Cara’s voice wandered off as she recalled John’s odd behavior during the McCrane incident. John had been so evasive about why he was answering to Jedikiah’s call, so determined and confident in his ability to handle McCrane and so firm about his statement that McCrane had just upped and left…John had seemed so off and now she knew why. “The Annex Project? You…you were part of it?”

It didn’t seem real. John, her leader and best friend, was part of the same project that destroyed McCrane’s psyche and the lives of countless other agents. How could he willingly participate in something that destroyed one’s soul? But at the same time, the secret itself made sense. John was always blocking Cara out and seemed to be hiding something. Cara just hadn’t realized this would be it.

John looked ashamed and regretful as he nodded. “I was the only one besides McCrane who was lucky enough to survive the beta test.”

“Why didn’t you just tell me?” asked Cara. Had John seriously thought that Cara would reject him or cast him out if she knew his secret?

“Because this part of me was supposed to stay dead,” said John. At the time, John had joined the Annex Project because he thought that if it was successful, he would be in a better position to protect their people. He’d bought into Jedikiah’s propaganda and he’d had no way of knowing the toll that taking a life took on one’s soul. It was John’s greatest shame.

Cara couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “This is what you’ve been hiding all these years? This is why you keep everyone at arm’s length? Do you see what is has done to us, John?”

“What choice did I have?” protested John. “How do you think they’d take the news that Jedikiah had turned their fearless leader into a freak? That I wasn’t one of them anymore?”

“I’m not talking about them. Why didn’t you tell me?” growled Cara. “I’m your SIC and your best friend. How could you keep this from me?”

John sighed again and looked at her with sad eyes. “Because of the way you’re looking at me right now, like I’m a monster.”

Cara’s blue eyes were as cold as ice. “I don’t care what your secret was. It’s that you kept it from me. That is what you’re seeing, John.” Angry tears pooled in her eyes. “Just tell me one thing: does Sierra know about what you can do?”

If John’s answer was no, then Cara was going to tell Robbie’s mother of John’s secret. Sierra had the right to know the truth about her ex-boyfriend.

John nodded. “Yeah, she knows. But she doesn’t care. She kept it secret because I asked her to.” When John had first taken a life, it’d been in self-defense but it’d still haunted him and he’d needed emotional support, so he’d gone to Sierra and confessed about the Annex Project. Sierra had been shocked but she hadn’t cared that John could kill, she’d just comforted him all night and promised to never leave him.

Cara paled as a horrifying thought came to her. “Does that mean that Robbie can—?”

“I don’t know,” said John. And frankly, John didn’t want to know. The idea of his son being able to kill was just too much. “Hopefully, we never have to find out.”

But who knew what the future held in store for them?
When Sierra awoke, she still felt off but she still felt better than she had before. She was being watched by Irene and the three who’d been dead before Sierra revived them.

“Are you okay?” asked Irene. “You really scared us.”

Sierra nodded as they helped her sit up. “I’m okay. Just tired and a little dizzy.” Sierra didn’t think she could stand and walk without help just yet. “Help me get to John, please.”

To Sierra’s surprise and gratitude, all four of them did so and with great gentleness.

“Thank you,” murmured Irene, gratefully as she gave Sierra a hug. “You took a chance and saved our lives. Thank you.”

The other three mimicked Irene’s actions, giving Sierra gentle hugs and murmuring words of gratitude as they helped her reach John, who smiled in relief at the sight of Sierra up and about.

“Sierra.”

“John.”

They shared a brief embrace and then John kept a grip on her waist, keeping Sierra standing as Sierra placed a hand on John’s shoulder and beckoned to the scene before her. People were sitting across from Cara at a small table as she gripped their hands. Cara had never looked so cold and determined before, it was almost frightening.

“What’s going on?”

“Ultra knew we were going to be at that party,” John said. “Someone gave us up. And no one is leaving this room until I find out who! Cara’s searching everyone’s minds, trying to find out who the traitor is.”

“The traitor…” Sierra’s face fell as she had a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. “John… the traitor. It might’ve been me.”

John stiffened as he looked at Sierra. “Excuse me?”

Sierra filled John in about what happened with the Founder and when she’d finished, John looked far from pleased but wasn’t nearly as angry as Sierra expected. Though John doubted Sierra was the traitor, he agreed to have Sierra’s mind searched at her request.

“Will you see everything the Founder saw?” asked Sierra, as she sat down across from Cara. “Find out if it was me?”

Cara nodded and then held out her hands for Sierra to take, before they could even attempt to start the process, Kurt blurted out, “I swear to heaven, it wasn’t supposed to happen like that!”

All eyes fell upon Kurt and Sierra shakily rose up with Cara’s help as John stood in front of Kurt, who was shaking like a leaf and crying.

“They said no one would get hurt. They said they just wanted you,” said Kurt, as he looked up
at John, with tear-filled eyes.


Sierra had never felt angrier. It hadn’t been her who’d given the Tomorrow People away to Ultra, it had been Kurt and by his own volition! Kurt, who’d been so kind and shy. Kurt, who Sierra and the others had risked their necks for to protect him. And he’d betrayed them without thinking twice.

“They lied to me,” sobbed Kurt.

John grabbed Kurt by the lapels of his jacket, forcing him out of the chair. “YOU SON OF A BITCH!”

Kurt was tossed across the room. He picked himself up and pointed a shaky finger at John. “You said you were going to kick me out for trying to visit my mom!”

“So you went to our enemy?” said John, incredulously.

“I went back to say good-bye to my mom for good. You were right. I shouldn’t have gone. They were there,” explained Kurt. He looked distraught. “What was I supposed to do? They said that they’d kill her if I didn’t help them capture you!”

“So you let them kill three of our own instead and almost take Sierra in the process?” said Russell, unable to believe this. Out of all of them, Russell was the one most hurt by Kurt’s betrayal. He’d been closest to Kurt, trusted and cared for him like a brother. “We trusted you! We made you one of us, you piece of—”

Russell moved to attack Kurt but John pulled him back.

All four of them were glaring at Kurt with intense hatred.

“We saved your life, Kurt,” said Sierra. She moved away from Cara, having suddenly found the strength to stand alone. “I almost died rescuing you.”

“We treated you like family, Kurt,” said Cara, coldly. “We took you in and this is how you repay us?”

“What’re you—?” Kurt was cut off when John TK’d him into the wall and then teleported away. When John returned, John had the syringe full of Jedikiah’s cure, positioned to be injected into Kurt’s neck. “AAH! Someone stop him!”

But no one did.

Sierra didn’t think it was worth to lose the serum over a lowlife like Kurt. Who knew when Sierra would be able to acquire more of it? But at the same time, Sierra understood why it had to be done. Kurt had betrayed them all and had to be punished for his actions.

“You’re not one of us, Kurt. Not anymore,” said John. He plunged the needle into Kurt’s neck as the younger man screamed. “If you breathe a word of this to anyone, if you try and lead Ultra down here, I swear to heaven I will get inside your head and I will magnify the pain you’re feeling so much you won’t recognize your mother’s face! Do you understand me, Kurt?”

Kurt just grunted in response before John dropped him to the ground.
“Someone get him out of here,” ordered John.

XXX

When Sierra felt well enough to leave the Lair a couple hours later, John insisted on escorting Sierra home.

After she’d almost died, John didn’t feel keen on letting her out of his sight anytime soon. Sierra understood what John was feeling. She didn’t feel like being alone that night either. But at the same time, Sierra knew John’s people needed him more, so they compromised. John would make sure she got home safe and Sierra would keep their link open all night. That way, they’d still be together and she could let him know if she needed him.

When Sierra entered her bedroom, she nearly jumped out of her skin at the sight of Astrid sitting on her bed, looking upset and scared.

“Where have you been?” demanded Astrid. “I’ve been waiting for you all night!”

Thinking Astrid was upset about the festival, which Sierra had completely forgotten about, Sierra felt a great wave of shame and guilt.

“Oh, Astrid. I’m so sorry,” said Sierra. “I should’ve called you.”

“I followed you,” said Astrid.

Sierra’s eyes widened in fear. “What?!”

“I got your text just as I pulled up and saw you enter a car with your uncle. Then I followed you to a club and when I tried to go after you, some Secret Service woman stopped me,” said Astrid.

Sierra was shaking again and felt a surge of anger and fear. “No! Astrid, you could’ve been…”

“I could’ve been what?” demanded Astrid. Her voice was thick with emotion and there were tears glistening in her eyes. “You’re scaring me, Sierra! I’m worried sick about you. How about you tell me what is going on?”

“I told you to drop this! You can’t follow me, okay?” blurted out Sierra, as tears came to her eyes. “It isn’t safe, Astrid!”

Astrid’s eyes widened at the stain on Sierra’s dress sleeve that became visible when Sierra folded up the jacket she’d been given. “What is that? Is that blood? Are you hurt?”

“What? No! No. It isn’t mine,” said Sierra, quickly.

Astrid still looked worried. “Sierra, what is going on?”

Sierra wanted to continue to hide everything, to keep Astrid safe from the knowledge of what Sierra actually was, but in that moment of distress and pain, Sierra could no longer hide the truth. She needed someone to talk to.

Sierra was trembling and tears were rolling down her cheeks. “I…I saw something tonight, something bad. Really bad. And I don’t know if I can deal with it alone.” Up until that moment,
Sierra had been strong, but now her defenses were coming down and the trauma from having witnessed Ultra’s cruelty was taking its toll on her. She’d thought she could handle it by herself like she’d handled so many other things but she couldn’t. She needed some emotional support, badly.

Astrid’s face softened as she held Sierra in a comforting hug. “You don’t have to. I’m right here. Whatever it is that’s wrong, you can tell me. I’m here. Just talk to me. What’re you so afraid of?”

Sierra sniffled as she pulled away. “I’m scared of losing you for good,” she confessed. “You were right earlier, I have been lying to you. I’ve been keeping something big from you for a really long time now. I wanted to tell you sooner, but for a long time, you were all I had, so I was so scared of losing you. Plus, it’s so dangerous and I was scared of what would happen if I dragged you into it—”

“Shh,” soothed Astrid. “If it’s your life, I’m already in it and it’s all right. Nothing you could do or say could ever change our friendship, I promise. Just tell me what it is.”

Sierra didn’t need her telepathy to know that Astrid wasn’t lying. Knowing Astrid was being honest made this easier. “It’s better if I just show you. Do you remember where we first became friends?” When Astrid nodded, Sierra took her hands. “Trust me and hold on tight.”

Sierra then teleported them to their favorite spot, the place where they became friends. They were at the river by the park, just overlooking the bridge which was lit up at night. Astrid gasped in shock but quickly got over it. She just looked at their surroundings in amazement before smiling and hugging Sierra tightly.

“Thank you,” whispered Astrid.

“No. Thank you,” murmured Sierra.

Astrid had no idea just how much her reaction meant to Sierra.

With her spirits lifted, Sierra was beginning to feel like maybe—just maybe—they could get through what was to come, together.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

Seven years ago

Russell Kwon, a musical prodigy, was playing beautiful classical music for a panel of judges who would either make or break his musical career based on how well he played today.

Russell looked at his father out of the corner of his eye, hoping to catch a sign of pride in Russell’s playing or at least an encouraging smile, but his father remained stony-faced. Russell tried not to let it get to him as he kept playing. Russell’s eyes widened when it happened again, the piano keys played by themselves. It wasn’t the first strange thing to happen to him and he didn’t think it would be the last and it scared him.

At last, the dreaded performance came to an end. Russell thanked the judges for their time and bowed before walking off the stage. Later that day when everyone else’s performances were done, Russell returned to the piano and went over his sheet music, seeing if there was anything that could be improved or required more practicing.

Mr. Kwon made his appearance known with his harsh voice. “Your tempo is sloppy and your fifth finger is weak!”

Russell’s heart sank. Had he really done that poorly in his work or was it just his father’s endless criticism again? “What did the judges say?”

“That you’ve been selected,” said Mr. Kwon, disgustedly. Russell’s triumph should’ve made him proud but he was never happy with anything his son did, no matter how hard Russell worked. “Seems to me all the judges are deaf. Isn’t that right, Ryung?”

“Russell,” he said, quietly. “My name is Russell.”

Mr. Kwon’s frown deepened. “Name I gave you wasn’t good enough? Do you know what I sacrificed for you? A good job, a nice big house for you and your mom. Why are you acting like this?”

Russell’s heart ached with pain. Time and time again, Mr. Kwon scolded Russell for being a terrible disappointment despite how hard Russell worked to please him, he never let Russell forget how hard he worked to provide them all with a good life, and he was never there for Russell
emotionally. Why couldn’t Mr. Kwon stop berating his son and see Russell for the good son that he was instead of what Mr. Kwon wanted him to be?

“Dad, something’s happening to me,” said Russell, unable to keep the sadness out of his voice. He was scared of what was happening and he needed his dad’s help or else he was going to lose it. “Sometimes when I’m playing, the keys just move by themselves and I—”

“That’s enough!” said Mr. Kwon, sharply. “You need to practice a lot more! I told you, your fifth finger is weak! Practice!”

Mr. Kwon then stormed off, leaving Russell alone with his misery.

Russell tossed his sheet music aside and tried not to cry before he accidentally TK’d the piano bench into the wall, shattering it. He used to love the piano but now he just wished it’d never been invented. He worked day and night to make his dad proud of him, but it was never enough. Why did he even bother?

Present day…

Russell and Sierra were topside at a pool hall.

Russell whooped as he sank the eight-ball, securing victory and winning his opponent’s cash.

“I did it!” he cheered. “Does that mean I win?”

Russell’s opponent, a tall bald guy with muscles that could rival the Incredible Hulk, looked annoyed as he tossed a wad of cash onto the pool table.

“Beginner’s luck,” said Russell. “What do you say? Double or nothing?”

Russell loved hustling people, it never got old, not for him. But his opponent didn’t share in Russell’s enthusiasm and just walked out of the bar.

Sierra, who was watching from her chair and sipping a ginger ale, shook her head as she walked over to Russell.

“You know, I’m pretty sure that guy was on to you,” said Sierra.

“Oh, chillax. Here…” Russell handed Sierra the money. “For your brother’s steroid fund.”

“Football camp,” corrected Sierra.

“Same difference,” said Russell, laughing. “You said you needed a break from life and a little extra dough. This is how we do it.”

“Yeah, I just want to help out my mom. Since she won’t accept money from Jedikiah, I have to let her think I have a second job,” said Sierra, as she pocketed the cash.

Sierra and Marla’s relationship had improved dramatically over the last couple of weeks. Marla was being the mother Sierra had wanted and Sierra helping out with Marla’s financial difficulties. Though Jedikiah had rescheduled the dinner and attempted to smooth things out between them, Marla still refused to permit Jedikiah’s assistance in her life and Sierra was forced to turn to
alternative methods to help out. Besides, even Sierra’s generous salary from Ultra had its limits.

That, combined with everything that’d been happening lately, Sierra felt stressed and worn out. When she’d mentioned it to Russell, who’d noticed how down she’d looked, he’d decided to take her topside for drinks and pool hustling as friends.

“That’s what I’m here for, girl. Besides, look at this way, now that you’ve seen my skills, you’ll applaud me even more when I teach Robbie when he’s old enough,” said Russell, as he chalked up his pool cue. “With his good looks and my teaching, Robbie will be the best of the best, I promise you.”

Sierra laughed and then shook her head. “Wishful thinking. If you teach Robbie how to hustle pool, I will kill you.”

“Our kind can’t kill,” teased Russell.

“No, but I will give him the location of your gummy bear stash,” said Sierra, with a glint in her eyes.

Russell looked horrified and clutched his pool cue like a combat stick. No one ever messed with Russell’s gummy bear stash. “You wouldn’t.”

“I would,” said Sierra, with utmost seriousness.

Russell held up his hands in a surrender position. “Okay, you win. No pool hustling lessons for the little munchkin. Can I at least teach him how to play poker? Please? I promise we’ll only use candy for it and I really need someone to play with.”

“No,” said Sierra, firmly.

Russell was a good friend, but Sierra didn’t want Robbie becoming Russell’s protégé in the art of pool hustling and gambling.

Russell pouted but Sierra was immovable.

“Hey, you two want to play a round?” asked a pretty girl with dark skin and black hair. “I’m looking to break in my new rod.”

Russell was stunned by the girl’s beauty and her pool cue, which she was taking out of its case. “Uh, it’s called a pool cue, actually. A Vinotchka to be precise. That is a ten thousand dollar rod… I’m sorry. What’s your name?”

The girl smiled. “Piper.”

“Charmed, Piper,” said Russell, as they shook hands. “I’m Russell. This is my bestie, Sierra.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Sierra.

“Same,” said Piper. She turned to Russell. “The rod’s my dad’s. He’s got like a dozen of them.” She shrugged it off like it was no big deal.

Russell’s eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets and he gave Sierra an excited look. “Rich girls. I just love them!”

Sensing Russell was about to do something stupid, Sierra intervened. “Piper, can you excuse us for just a sec?” When Piper nodded, Sierra grabbed Russell’s arm and dragged him away. “Ever
They’d done enough hustling for one night. Too much and they were going to get their butts kicked to Kingdom Come or lose their prize winnings.

Russell snorted. “Puh-leeze. You’re talking to a professional here. I can afford to lose some. This one’s for me.”

Sierra could see Russell wasn’t going to give in, so she gave up. “Your funeral.”

Russell feigned offense and then returned to Piper. “What do you say we play for a little cheddar? Money? It’ll make you a sharper player. It’s cheaper than lessons.”

Piper grinned. “Go easy on me?”

Russell nodded.

Sierra nearly laughed into her soda. This was going to be interesting. The professional pool hustler was about to get hustled. Sierra’s suspicions proved to be correct when Piper not only began beating Russell at his own game but subtly used telekinesis to shift one of the balls into a hole. Russell noticed too and glanced excitedly at Sierra.

Did you see that? She’s a breakout. She’s one of us. Bonus! squealed Russell. But he also looked annoyed. No one hustles Russell!

Really? That’s all you’re concerned about? Her being a breakout also means she can hear everything we’re saying, genius, said Sierra. She turned to Piper. “Isn’t that right, Piper? You heard us, didn’t you?”

Piper feigned ignorance. “What’d you say?”

Russell sighed and picked up one of the balls which he tossed at Piper.

“Russell!” exclaimed Sierra. Was he being stupid on purpose?

Piper stopped the ball in mid-air with her telekinesis and then ran from the pool hall.

Sierra and Russell chased after her and quickly caught up with Piper half a block away. Or rather, Piper beat Russell back by nailing him in the stomach with her pool cue. She held it up threateningly as Sierra backed up.

“Get the hell away from me or I’ll do to you what I did to your friend!” warned Piper.

Sierra held up her hands. “Piper, calm down. It’s okay. This idiot you just cracked in the chest, he and I are just like you. We have powers. You read my mind back at the pool hall and I can read your mind too. But we’re not your enemy.”

Piper didn’t believe her. “Oh, yeah? Prove it!”

She blasted Sierra across the street. Sierra barely had time to land on her feet instead of flat on her back before Piper ran and then teleported away.

Great. John’s going to have a fit.

Sierra held out her hand to Russell and helped him stand.
“You okay? Anything I need to mend?” Like his pride or his thick skull?

Russell shook his head as he clutched the back of it. “Nah, it’s nothing a bag of ice won’t fix. The girl’s a gamer. I like her.”

Sierra resisted the urge to roll her eyes and laugh.

XXX

When they returned to the Lair and met up with John and Cara, who were playing with Robbie in TIM’s room, they reacted as Sierra had expected. Robbie stayed out of it, not wanting to get involved in grown-up fights, John was displeased and stern, and Cara flew off the handle.

“What were you two doing in a pool hall? The last time we went topside, we walked into an ambush and almost died,” said Cara.

Sierra scowled. Did Cara really have to act like a lecturing parent? And who was the ‘we’ there? Sierra hadn’t been the one who played into Ultra’s hands.

“I’m aware of that. And for the record, we were working,” said Sierra. “We ran into a breakout, a girl called Piper.”

“Did you tell her about us?” asked John.

“We didn’t get a chance,” said Russell. “She freaked out and when we tried to talk her, she beat us like piñatas and took off like a she-ninja. Girl’s got some serious skills.”

Robbie barely stifled his giggles, which didn’t go unnoticed by Russell.

“What’re you laughing about, munchkin? You think Uncle Russell getting his butt kicked is funny?” teased Russell, as he tickled Robbie. “Do ya?”

Robbie laughed as he squirmed under Russell’s tickles. “No! No! Uncle! Uncle!”

Russell grinned as he ceased tickling the boy and ruffled Robbie’s hair.

“Sorry for the interruption,” said TIM. “But I found something that I think might interest Russell.”

“Lay it on me, TIM,” said Russell.

An obituary for an older man who bore a striking resemblance to Russell appeared on the screen.

“In scanning the newsfeed, I flagged an item from the Portland Herald,” said TIM. “Last night a local resident suffered a heart attack. His name was listed in the obituary as Chan-Woo Kwon. He passed away this morning.”

Russell looked grief-stricken as he rose up from his seat. “That’s my dad.”

Sierra exchanged sad looks with the others before speaking. “Russell…I’m so sorry.”
“No, it’s…it’s okay. We…we weren’t that close,” murmured Russell.

Russell may have claimed he lacked a close relationship with his father but it was clear that Russell cared deeply for his old man and wasn’t taking the news well.

Wisely, John, Robbie and Sierra left the room to give Russell some space. Cara stayed behind just in case Russell needed some telepathic counseling.

“Is Russell going to be okay?” asked Robbie, when they were out of earshot.

“Eventually,” said John. “I think it’s best if we give him some time to himself.”

Sierra couldn’t help but feel guilty. “Man, of all the days for me to take him topside…”

“Is there ever a good time to find out your dad passed away?” asked John.

Sierra was forced to admit there wasn’t.

“Besides, as much as I disapprove of going up top, if you two hadn’t gone topside, we might not have found out about the new breakout,” continued John.

Sierra nodded. “Thank you for reminding me. I should’ve brought her in.”

“Cara should’ve gotten a read on her,” reminded John. “Look, we’ve all been a little off lately ever since the ambush. It’s hard not to be.” How could anyone not be off after watching their friends get gunned down right in front of them? “How’ve you been doing, by the way? We haven’t had much of a chance to talk since…”

“Since I overused my powers and was proven wrong about Kurt’s character?” finished Sierra. She still felt upset about Kurt. Granted, he’d been in a bad situation, but Sierra regretted trusting him. It was an almost fatal error of judgment. “I’m fine, John.”

John’s face softened and Robbie wrapped his arms around Sierra’s legs.

“It’s not your fault, Mom,” said Robbie. “None of us could’ve known.” He’d been told of what had occurred the night of his sleepover and he felt a little responsible for what happened with Kurt. He was the one who’d pushed John to help Sierra save Kurt. “I trusted Kurt too.”

“Kurt made his own choices. It wasn’t anyone’s fault except his own,” said John, gently. “You were doing the right thing with him. Kurt messed up, not you. How often do I need to say it before you believe it?”

Sierra smiled softly. “I think I’m getting there.”

John smiled back and then his face fell when Cara left TIM’s room, caught John’s gaze and then walked in the opposite direction.

“Excuse me for a sec.”

XXX

John chased after Cara, who’d been avoiding him ever since the night of the ambush. “Cara. Cara!
Cara sighed and stopped to face John. “What, John?”

John gave her a look. “Are we ever going to talk about this?”

Cara feigned ignorance and avoided John’s gaze. “About what?”

John sighed. Really? They were going to do this? “Every time you find out something I didn’t tell you about, you avoid me. You barely spoke to me after you found out about Sierra being my ex and Robbie my son; and now ever since you saw me take out that agent and found out about Sierra’s powers, you can barely look me in the eye.”

“You think I’m upset because you can kill?” said Cara, incredulously. “Or that your ex-girlfriend is Roger’s daughter and the mother of your son? Or that you kept Sierra’s secret? You saved my life. That’s not what’s come between us, John. I think you know that.”

Cara may not have liked what the secrets were or the manner in which she discovered them, but that wasn’t the problem. The problem was that they’d been kept from her in the first place and Cara was left to wonder what else was being hidden from her.

“Then what?” demanded John.

“What else have you been protecting me from all this time? I can feel you blocking me out,” said Cara. She knew John had a right to his secrets but whatever John was hiding wouldn’t ceased bothering her. It was like a sore tooth that wouldn’t stop aching. “What are you so afraid of?”

John hesitated and decided to go with a half-truth. “If everyone here finds out that I can kill, that Jedikiah warped me, do you really think they’d accept it like they did with Sierra’s power? She can save lives. All I can do is take them. Do you really think they’d still look up to me or would this whole place fall apart? That’s what I’m afraid of, Cara.”

John didn’t want people knowing he could kill for a reason. McCrane’s ability to kill had caused everyone to fear and despise him. John didn’t want that happening to him. More importantly, if John’s secret was made known, he couldn’t be leader anymore and then everything he’d worked so hard for would fall apart. In the long run, some secrets were better left buried and forgotten.

“I don’t believe you. There’s more!” insisted Cara.

“Excuse me,” said Sierra, interrupting them. “But you need to hear this.”

John and Cara turned to see Sierra and Robbie standing behind John. Russell was with them and he was carrying a duffle bag on his shoulder.

“Russell, are you going somewhere?” asked John, unable to keep the disapproval out of his voice.

Russell nodded. “My dad’s funeral is on Saturday.”

John was taken aback and frowned. “I thought you said you weren’t close.”

“We weren’t, but it feels right to be there. Closure and all, you know?” said Russell. “I know the rule: no contact with our human lives, but I need to do this. I got to go home just for a little while. If that means I’m not allowed back—”
“It’s okay,” interrupted John. “You can go.”

Russell looked surprised. “Really?”

John nodded. “But not alone. You can’t go cross-country solo. It takes multiple, long-range jumps. I’ve mapped out a network of zones over the years where you can land safely, lay low and rest up. You can go, but only if you study those areas and someone goes with you.”

“I’ll go,” said Cara, surprising them all. But it wasn’t that surprising in Cara’s mind. If John wasn’t going to talk to her, then she needed some space and to clear her head. Accompanying Russell on his trip would give her that. “I could use some fresh air. It’s stifling down here.”

John looked hurt but quickly covered it up. “Fine.”

“Can I come too? Please?” begged Robbie. “I’ve never been on a road trip. Can I come?”

“Not this time, kiddo,” said John, before Cara could speak.

“But I promise I’ll bring you a souvenir from my hometown,” said Russell.

Robbie looked disappointed but his face still brightened. “Will you play the piano on my birthday for me, Uncle Russell?”

Sierra, Cara and John all looked surprised. Russell? Playing the piano? Clearly the man had more skills than they were aware of.

Russell nodded. “Sure, pal. Whatever you want.”

Robbie smiled and gave Russell and Cara a brief hug before scurrying off.

“Travel safely, guys,” said Sierra.

“We will,” said Cara.

And that was the end of it.

XXX

The next day at Ultra, Sierra was in the nerve center, trying to get more intel on the breakout.

So, far, she wasn’t very successful and she was growing more concerned by the minute. Someone like Piper didn’t stay hidden for long.

“Jameson!”

Sierra nearly jumped a foot. She clutched her heart and resisted the urge to shoot daggers at Darcy. “What is it?”

“Hallway. Now.”

Darcy’s tone left no room for argument and she gave the impression that Sierra was in deep trouble. Great. What had she done now?
When they were in the hallway, Darcy showed Sierra the profile on Astrid on Darcy’s tablet. “Who is this?” She didn’t give Sierra a chance to reply before she continued, “I know she’s a friend of yours. Astrid Finch.”

Oh, crap. Sierra knew she’d really stepped in it this time. She tried to salvage the situation. “Astrid has nothing to do with my work here. She’s just an old friend. She doesn’t know anything.”

“I hope for her sake and yours, that it’s true, because Astrid showed up on our last kill-squad op. Astrid followed you, Sierra,” said Darcy. “If your uncle decides that she’s a liability, she’ll be killed.”

Sierra knew that. How could she ever forget it when no one ever let her? It was practically burned into her brain. “What do you want from me?”

Darcy pursed her lips. “Nothing. I’m going to turn a blind eye this one time, because you saved my life when McCrane almost killed me and I like to repay my debts. But let’s be perfect clear: you cannot mix your old life with your new one. Do you understand?”

Sierra nodded. “Yes. Completely. Thank you for giving me a heads up.”

“Like I said, I repay my debts,” said Darcy.

Sierra understood that, but nevertheless, she was grateful. “So, what’s on tap for the night shift?”

Darcy looked bored. “It’s pretty dead, actually. There’s a possible breakout in Hell’s Kitchen, an African-American female in her late teens. I’ll update you when we get more information. Until then, keep your head down. Got it?”

Sierra’s heart sank. Piper. The pool hustler was on Ultra’s radar just as Sierra had feared. “Yes, ma’am. I got it.”

“Good.”

And with that, Darcy switched off her tablet and left Sierra alone.

As soon as she had the chance, Sierra clocked out of Ultra and contacted John for help. Chances were if she went after Piper alone, it’d end badly.

John, I need your help, said Sierra.

What’s wrong? asked John.

Piper, the pool hustler just got on Ultra’s radar. I need help bringing her in. Can you meet me? asked Sierra.

Much to Sierra’s annoyance, John hesitated.

Don’t tell me you’ve changed your mind about this. Are you trying to give me whiplash? Seriously, would John make up his mind about what he wanted to do? One minute he was on Sierra’s side, the next he was the paranoid, reclusive leader of the Tomorrow People. Which did John want to be?

No. I’m just saying after everything that’s happened lately, and after the ambush, we need to choose our battles, said John.
Sierra sighed. John was in a difficult position, she understood that, but he was driving her crazy. If John wanted to stick around down in the Lair, minding the store, fine. But Sierra had a job to do.

*Do what you think is right, John. I’ll let you know when I’ve got something*, said Sierra.

She was going after Piper alone. Sierra couldn’t afford to wait around all day for John. An innocent life was at stake.

XXX

Meanwhile, Cara and Russell were making a painful landing outside a containment unit in Ohio.

Russell crashed into a trashcan and nearly busted his tailbone when he landed on his backside. “Ow. Where the hell are we?”

“Shh!” hissed Cara. She opened the container doors and switched on the lights. Inside the container was a small cot with blankets and pillows and a table with food and water. “We at an abandoned industrial park outside of Arkon, Ohio. When John was working with Ultra, he hid here, tracking a breakout. We’re safe here.”

“Nice, but it’s still a dump,” said Russell.

Cara shrugged. “Beggars can’t be choosers. Help me set up the beds, will you?”

Russell insisted on Cara taking the cot, him being a gentleman and all, and he made himself a little nest of the extra blankets and the spare pillow on the floor.

“When’s the last time you saw your dad?” asked Cara.

“A couple of years ago,” said Russell. “Like I said, we weren’t close.”

Cara nodded understandingly. “Robbie said you play the piano. Are you any good?”

Russell grinned. “Hell yes. When I was five, I saw a piano and tried it out of curiosity. Turns out I had a natural gift for it. But then my dad got it into his head that I was destined to be a concert pianist, so he had me practice six hours a day, eight on the weekends.”

Cara winced. “Yikes. So, if your dad was such a tyrant, why’re we doing this?”

Russell gave Cara a look and she looked apologetic.

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” said Russell. He sighed and leaned against the wall. “When I was a new breakout, I was so sick of the piano that it caused me to land myself in big trouble. I tried to use my powers to buy off my dad, thinking that if I paid him a large amount of cash, I could be who I wanted instead of what he did. I got stupid, cheated at a poker game with a loan shark. He got mad, came looking for me and wanted the money back. My dad hid me in the closet and denied all knowledge of my whereabouts, even though they broke his hand for it.”

Cara looked horrified. “I’m so sorry. What happened then?”
“Surprisingly enough, my dad wasn’t angry with me. When I gave him my poker winnings, he was just shocked at what I’d been driven to do. He apologized, completely changed his tune. And afterwards at the hospital, when I was bawling my eyes out, apologizing for getting him hurt, my dad said he loved me and everything was going to be okay. He also said he was proud for finding the courage to stand up for myself,” said Russell. He sniffled and tears slid down his cheeks. “And then he asked me to forgive him for being so hard on me. Things got better between us after that, but it didn’t last long because soon after my last performance, I left and never looked back.”

Cara got off the cot and sat down beside Russell. She wrapped an arm around his shoulder and rubbed Russell’s arm.

Russell snuggled close, grateful for Cara’s presence and understanding. “I’m glad you’re here, Cara. I don’t think I could do this alone. I’m scared stiff of facing my mom,” he confessed. “I ran like a coward. What if she refuses to see me?”

“She won’t. Just let her see the man you are now and everything will be fine,” assured Cara. “I’ll be right here with you the whole time, I promise.”

Russell smiled a little.

They chatted for a few more minutes before going to sleep.

XXX

Back in New York, Sierra was attempting to track down Piper with the help of John, who’d decided to join Sierra in her work. John had traded in his trademark leather jacket for a hoodie and a pair of sunglasses in case Ultra showed up and he needed a disguise.

They were headed to the pool hall where Sierra had first encountered Piper.

“You really think she’s going to show here again after what happened last time?” asked John.

Sierra shrugged. “It’s worth a shot. I traveled a lot before Astrid took me in. When I returned to the city, I hardly ever left the corner of 63rd and Lex. For two months, I ate the same pizza and drank the same strawberry smoothie. How much you want to bet Piper’s doing the same?”

At the mention of Sierra’s life before Astrid took her in, John looked guilty and regretful for a moment before looking nostalgic. “I know what you mean. When I first came here after Jedikiah took me in, I went to the same burger and coffee joint every day. It gave me a sense of routine and familiarity, which is something you need in an intimidating city like this one.”

Sierra looked surprised.

John noticed. “What?”

“Nothing. It’s just…you always seemed so fearless when I first knew you. Hard to believe you were scared of anything,” said Sierra.

John smiled as they entered the pool hall and took a seat at the bar. “A beer and a soda water, please.”
The bartender raised an eyebrow. “Can I see some ID, kid?”

John looked insulted at being carded but he calmed down when Sierra put her hand on John’s and then she looked sweetly at the bartender.

“How about a beer and a soda water for me, please, handsome?” she said, sweetly, as she batted her eyelashes at the bartender.

The bartender smiled and turned a faint shade of pink as he nodded. “Sure thing, sweetheart.”

John burst out laughing as the bartender fetched their drinks. “Well, it looks like you never had a problem fending for yourself.”

“Shut up,” said Sierra, blushing.

The bartender then returned with their drinks. Sierra slipped him a ten dollar bill before picking up her cold soda bottle.

“To the kindness of strangers,” she said.

“Cheers,” said John, as they clinked their bottles together. No sooner had John finished his drink, his face changed. “Is that our girl?”

Sierra spun around to see Piper a few tables away, standing near the pool tables. She panicked when she saw Sierra’s face and ran for it.

John and Sierra chased after Piper and they cornered her in the streets before she could teleport away.

“Nice night for a walk, huh? I’m John,” he said. “You can relax, Piper. I just want to talk.”

“Why? What do you two want with me?” demanded Piper.

“We want to help you,” said Sierra.

Piper’s eyes narrowed. “What makes you think I even need your help?”

“Because there are others like, like us, from all over and not all of them are good. Listen to me, Piper, you’re in danger unless you trust us,” said John. “The other like us, if they find you, they’ll either force you to work for them or worse, strip of your powers or kill you. You need to come with us if you want to be safe, so please.”

Before Piper could reply, two of Ultra’s agents appeared at the far end of the sidewalk and they were headed straight for Piper.

“Oh, crap!” muttered Sierra. “It’s too late. They’re here.”

“Who’s here?” asked Piper, looking scared.

“Ultra,” said John, gravely. He cursed under his breath. “Okay, Piper, you need to—”

But it was too late, Piper had already teleported away to who knows where.

Sierra grabbed John’s arm. “Come on. We’ve got to jump.”

John shook his head as he pulled the hood of his hoodie over his head and his sunglasses on.
“No, it’s too crowded. Just keep walking.”

Sierra and John walked at a casual pace in the opposite direction until two more Ultra agents started to head their way. They were boxed in. This was bad.

Suddenly, John cupped Sierra’s face and began kissing her. Without thinking, Sierra’s arms snaked around John’s neck and she returned the kiss with fervor as the Ultra agents passed by them. One of them gave Sierra a questioning look, but none of them noticed it was John that she was kissing and then they disappeared as quickly as they’d appeared.

Neither of them spoke for a few moments when they broke apart.

“That was…” began John.

“Smart,” interrupted Sierra. She wasn’t angry with John for kissing her out of the blue. The situation was out of their control and privately, Sierra couldn’t deny that she had liked it. “We should go before they double back. Come on.”

John slid his hand into Sierra’s as they made their way to an empty alley and then teleported back to the Lair.

“Just so you know, I’m not going to make a habit of kissing you every time we run into Ultra like that,” said John, as he avoided Sierra’s gaze.

“Good to know,” said Sierra, after a moment. “So, what’s next? Have you got any hits on your radar?”

Before John could reply, Robbie teleported into the room, carrying his sketchpad.

“Robbie, honey, is something wrong?” asked Sierra, concerned. “Did you have another vision?”

“Sort of. But it’s more like just one image, that’s it.” Robbie flipped open his sketchpad and showed a picture of Piper and Darcy at the Noodle Shop, looking like they were old friends or something. “Do you know who they are? It’s driving me crazy.”

Sierra’s brow wrinkled. “Yeah, that’s the breakout we’re tracking and my partner at Ultra.” This didn’t make any sense. Why would Darcy be so friendly to someone on Ultra’s radar? She was always so professional, so business-like. She hadn’t even gotten friendly with Sierra until the McCrane incident. What was so special about this girl that Darcy would change her tune?

“I’ll have TIM run a background check on your partner, see what he can dig up,” said John. “In the meantime, Robbie, you should be getting to bed. It’s getting late.”

Robbie deflated. “Do I have to?”

“Yes,” said John, amused.

“Then can I stay here tonight and be with you guys until I fall asleep? Please?” he begged.

Sierra and John hesitated but then Robbie gave them the infamous puppy-dog eyes and they caved in. Robbie and his parents hung out in TIM’s room, watching a movie until Robbie fell asleep and then they left him under Irene’s watch.

With their son safely asleep, Sierra and John hit the streets to look for Piper as she wasn’t underground and the sooner they found her, the better.
While they were out wandering around, Sierra and John took the opportunity to catch up on the past eight years they’d been apart and even talk about things they’d never told each other before. John was particularly curious about Sierra’s past relationships before she’d met John. Like any girl, Sierra had had a few but unfortunately, only one had ever panned out into a long-term relationship.

“Wait, rewind. I’m losing track here. Which one was Jack? The ginger one?” asked John, looking puzzled.

Sierra shook her head. “No. The ginger one was Jeremy, seventh grade crush and a total hunk. Until he tried to steal my guinea pig and then I had to kick him to the curb. Literally. Luckily, my mom didn’t find out or I’d have been grounded for a week.”

John laughed. He could easily see Sierra doing something like that. “And Jack?”

“Jack was in a band, played all the time at dances and even wrote me a love song. But then I caught him snorting heroin under the bleachers at school and I had to turn him into the principal and the cops,” said Sierra. “Last one before I met you was Hilton.”

“Ah! Finally! A break in the pattern,” teased John. “So, you don’t only date hot guys whose name begins with ‘J’. What was Hilton’s story?”

“I met him after I broke up with Jack. Hilton was very handsome and organized, but he was also a total control freak and workaholic. He was obsessed with perfecting himself and he stood me up once too often and he took me for granted. So I broke it off. Eventually, I met you and that was it. I haven’t really dated anyone since,” said Sierra.

John looked surprised. “Really? Why not?”

“Being a single mom is time-consuming and not all that attractive to single men,” said Sierra. That and Sierra just hadn’t been willing to put her heart on the line again after John broke her heart.

John smiled. “Well, they’re wrong.”

Sierra blushed and averted her eyes. “Enough about me. What about you?”

John actually looked nervous and began rubbing his neck. “Actually…”

Sierra’s jaw dropped. “You’re kidding me. I’m the only girl you’ve ever dated?” How was that even possible? A guy with John’s qualities and good looks should’ve been the object of every girl’s affections. What was the deal?

“Being a foster kid who can’t afford to eat and Ultra’s top agent doesn’t really leave a lot of time for dating or a lot of options,” said John, as he turned bright red. “And in any case, I wanted to wait for the right girl.”

Sierra felt very flattered and without thinking, she slid her hand into his. “I think that’s real sweet of you, John.”

John smiled at Sierra and tightly intertwined their fingers.

Sierra had been fighting against being close to John again for so long out of fear…why did she not feel afraid now? Was it possible that her heart had softened and she was trusting John and falling in love with him again?
The next day, John and Sierra still hadn’t found Piper, but they hadn’t given up.

As it was Saturday and they’d both felt the need to spend more time with their son, they brought Robbie with them on their search. The little boy was loving the sunny fall weather and he was having a blast with his parents, especially when they lifted him into the air and swung him around.

It felt so right, so natural for them to be like that together, out there enjoying the sunshine and having fun as a family. With her psychic connection to John and Robbie, Sierra could feel everything they felt and she knew they were loving it as much as she was. Sierra couldn’t help but wish their one perfect day together could last forever.

“Mom, I’m getting something,” said Robbie, suddenly stopping in his tracks. He projected an image of Piper, hiding somewhere in the park looking scared. “That’s the girl from my vision.”

“It’s Piper. She’s around the corner,” said John. “So is Ultra.” He knelt down to Robbie’s level. “Son, you need to stay close and do exactly as we say from here on out. No arguments. Understand?”

Robbie nodded and then the three of them teleported onto a rooftop where they could oversee everything happening in the park. From where they stood, they could see Darcy being accompanied by two other Ultra agents, they were tracking down Piper.

Piper? called John.

Piper’s head shot up and she glanced in the direction of the voice. How…where are you?

I’m not the one you need to worry about right now, Piper. Remember the others we mentioned last night? Ultra? They’re about to grab you right now, said John. They know you’re here.

I don’t believe you, said Piper, stubbornly.

John bit back a growl of frustration. Why did no one ever listen? Look straight in front of you. Do you see those guys coming towards you? There are more.

Upon seeing the two men in black suits, Piper became scared and more attentive. What do I do?

Stay calm. Follow my lead, said John. He waited for a brief moment before giving out more instructions. Ready? Get up and go on the steps.

Piper rose up and broke into a run, causing the Ultra agent to miss her and hit a civilian instead. Piper then casually walked with a group of girls, blending in and hiding from Ultra in plain sight.

To your left, instructed John. Head for that sign. Lose yourself in that crowd.

Piper went directly to a large sign displaying an ad for an upcoming concert in the park and was frozen like a statue after spotting the Ultra agents lurking behind it, waiting for the chance to shoot her with a tranquilizer and take her to Ultra.

John glanced around and then spotted the next place for Piper to hide. See that coffee truck? Go
Piper frantically shook her head. *I can’t! They’ll see me!*

*Not if you hurry,* said John, calmly. *Go.*

Piper took a deep breath and then ran to the coffee truck. She went behind it and then suddenly she was surrounded by John, Sierra and Robbie, who teleported her away to the Lair, and not a moment too soon.

XXX

Once they were at the Lair and they fully explained the situation, Piper quickly became more at ease with her new friends and was soon settled down and telling them what’d happened when she’d broken out and left home.

“Every kid at my part of Pathesdo was completely uber-normal. You were either a cheerleader, or in the school play or part of the debate team. Except me. I was always in the zero percentile of success,” said Piper.

Sierra nodded understandingly. “We know what it’s like to feel alone, Piper. Treated like freaks.”

“So what brought you to New York?” asked John.

Piper shrugged. “I don’t know. It’s weird. It was like I was just drawn here.”

Sierra and John exchanged knowing looks. They’d both traveled in their pasts, but in the end, they’d both been drawn back to the city. Neither of them could fully explain why.

“It’s not weird at all,” said John, smiling. “There’s something about our powers that forces us to congregate in one place.”

Piper raised an eyebrow. “But why *here*?”

This time John shrugged. “That’s what we’re trying to figure out. In the meantime, you’ll be safe here from Ultra.”

Irene then made an appearance. “Excuse me. But TIM says there’s something that can’t wait.”

Piper looked interested. “Who’s TIM? Your leader?”

Sierra and Robbie laughed while John shook his head.

“No. TIM likes to think he’s our leader, but that’s my job. Excuse me for a sec.” John rose up and disappeared into TIM’s room.

“So, what else is bothering you?” asked Sierra, noticing the pain in Piper’s eyes.

Piper sighed. “I just feel so bad for my parents. I left them without a warning. I never told them about my abilities. I can only imagine how they must feel right now.”
Sierra’s face softened. “I’m sure they miss you.”

“It’s not just me. My big sister bolted when she was seventeen, broke their hearts,” said Piper. “Part of what brought me here was that I felt she was here too. I thought if I just wandered around, I might bump into her. But I’ve got to admit, it does sound kind of crazy.”

Sierra shook her head. “Not at all.”

Just then, John returned, looking scared stiff and angry. “Sierra, can I borrow you for a moment?”

Sierra nodded and rose up from her seat.

Robbie looked concerned. “What’s wrong, Daddy?”

“I’ll tell you in a minute, kiddo. Why don’t you show Piper your sketchpad while your mom and I talk?” suggested John. Without waiting for a reply, John took Sierra’s hand and led her to TIM’s room. “We have a serious problem. Do you have any idea who Piper is?”

Sierra shook her head and then when John showed her the results TIM had discovered, her hand flew to her mouth. The reason why Robbie had drawn that image in his notebook was simple but completely horrible: Piper was Darcy’s younger sister.

“You have got to be kidding!” she exclaimed.

“TIM doesn’t kid,” said John, grimly. “Piper is your partner’s sister. This was a mistake. We never should’ve brought Piper in.”

Sierra gave John an incredulous look. “Piper needs to be protected! Being Darcy’s sister doesn’t change that any more than being Jedikiah’s niece does for me!”

John’s eyes narrowed. “We don’t know a thing about this girl! For all we know, she’s working with Darcy, for crying out loud!”

“The same could’ve been said about me, John! But you still took a chance and accepted me anyway,” said Sierra. She understood why John was freaking out and he did make a good point, but at the same time, Piper deserved the benefit of the doubt just like Sierra had been given. “There is no way Piper is working with Darcy, okay? Piper is just a scared runaway.”

John sighed and folded his arms across his chest. “What do you recommend?”

Sierra was quiet and then an idea came to her head, one that John immediately disapproved of.

“Oh, no. No, no, no! Absolutely not!” said John, firmly. “Have you completely lost your mind?”

Sierra refused to back down. “They deserve a chance to be reunited! Okay? Just at least think it through!”

“I did and I came up with about a thousand reasons why it’s a terrible idea!” snapped John.

“Darcy may be Ultra, but she also left family behind,” said Sierra. “If it was me and Robbie, wouldn’t you want to see us?”

John growled. “That’s not fair.”
There was a knock on the door and Piper came in, followed by Robbie.

Piper stared at Darcy’s image on the screen. “I was right. The girl in Robbie’s picture…that’s my sister. My sister’s here.” Piper was smiling with joy. “Do you know where I can find her?”

John gave Sierra a look and the latter sighed.

“Piper…I’m a double-agent at Ultra, the secret government organization that hunts us down, the people that were after you. I’ve been working with them, trying to bring them down from the inside. Your sister is my partner,” said Sierra. “When your sister left, she was captured by Ultra and forced to work with them, along with countless others like us.”

Piper’s face fell. “Why?”

“Because Sierra’s uncle and boss is a sadistic son of a bitch who wants our kind wiped off the face of the planet,” said John, bluntly. “Understand the risks, Piper. This could end very badly.”

“I don’t care. I still want to see her,” said Piper, stubbornly. “Please.”

Piper was desperate to find her sister and not be alone anymore, something they all knew all too well. They sympathized, but did they dare risk it?

XXX

When Sierra returned to Ultra on Monday, she tracked down Darcy, who was in her office at her desk, working at her computer.

Darcy looked up when Sierra knocked at the door. She beckoned for Sierra to come in. “It’s about time. Got anything new on our breakout?”

“Yes, actually. I know you’re not going to like this because of all the rules I’ve broken, but I’ve tracked her down on my own time and I’ve got an ID on her.” Sierra took a seat across from Darcy and pulled up Piper’s image on her tablet. “It’s your sister, Piper.”

Darcy gasped and her eyes filled with tears. “Where is she?”

“She’s safe,” assured Sierra.

“Does she want to see me?” asked Darcy, her voice thick with emotion.

Sierra nodded. “Yes. Piper wants to see you and you can, but there’s a condition. Our employer can’t know about it. This has to be on the quiet.”

Darcy looked angry. “I am a senior field agent! Think about what you’re asking me to do!”

“Piper’s all alone and she’s scared out of her mind,” said Sierra. “You know as well as I do what that’s like, Darcy. You haven’t forgotten anymore than I have.”

Darcy still didn’t look happy or convinced and she was about to protest even further when Sierra interrupted once again.

“I know you can report me for not turning in a breakout through the proper channels, but you
won’t do it, will you, Darcy? You know what Jedikiah would do if he found out about your sister. Piper’s too young for this work and I don’t think you want her to be stripped of her powers or worse.”

Darcy fell silent and sighed. “I don’t,” she admitted. “I just want her back. You win. What do I have to do to see her?”

Sierra smiled in relief and gave Darcy strict instructions to follow.

XXX

Later that day, Sierra sat with Piper at the Noodle Shop.

John was standing by at the Lair, watching their surroundings from the security cameras and staying in touch with his telepathy. He’d strongly disapproved of this plan but was going along with it because Sierra needed his support.

Piper was nervous about seeing her sister again after so many years and kept playing the “what-if” game while she twisted a loose thread from her sleeve in her hands.

“What if she doesn’t show?” fretted Piper

“She will,” assured Sierra.

“What if she doesn’t even remember me?”

Sierra was about to reply when Darcy entered the Noodle Shop with a smile on her face.

“How could I forget my baby sister?”

Piper’s head shot up and she spun around to see Darcy. Piper immediately rose up from her seat and hugged Darcy tightly. Darcy buried her face in the crook of her sister’s neck and stroked Piper’s hair.

“Ah, look at you,” said Darcy, when they broke apart. “You’re all grown up. You look beautiful.”

“So do you. You look amazing,” said Piper.

Sierra smiled at the sisters and kept her distance, wanting to give them some space.

Piper and Darcy sat at a booth. “So, what, you’re like a secret agent lady now?”

“And you’re a pool hustler?” teased Darcy.

Piper laughed. “It pays the bills.”

Darcy chuckled and then looked solemn. “How’re Mom and Dad?”

Piper’s face lost its smile. “Alive, but they miss us and they never got over you. I kind of followed in your footsteps, left with no warning. I haven’t spoken with them since I left.”
Darcy sighed as she squeezed her sister’s hand. “I’m sorry I left like I did, sis. But I didn’t have much of a choice. Ultra’s not keen on letting their agents mix their human lives with their paranormal ones. I wanted you to be safe. I never stopped thinking about you.”

“I know. It’s okay. Sierra explained everything to me,” said Piper. There was no anger or hurt in her eyes, only love for her sibling. “You’re here now, that’s all that matters. Maybe we can work something out, see each other now and then. If you want to?”

Darcy nodded. “I’d love to.”

Sierra sipped her water, silently pleased that everything was working out so well.

_Sierra, it’s me_, said John, sounding urgent.

Sierra put down her drink and her guard went up. _What’s wrong? I’m with Piper and Darcy._

_Yes, so is Ultra. Two of their cars are headed your way. E.T.A. two minutes_, said John.

Sierra felt a rush of anger as she rose up and stormed over to Darcy. “What have you _done_?” she hissed.

Darcy looked confused. “I haven’t done anything.”

Sierra didn’t believe her. “Really? Then why’s Ultra on their way over here?”

Piper looked horrified. “You told them?” she whispered, sounding hurt.

Darcy’s eyes widened and she frantically shook her head. “No! I swear to heaven, I kept my word! I didn’t tell them anything! I would _never_ betray you, Piper! They must’ve been following me, thinking I would lead you to them. I didn’t tell them, I swear!”

_Sierra, ten seconds! Move! Go out into the alley!_ barked John.

Sierra wanted to scream at Darcy but now wasn’t the time. “You’d better be telling the truth or I swear, you’re going to wish I could kill you. Now, come on. We’ve got to go!”

Piper rose up and grabbed her sister’s hand. “I won’t leave you again! Come with us. _Please!_”

Darcy hesitated. If she left now, she’d be betraying Ultra and be a fugitive. Could she really do that? She almost refused but one pleading look from Sierra persuaded her to make the right choice. “I’m right behind you.”

The three women ran out of the Noodle Shop and into the back alley. One of Ultra’s vehicles pulled up, causing Sierra and Piper to hide behind a car while Darcy attempted to take control of the Ultra agents. The agents got out of the car and emerged from the backdoor of the restaurant.

“Where’s the breakout?”

“I lost her,” lied Darcy. “Probably wouldn’t have, if you idiots hadn’t blundered in like that. Why’d you follow me? I had it under control.”

“You never go off alone while you’re on duty. Boss thought something was wrong and told us to go after you. Now, where’s the breakout? One of our telepaths detected a signal here not one minute ago. A few signatures, actually.”

They knew Darcy was lying. This wasn’t good. Piper became tense and attempted to defend her
sister, but Sierra held her down and gave Piper a warning look.

“Are you calling me a liar?” said Darcy, incredulously.

“It doesn’t matter what I think. You know protocol. They’ll scan your brain back at HQ and find out everything you know.”

Sierra used her compact mirror to see what was happening. She saw the agents approach Darcy and she telekinetically summoned of their guns to her hand.

“Piper, run!” yelled Darcy, as the rest of the men aimed their guns at her. “Tell your men to stand down!”

“Or what? Your kind can’t kill!” he sneered.

“I don’t need to kill in order to stop you!” yelled Darcy. She fired off the gun into two of the agents’ legs, crippling them before she was shot down and killed.

_No!_ cried Piper, as tears slid down her cheeks. _Not her!_

Fed up with the helplessness, Sierra finally took control of the situation. She beckoned for Piper to stay down and be quiet and then Sierra appeared behind the agents, making it seem like she’d only just arrived on the scene.

“What’re you doing here?”

“I was on patrol and picked up a signal. What happened?” asked Sierra, feigning ignorance. She gasped in horror at the sight of the wounded agents and Darcy’s dead body. “Darcy? A traitor? That’s impossible. I don’t believe it.”

“Believe it. She got herself killed over some stupid breakout.”

Sierra shook her head. “She should’ve known better. Listen, you’d better get your men back to base. I’ll take care of Darcy’s body and explain things to my uncle. Unless, of course, you’d rather do it yourself?”

“No, ma’am.” None of them liked dealing with Jedikiah. For a human, the man was scary. And if Jedikiah’s niece was the one who explained the situation, she might be able to soothe him and save their butts. “Move out, men!”

As soon as the agents left, Sierra placed her hands on Darcy’s body. Moments later, Darcy was revived and she sat up suddenly, inhaling sharply as she clutched Sierra. “You saved me…”

“You’re welcome,” said Sierra, softly.

Piper ran to her sister’s side and held Darcy close as tears slid down her cheeks. “You brought her back. How did you do that?”

“Long story,” said Sierra. She sighed. Darcy was alive and the sisters were back together, but there was still some big problems to deal with. “What’re you going to do now? You can’t go back to Ultra. They think you’re dead and a traitor now.”

“I don’t care,” said Darcy. “I’ll go anywhere now. My place is with my sister.”

“Can she come home with us?” asked Piper, hopefully.
Sierra hesitated. Darcy was a former Ultra agent. Even with her sacrifice and her relation to Piper, she wouldn’t be warmly welcomed in the Lair. Not to mention, the decision wasn’t Sierra’s to make. It was for John to decide.

“It’s not up to me,” she said, after a moment. “Give me a sec.”

_John? You get all of that?_

_I got everything, said John. He sighed. I must be out of my mind and I can’t promise how well she’ll be accepted here, but after what’s just happened…Darcy can stay. But Darcy has to be watched for at least a month and if she sets one foot out of line, I’ll deal with her myself._

_I understand._ Sierra turned to the Nichols sisters. “Darcy, you can come with us, but…”

“John Young will kill me if I don’t behave myself,” interrupted Darcy. “He doesn’t need to worry. My loyalty to Ultra ceased when my sister’s life was on the line.”

Sierra stared, flabbergasted. “How…how did you—?”

“I’ve had my suspicions about you for a long time now, Sierra,” confessed Darcy. “But I kept them to myself. Your uncle doesn’t know anything.”

Sierra was stunned. Darcy had suspected Sierra’s loyalties to Ultra were a lie and she’d kept quiet. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

“You won me over when you saved my life,” said Darcy, truthfully.

Sierra felt a wave of gratitude and respect for her former partner. “Thank you.”

Nothing more needed to be said as they then left for the Lair.

**XXX**

Meanwhile, at the Kwon house, Russell and Cara stood outside.

They’d swiped some clothes appropriate for the memorial service. Cara was in a black dress with her hair in a ponytail and Russell was in a black suit with his hair and goatee neatly combed and trimmed. For a moment, neither of them moved.

“You ready for this?” asked Cara.

Russell shook his head. “Not really. What am I even supposed to say?”

Cara squeezed his shoulder. “Maybe just being here is enough. C’mon.”

Russell still looked apprehensive as he took a deep breath and followed Cara inside the house.

Inside the house, there was a table of food and drink, pictures and mementos from Russell’s father’s life, and amongst all the guests giving out their sympathies and condolences sat Russell’s mother, who looked amazed at her son’s presence after so many years.

Russell was shaking like a leaf and tears pooled in his eyes. “I’m sorry, Mom.”
Mrs. Kwon’s face showed no anger or resentment. She just opened up her arms and then Russell fell into her embrace as they both cried. They remained like that for a good long while, enjoying each other’s company for the first time in so long as they comforted one another.

“Is there anything I can do?” asked Russell, as they broke apart.

Mrs. Kwon nodded. “There is one last thing you can do for your father. Play for him.”

Russell nodded.

For the rest of the memorial service, Russell played beautiful melodies on the piano that brought tears and smiles to everyone who listened, especially his family and Cara. The more Russell played, the more comfort he felt. For Russell, it seemed like his playing the piano again enabled him to say good-bye and so much more to his father and he felt a sense of peace for the first time in years.

XXX

After picking up Robbie from school and sending him to his room to do his homework, Sierra collapsed onto the couch and buried her face in her hands.

After sending Darcy and Piper off to the Lair, Sierra had returned to Ultra with a bunch of crappy excuses for Darcy’s ‘demise’ and Piper’s escape. Jedikiah had accepted her report without asking any unwanted questions, but for once, Jedikiah was the least of Sierra’s problems. Sierra had never been popular at Ultra, being the boss’s niece had a negative effect on her status, but with Darcy gone, her co-workers’ dislike had turned to hate and they made no secret of it.

Two of Sierra’s partners were gone and she got a lucky break because she was Jedikiah’s blood. It was no wonder her co-workers thought she was being shown favoritism and was a bad-luck charm. Sierra wasn’t to blame for any of them but they didn’t care. Could Sierra ever get a break?

Just then, John teleported into the apartment. He was carrying some take-out bags with the Olive Garden logo on them.

“Hey,” he said. “I hope you don’t mind. I thought you might not feel up to cooking tonight after what happened, so I grabbed some chow.”

Sierra gave him a grateful look. “You’re the best. Thank you.”

John put the bags on the counter and sat down beside Sierra. “How’d it go at Ultra?”

Sierra sighed. “I know you can hear my thoughts, so I’m not going to lie. I thought you might not feel up to cooking tonight after what happened, so I grabbed some chow.”

Sierra sighed. “I know you can hear my thoughts, so I’m not going to lie. It went as well as can be expected but it’s nothing I can’t handle. How’s Darcy settling in?”

John shrugged. “She’s okay but it’s going to be a while before she’s accepted by everyone.”

Sierra nodded. She’d expected nothing less. Then Sierra remembered the other reason why she felt so crappy and she sighed. “John, I’m sorry. You were right about picking our battles. I could’ve gotten us all killed today because I thought I knew better than everyone else. I can’t keep doing that.”
John’s face softened. “You can’t blame yourself for Ultra’s actions.”

“Who else is there to blame? Everyone hates me because I go through partners like popcorn,” said Sierra. “I thought I was right about Kurt and look how well that ended.”

“You were right about Darcy,” reminded John. “I misjudged her.”

“It doesn’t matter. She still died because of me. I never should’ve forced you to go after Piper.”

John shook his head. “You didn’t force me to do anything. What I did, helping you, that was my choice. You told me to do the right thing. I did and I’m glad. You reunited two, lost and lonely siblings and changed Darcy for the better. You risked getting caught to stay with Piper. It reminded me of what I’ve known all along. You’re the best person I’ve ever met.”

Sierra smiled but it didn’t quite reach her eyes. “I don’t know if I belong in the Lair, John.”

John looked at her incredulously. “Why not?”

“Because we’re in the middle of an already difficult war and all I’ve done since I was brought in, is make things worse. Whereas, you keep people alive. You protect and provide for them even when your own life’s at risk,” said Sierra, as she rose up from the couch.

“You think you don’t do the same? Sierra, you saved Irene and brought back three others. You did the same for Piper and Darcy.” John placed a hand on her shoulder. “Until you were part of my life, all I did was survive, I didn’t live. You gave me, you gave all of us, a gift.”

Sierra’s face softened and she felt her pain eased a little. “You gave me one too, John. You gave me courage and our son.” For all John’s talk of how Sierra had reminded him to be brave, Sierra could not forget that it’d been John who’d taught her courage in the first place.

John smiled a little.

Sierra took a deep breath. There was something she needed to say, something she’d been thinking about for quite a while now. She’d thought she wasn’t ready for it but things had changed. That fear was no longer there. She wanted this so badly.

“John…the other night when you kissed me—”

“I’m sorry if it bothered you,” interrupted John, quickly. “I wasn’t trying to overstep my boundaries.”

“You didn’t, John. Let me finish,” said Sierra. She had to get this out now or she never would. She was losing her courage and fast. “After we broke up, I promised myself I’d never put my heart on the line again, that I would never love again no matter how lonely I got. And after we were reunited, even though it was plain to both of us that our affections hadn’t changed, I was scared of letting you in again. I pushed you away, denied everything and barricaded my heart. You’ve been so incredibly patient and understanding with me, maybe more than I deserve—”

“Sierra—” began John, but she put a finger on his lips, silencing him.

“But as much you hurt me, I hurt you too,” she continued. They’d both been at fault with the mistakes they’d made in their relationship, it wasn’t one-sided. “I’ve seen your memories, John. I know that you only left to protect me, and you were going to come back for me. You’ve been supportive of me since this all began and you’ve been a wonderful father to Robbie. I was scared, but I’m not anymore. Whatever happens in the future, I want to face it with you. I’d like to start
over, if you’ll have me.”

John didn’t speak. He just cupped Sierra’s face in his hands and kissed her with an intense passion until the need for air became too much.

“I love you, so much,” he said, hoarsely.

“I love you too,” said Sierra, as she kissed him again. “Bedroom?”

John nodded and then they took their reunion to Sierra’s bed and lost themselves in their love.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

Jedikiah shot up in bed.

He was sweaty and breathing hard, having just had a nightmare about John’s part in the Annex Project. He remembered that day all too well. John had volunteered to be part of the project that would weaponized Ultra agents, a project that had killed countless agents before John. Jedikiah had been against it but finally caved in when John insisted, reminding Jedikiah that John was an ideal candidate and Jedikiah’s best agent.

John had wanted to be a better agent and make Jedikiah proud. The project had been successful. John could kill like a human being. But John had nearly died in the process and in a way, Jedikiah had still lost John. Shortly after the Annex Project debacle, Roger had died and John had gone rogue from Ultra. It was something Jedikiah deeply regretted.

Morgan, Jedikiah’s secret paranormal girlfriend, switched on the bedside table lamp and rubbed Jedikiah’s back as she handed him the glass of water she kept strictly for nights like this.

“Baby, what’s wrong? You want to tell me what’s on your mind?”

Jedikiah downed the entire glass of water in one gulp before lying back down and holding Morgan close to his chest.

“I’ve just got a lot going on at work, that’s all. I’m having a hard time escaping it,” said Jedikiah.

“Is it about your niece?” asked Morgan, concerned. “Did something happen to her?”

Jedikiah shook his head. “No. Sierra’s fine.”

Sierra had just lost her second partner in a matter of weeks. It’d be tough on her for a while, but if there was anything Jedikiah learned over the past couple of months, it was that Sierra was a tough customer. Whatever came her way, Sierra could handle it.

Morgan looked longingly as she rubbed circles up and down John’s arm. “I wish I could meet her and that grandnephew of yours. They sound wonderful.”

“I know. But it’s safer if you don’t,” said Jedikiah. “The less you know about my work and those I work with, the better off you’ll be.”
If the Founder knew that Jedikiah’s girlfriend was a paranormal, it would not end well for either one of them. It was better this way.

Morgan was quiet for a moment. “Do you remember how we met?”

They both chuckled as they recalled the day they’d started their secret love affair.

“Coney Island,” said Jedikiah, smiling. “You were passing yourself off as psychic, using your telepathy to tell poor schmucks what they wanted to hear. And then I made the mistake of letting you read me, and in the instant you took my hand, you knew more about me than anyone. But you weren’t repulsed or scared in the slightest.”

Jedikiah didn’t know what was more amazing, that he’d fallen in love with a member of the species he hunted or that she loved Jedikiah back despite knowing of his dark side.

Morgan smiled. “I’d never met anyone like you, of any species. So passionate, so intelligent, so vulnerable…how could I not love you?” She stroked Jedikiah’s cheek and kissed him as he smiled at her and looked at her with love and gratitude in his eyes. “You, my darling, are a web of contradictions. You need me inside that tangled head of yours. Now, are you going to go back to sleep willingly or do I need to make you?”

Jedikiah chuckled and kissed her. “No need. Good night, Morgan.”

And with that, the two fell back into a dreamless sleep.

XXX

The bright rays of the sun peeked in through the white curtains in Sierra’s bedroom, lighting up the room with a warm glow.

Sierra lay asleep, tangled up in the bed covers with her head pillowed on John’s chest. She stirred when she felt John’s gentle touch as he traced patterns on her back. Sierra’s eyes blinked open and she looked upon John, who was smiling at her. Sierra smiled back as she placed a tender kiss on John’s lips.

“Morning,” said Sierra.

“Morning,” said John. He tangled his hands in her hair as he kissed her again, this time with more passion. “I’ve missed this. You’re so beautiful.”

“You’re not so bad yourself,” teased Sierra. “Last night was…”

“Long overdue,” finished John, smiling. “Want to pick up where we left off?”

Sierra nodded and they resumed their intense, passionate make-out session. Just when things were getting quite heated, their moment was interrupted when there was a knock on the door.

“Mom? Dad? Can I come in?”

John bit back a groan as they broke apart. “I love him, but our son has the worst timing,” he whispered.
“Wonder where he gets that from,” teased Sierra. She turned to the door. “Just a sec, sweetie.” Quickly, Sierra and John dressed and made themselves presentable. “Come in.”

The door swung open and Robbie came into the room, still in his pajamas. “Good morning.”

“Morning. Shouldn’t you be at school already, kiddo?” asked John, after glancing at the clock.

Robbie shook his head. “It’s the second Tuesday of the month, it’s a late-start day.”

“Ah.” Of course it was.

“Was there something you wanted, Robbie?” asked Sierra, changing the subject.

Robbie’s face brightened. “Russell and Cara are back. Can I invite them over for breakfast?”

Sierra and John exchanged looks and had a silent conversation before nodding.

“Sure, honey. Tell them to come over in half an hour and then I want you to go get ready for the day,” said Sierra. “Okay?”

Robbie nodded and then scurried out of the room.

“Come on, we’d better hurry. Would you make breakfast while I go shower?” asked Sierra.

“Sure. I’ll make French toast sandwiches,” said John. He combed his hair in front of the mirror hanging on Sierra’s wall and sighed. “Sierra?”

“Hmm?” Sierra, who’d just picked out some clean clothes from her dresser, turned to look at John. “What is it?”

John hesitated. “I don’t want to mess up my second chance with you and Robbie. You think we can get it right this time?”

Sierra nodded. She had her own concerns about it, but she wasn’t going to give into them. No relationship was perfect. She and John had their problems, but if they kept at it, maybe they could make their relationship work this time. Maybe, just maybe they could be a real couple and raise their child together, be a proper family.

“I think we can do it, John. We just need to work together. Communicate more. No more secrets, no more lies.” When John looked away, Sierra placed her hand on John’s shoulder. “I didn’t mean right this instant. I know there’re still things we haven’t told each other. But I’m not going to demand you tell me. Whenever you’re ready, I’ll be waiting. No rush, okay?”

Sierra knew there were things John kept to himself. It irritated her sometimes but in the end, she was respectful of John’s privacy and she trusted him to come to her when he was ready. Unlike Cara, Sierra didn’t feel the need to pressure John into revealing his secrets.

John looked gratefully at her. “Thanks, Sierra. I appreciate it.”

Sierra nodded. “Speaking of which, there’s something I need to talk to you guys about over breakfast. It’s important.”

John looked concerned, but didn’t ask questions.

Half an hour later, the apartment smelled of delicious French toast sandwiches and there was a knock on the door. Robbie squealed in delight when he opened the door to find Cara and Russell on
“Aunt Cara! Uncle Russell!” Robbie hugged Cara and then Russell. “I missed you guys so much.”

“We’ve missed you too, Robbie,” said Cara, smiling.

“And to show it, I brought you the souvenir I promised you.” Russell reached into his duffle bag and pulled out a coloring book and a new packet of crayons. “This has all the best scenes from my hometown and those are the best crayons of all time. Enjoy.”

Robbie was thrilled. “Thank you, Uncle Russell.”

“Come on in, guys. Breakfast is on the table,” said Sierra.

“Great. I’m starving. What’d you ma—John?!” said Cara, surprised.

John, who’d been setting the table, gave Cara a polite nod. “Nice to see you too, Cara. Safe trip?”

“It was good, man,” said Russell, before Cara could speak. He eyed John. “But enough of me. What about you? Let me guess, you stayed the night and you’re cooking breakfast. You and Sierra are back together, aren’t you?”

Sierra and John blushed as they nodded.

Robbie, who already knew of this, just smiled.

There was a hint of heartbreak in Cara’s eyes but she covered it up quickly with a warm smile. “Congratulations.”

Roger shot his fist up into the air. “Yes! I win the pool!”

John’s eyes narrowed at the idea of Russell taking a bet on John and Sierra’s love life, but held his tongue for Robbie’s sake. Instead, he invited everyone to sit down and eat their breakfast. But Russell was going to get it later.

After breakfast, which was quite delicious as John’s cooking was superb, Sierra took a deep breath and revealed what had been concerning her.

“Remember when I overused my powers the night of the ambush?”

John’s eyes became dull with pain. “Yeah. Why?”

Sierra sighed. “Right before you brought me back, I saw my dad. He’s alive, John.”

John looked stunned while Robbie looked smug.

“I knew it!” exclaimed Robbie. He pulled out his sketchpad and showed the image that Sierra had seen the night of the ambush. “I drew this the other day. Is this it? Is this where you were?”

“Yeah, that’s it,” said Sierra, nodding. “I thought it was just a hallucination brought on by the near-death experience, but it wouldn’t leave me alone. So, I did some research and now all we have to do is figure out how to bring my dad back.”

John inhaled sharply. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves, Sierra. What exactly did you see? What did Roger say to you?”
Sierra rehashed her meeting with her father. Robbie found it all interesting, but John was skeptical.

“Thanatos? That’s all you got?” said John. “Some secret code word your dad said to you in a dream?”

Sierra gave John a look. “It was real, John. It was him.”

“Not to be the rain on your parade, but girl, you were dead,” reminded Russell.

Sierra threw up her hands in frustration. “I know it’s not a lot to go on, all right? But when I couldn’t quit thinking about it, I did some digging through Ultra’s files.”

Cara leaned forward in her seat. “You looked through Ultra’s files? What’d you find?”

“Unfortunately, not much,” admitted Sierra. “Just a bunch of redacted files and empty folders. But they were all labeled ‘Thanatos.’ I think Thanatos must’ve a secret research program that my dad was a part of it, an important one. Why else would my uncle completely bury it?”

None of Jedikiah’s past failures were completely buried, not even the files on the Annex Project. For the Thanatos program to be hidden like this was no coincidence.

“Mom’s got a point,” said Robbie. “Maybe Thanatos is the key to finding Grandpa Roger. Don’t we want to see where it leads?”

There was a moment’s silence as everyone at the table realized the truth in Robbie’s statement. It sounded like a wild goose chase, but it was the only lead they had to finding Roger.

“I could find out what he knows,” said Cara, quietly.

Sierra looked at Cara, incredulously, as did John. Have Cara read Jedikiah’s mind? She couldn’t be serious! It couldn’t be done and the risks were too great.

“You want to get inside Jedikiah’s head? How?” asked John. “When he’s in his telepathically-secure office or out on the field, surrounding by agents?”

“Or when he’s at home asleep,” said Cara. “It could work.”

John wasn’t convinced. “Have you been to Jedikiah’s apartment? It’s suicide. You can’t just teleport in. He’s got the best security system money can buy, cameras, hidden guns and Ultra agents standing guard. It can’t be done.”

“I’m a one-man Ocean’s Eleven,” Russell pointed out. “Dude won’t even know he’s been hit.”

Cara’s face lit up. “And I can be in and out of his head before he even realizes.”

John looked at Sierra. “How do you feel about all this?”

Sierra hesitated and then took a deep breath. “It’s insane, complete and utterly insane. It’s a really bad idea. But what choice do we have? Everything we’ve done up until now has been about finding my dad and the Refuge. We all need this. How can we walk away just when we’re getting somewhere?”

John was still unhappy and disapproving but he was forced to admit that Sierra had a point and they needed to do this. The sooner they found the Refuge and Roger, the sooner a better life could be made for their son and future generations.
“This is a bad idea,” said John. “But fine, we’ll do it. However, at the first sign of trouble, we’re out. Understood?”

Everyone agreed.

XXX

That night after they’d gone over strategies for their plan, they set it in motion.

Robbie, Sierra, and John stood in TIM’s room, monitoring the situation and hijacking Jedikiah’s security system while Cara and Russell stood outside Jedikiah’s apartment building.

*How’re we looking, John?* asked Cara.

*You’ve got to admit, we look pretty good. Right? Right?* said Russell.

*You’ll look better when you’re back in one piece,* said John. *You’ve got a guard in the lobby and two out front, so don’t draw their attention to you by using your powers. I’ll switch the surveillance to a loop, but once you’re inside, I can’t see you.*

*Understood,* said Cara. This was a huge risk they were taking, and she wouldn’t deny that part of her was scared stiff but it was something they had to do.

*Alright, TIM, kill the power,* ordered John.

The entire building became dark when the power died, allowing Cara and Russell access to the building. TIM was able to intercept the phone call the security guard made regarding the power loss, and Sierra persuaded the guard to think it was just a glitch and he believed her when the power went on a minute or two later; allowing Cara and Russell to get through the building undetected.

When Cara and Russell arrived at Jedikiah’s front door, Russell used his skills to break in. He placed a little gizmo of his own creation on the lock, which opened the door.

They then carefully snuck inside the apartment. Cara had to restrain Russell from pinching Jedikiah’s very fancy, very expensive Eames chair.

*“Don’t—touch—anything!”* hissed Cara, as she enunciated each word.

Russell pouted before complying with Cara’s request.

They walked up a flight of stairs leading to Jedikiah’s bedroom where they found the man sleeping on his bed, still in his day clothes and judging from his lack of movement and the position he was in, Jedikiah was exhausted, which was good news for them.

Carefully, Cara knelt down onto the mattress and pressed her fingers to Jedikiah’s temples. She saw images of a dark-haired woman who was probably Jedikiah’s girlfriend, flashes of when he’d tried to shoot them away when they’d rescued Sierra from Ultra, and then she saw a memory of John.
An Ultra agent’s body was being wheeled out to the morgue.

Jedikiah stopped it for a moment so John could get a good look at the latest Annex Project failure.

John looked sad. “I guess he wasn’t as lucky as me.”

Jedikiah nodded and looked at John with pride. “How’re you feeling?”

“Good, actually. It’s weird, I thought I’d feel different, changed or something, but I don’t,” said John, smiling.

“You will,” said Jedikiah. “Rest up. Next phase of your training starts tomorrow.”

Cara was startled out of the telepathic intrusion when Russell accidentally dropped one of Jedikiah’s possessions and caused a ruckus that woke up Jedikiah.

Cara quickly teleported out of the building and back to the Lair, but Russell wasn’t so lucky. Awake now, Jedikiah switched on the alarm system which activated the D-chips in his room and pulled out the gun he kept hidden under one of his pillows.

“Hello, Russell,” said Jedikiah. He didn’t take his eyes off Russell as he got out of the bed and aimed the gun at the paranormal. He smirked when Russell tried and failed to teleport away. “Yeah, I’m sorry. Your powers won’t work now that I’ve activated the alarm. So, now that I’ve got you trapped, why don’t you tell me why you’re here?”

Russell looked scared stiff and he kept his hands up in the air. “Oh, you know, I was just in the neighborhood, thought I’d say hi. Bad timing, I guess. OW!”

Jedikiah clocked Russell in the head with the butt of his gun.

“Quit lying to me,” said Jedikiah, sternly. “I’m only going to ask you this one more time. Why are you here? Or should we take this to Ultra instead? I’ll tell you, Russell, in a couple of seconds, my crew’s going to—”

Jedikiah was cut off when Russell suddenly made a move for the gun. The two of them fought and wrestled for several moments until Russell disarmed Jedikiah and did an impressive move where he twisted his legs around Jedikiah’s neck and brought the head of Ultra down onto the ground. Russell then switched off the alarm and teleported away, only for Jedikiah to grab him at the last second.

Suddenly, Russell was on the floor of the Lair along with Jedikiah.

Everyone gasped in fright at the sight of their most dangerous enemy suddenly in their home.

“Oh, no, no, no, this isn’t happening!” exclaimed Russell. What had he done? How could he have been so stupid? He was going to get them all killed!

Quickly, before Jedikiah could do anything more than look both confused and impressed, Russell decked him. Right after Russell knocked Jedikiah out; Robbie, John, Cara and Sierra ran out of TIM’s room looking horrified.

“I can explain,” said Russell, weakly.
“Holy cow…” said Robbie.

“Oh my God,” gasped Cara.

“Russell…” whispered Sierra.

“What the hell did you do?” finished John.

Jedikiah, the head of Ultra and their sworn enemy, was in the Lair. This was really, really bad.

XXX

After tying up Jedikiah and putting him away, Sierra had a private talk with Russell, John, and Care. She was furious and terrified, not the best combination.

“Whose genius idea was it to kidnap my uncle?” hissed Sierra.

Jedikiah was in the Lair. Could there be anything worse? If Jedikiah got free of his bonds, if he found out the Lair’s location and discovered Sierra’s true loyalties, it would be the end of everything they’d been working for. Worse still, it’d be the end of their lives.

“I didn’t kidnap him!” protested Russell. “They were about to bust in the door, I was trying to get away and he jumped on top of me! He’s a stowaway, not a kidnap victim!”

“Stowaway or not, this is not good. If Jedikiah finds out where we are, it’s over. We’re all dead,” said John, gravely. “The longer he’s here, the more dangerous it is for all of us. We need to get him out of here now.”

Sierra and Russell nodded in agreement. Cara didn’t.

“Or we could make the most of it.” When everyone stared at her in disbelief, Cara continued, “I’m just saying, he’s here, he’s helpless and he’s in possession of information we need. We can still find out about Thanatos. Either he ‘fesses up to what he knows or I go digging around in his mind until I find it. Either we, we win.”

Sierra shook her head. “No. Absolutely not. Do you even realize what’ll happen if Jedikiah finds out you still have you powers?” Sierra wanted to find out about Thanatos and get her father back, but not like this. The risks were too great.

John nodded in agreement. “Exactly. Sierra’s cover is blown. She was supposed to give you the needle, remember?”

Cara refused to back down. “Jedikiah will never know I’m in his head! I’ll get what we need—”

Sierra’s phone went off and she sighed when saw it was a text from Agent Troy, her new partner. “Ultra, code blue. I’ve got to check in.” She pocketed her phone. “It’s getting late, so I’m going to take Robbie home. Keep us posted.”

And to think, Sierra’s morning had started off so beautifully. Now, it’d be a miracle if they could get out of this alive.
After Sierra left, they decided to interrogate Jedikiah, who’d awoken.

Anyone else in Jedikiah’s shoes, a human who was trapped heaven alone knew where and at the mercy of dangerous non-humans, would’ve been terrified or caved in and answered their questions, but the head of Ultra didn’t seem the least bit bothered by his predicament.

“Thanatos?” he laughed. “That’s what you were after? Really? I could’ve saved you the trip.”

“Just tell us what it means and we’ll let you go,” said Russell.

Jedikiah smirked. “Simple as that?”

“Consider this your golden ticket,” said John, coldly.

Jedikiah cocked his head. “‘Thanatos’ means death, in Greek that is. Beyond that, I don’t think I can really help you.”

“You’re lying,” said Cara, flatly.

“And how would you know?” sneered Jedikiah. “My niece stripped you of your powers to save her son’s life and to spite her ex-boyfriend, who I was told you’re in love with.”

Cara’s blue eyes were like two chips of blue ice but she was silent.

“Come to think of it, I’m surprised you’re still allowed down here, what with you being a useless sap and not a powerful paranormal anymore,” said Jedikiah. “How different it must feel for you to be living down here like some scared paranormal sewer rat when you really belong on the surface with the rest of our species.”

“I see more rats up there than I ever do here,” snapped Cara.

Jedikiah wasn’t convinced. “Yeah, well, as much as I’m enjoying this little chat of ours, I’m not going to say another word until I speak to John. Alone.”

Russell and Cara looked to John, who nodded. With his permission, they left their leader alone with their most hated enemy. Cara wasn’t the least bit happy about it as she’d gotten nothing from Jedikiah’s mind, which was only to be expected considering that Jedikiah had grown up as Roger’s brother and therefore knew a trick or two to block out telepaths.

Once John was alone with Jedikiah, things progressed.

“What do you want?” asked John, quietly.

“To remind you that it’s in both of our best interests that you get me out of this dank hovel as soon as possible,” said Jedikiah, quietly.

John cocked his head. “Why would I help you?”

Jedikiah raised an eyebrow. “Because if certain information came to light, it would be unfortunate for all parties involved. It’s surprising you even let them read my mind in the first place.”
John gave Jedikiah a smug look. “Blackmail? Extortion? You haven’t changed one bit. Go ahead, tell them about the Annex Project. It won’t do you any good. Thanks to your ambush, they already know that I can kill.”

“You know it goes much deeper than that, John,” whispered Jedikiah. He was referring to a secret that John had kept for some years now, a secret he’d not told Sierra. “What do you think they would do if they knew the whole truth about you? Would they still consider you their leader? Their savior? We both know how this ends, John. Even these sewer rats will abandon you!”

John’s face was unreadable and he was quiet. Whether he liked it or not, John knew that Jedikiah was right. If the rest of the Tomorrow People knew of John’s secrets, that he could kill and was a freak amongst freaks, they’d never trust him again.

“If you won’t free me for yourself, then do it for your son!” hissed Jedikiah. “If anything happens to me, my deal with Sierra is null and void. What do you think will happen to Robbie if I’m not there to protect him?”

Jedikiah was right once again, but he was also wrong.

John took a step towards Jedikiah and got up in the older man’s face. “We both know you’re not protecting him. Now, I may not be part of my son’s life, but I’ll be damned if I let you hurt and use him like you did to me. If that means Sierra and Robbie have to become fugitives and leave Ultra, or if I have to put a bullet in your head, then so be it.”

Jedikiah frowned, clearly disappointed that his bargaining hadn’t worked.

XXX

Eight years ago…

John was being dragged to an abandoned house by Jedikiah.

He had no idea what was going on or why, he just knew he wasn’t going to like it. He wanted it to be over and done with so he could leave. John had recently made a horrible mistake and he intended to rectify it and leave Ultra forever. But before John did that, he had to finish his last mission.

“What’re we doing here?” asked John, as they ascended the stairs. “What is this place?”

“This is Safe House 46. It’s where you’ll receive your first new assignment as a newly-enhanced operative,” said Jedikiah. “And it’s also to make sure your skills are sharp and you’re ready to get back out there after the incident.”

John winced. Some months ago, John had been in a bad situation and taken a life in self-defense. John’s physical wounds had been bad enough that he’d needed months of recovery and telepathic therapy sessions to get past the trauma. This was John’s first time back out in ages.

There was a man in the middle of the room, bound and masked.
John’s heart sank. Were they going to ask him to kill this man?

“This man is guilty of various banal cruelties,” said Jedikiah. “Horrible, unspeakable crimes. You’re going to carry out his punishment.”

John gave Jedikiah a disbelieving, puzzled look. “Why? To prove the experiment works? You know that.”

“Oh, it worked. Even without the incident, I know the experiment works. I gave you all the biological tools you need, John,” said Jedikiah.

“Then what’s the point?” asked John.

“Well, for starters, the incident was an accident. Self-defense. It’s not necessarily proof,” explained Jedikiah. “A lot of people think they can kill, but there’s no way of knowing for sure until you’re confronted with the cold, hard realities.”

John wasn’t surprised that Jedikiah was asking him to do this, but nevertheless, it wasn’t something he wanted to do. Killing in self-defense was one thing, but killing another, one who was bound and defenseless, even a sicko like the prisoner…was just plain wrong. This wasn’t justice. This was murder, plain and simple. But even so, John knew what would happen if he refused. Someone else would finish the job and they wouldn’t be merciful like John.

John pulled out the gun he’d been given and aimed it at the prisoner’s head, but despite knowing what the prisoner had done and what would happen if John didn’t obey Jedikiah’s orders, he hesitated.

“Don’t do it! Please, I’m begging you!” pleaded the prisoner.

John’s heart ached. How could he do this?

Jedikiah leaned in and whispered into John’s ear, “You want to be the best, like me?” When John nodded, Jedikiah continued, “The Founder and I have been so pleased with your progress so far. Show me you can go all the way. Show me it wasn’t a mistake to believe in you. Your next assignment won’t have the luxury of time…unless you don’t feel like you have it in you.” When John hesitated once again, Jedikiah tried another tactic. “John, this man hurt a lot of innocent young women. Are you really going to let him get away with that? Finish it, John.”

This time, a fire in John blazed as he thought of what would happen if something happened to Sierra, if some psychopath dared to harm her or take her away from John. Whoever made that mistake would pay for it with their life.

Without further hesitation, John fired off the gun, only to be shocked when he discovered it was loaded with blanks.

John was nothing if not confused. “What the hell—?”

The prisoner’s bonds became undone and he removed his mask, revealing himself to be one of John’s trainees, and he laughed as he rose up from where he’d been kneeling on the floor and laughed while Jedikiah applauded and smiled at John.

“Congratulations,” said Jedikiah. “You passed your test with flying colors. You not only have the ability to kill, but you also have the conviction.”

John was quiet and there was no mistaking the pain in his blue-grey eyes. He was disgusted
with himself. If it hadn’t been a test, he would’ve killed that man in cold blood. That didn’t make him better in any sense of the word, it just made him no better than his enemies.

Jedikiah pulled out a small manila envelope from his coat pocket. “Here, this is your real assignment.”

John took the envelope and removed its contents. Words could not describe the devastation he felt. “You can’t serious.”

Out of all the people Jedikiah could’ve asked John to kill, why did it have to be Roger?

XXX

Cara was waiting for John in TIM’s room.

She’d been sorely tempted to listen in, but decided against it. She was still very curious about why Jedikiah had wanted to speak to John privately.

“John, what was that all about?” she asked, when he entered the room. “What did Jedikiah want with you alone?”

“Hate to disappoint you, but it wasn’t to tell me about Thanatos.” John sighed and leaned against his desk. “Jedikiah wanted my help getting out of here. I said no.”

Cara looked confused and her eyes narrowed in suspicion. “Why would he ask you?”

John feigned ignorance and shrugged. “We have history and obviously, he’s scared of what might happen to him. He threatened to renege on his deal with Sierra if he wasn’t released.”

Cara’s eyes darkened with anger. “He threatened Robbie?”

“Relax. I told him I’d put a bullet in his head if any harm came to Robbie,” said John. He hadn’t been bluffing about that. If it came down to it, John would quite happily kill Jedikiah if it meant saving Sierra and Robbie’s lives. “Jedikiah shut up after that.”

“Good. He deserves that and more,” Cara sat on the desk and looked down at her hands. She took a deep breath as she placed a comforting hand on John’s shoulder. “I saw what he did to you. When Jedikiah was asleep, he had his guard down. I saw into his memory.”

John tensed. “What exactly did you see?”

Had Cara seen what John feared? Had she seen his darkest memories from his time at Ultra?

Cara looked sad. “Not much, just flashes, and it wasn’t so much what I saw but what I felt. Jedikiah loved you like a son. He still does.”

John pulled away. He didn’t want to hear that Jedikiah cared. Breaking free of the man that John had once loved and respected like a father had been one of the hardest things John had ever done. Jedikiah showed no such pain, no regret as he’d hunted John and tried to put him down like a dog.

“Well, Jedikiah had an odd way of showing it,” murmured John. “I need some air.”
Without waiting for a reply, John left the room.

John didn’t care what Cara thought she saw or felt when she read Jedikiah’s mind. Jedikiah was not capable of love or any kind of real feelings. The man was a monster, nothing more.

XXX

After dropping off Robbie at Astrid’s, Sierra went to Ultra.

As predicated, the whole place was on high-alert and everyone was running around like headless chickens. It was not good. She caught up with her partner, Agent Troy, who was headed up to the nerve center.

“Hey, I just got the alert. What’s going on?” asked Sierra, feigning ignorance.

For the first time since Darcy’s death, he didn’t give her any grief or even a dark look. “It’s crazy in here. Jedikiah’s missing. He’s been kidnapped, teleported out by some rogue breakout.”

“My uncle’s missing? Oh, jeez…” murmured Sierra. She didn’t have to pretend that she was horrified by the situation. “Okay, what do we know?”

“There were tele-signatures all over Jedikiah’s apartment and we’re tracking surveillance in and out of the building but in the meantime, we’re got the Brain Trust working on it,” explained Troy.

“Brain Trust? What’s the—oh, ew.” Sierra felt physically sick as they came upon the nerve center. In the middle of the room was a small group of TP agents, literally plugged into a machine from the back of their necks.

Troy grimaced. “Pretty nasty, huh? They’re telepathic specialists. That device plugs directly into their brain to boost the psychic signal. Each of our brains operates at a unique wavelength like a radio signal. There are millions of stations for these guys to tune in to, one-by-one. Frequency’s weaker in humans, but if the boss is alive, they’ll find it.”

Sierra swallowed the bile that entered her throat. This was like some sick, twisted version of Professor Xavier’s machine, Cerebro. And if that wasn’t bad enough, if their power really was as advertised, then it wouldn’t be long before Jedikiah was found and Sierra’s secret was blown and the lives of the Tomorrow People were ended.

“Where did these guys come from?” asked Sierra.

Troy shrugged and then leaned in closer to Sierra before speaking in a soft tone. “I don’t know his name, but they call him the Founder.”

“Do they? Perhaps I should have that printed on my business cards.”

Sierra’s blood ran cold as she and Troy spun around to see a stranger behind them. He was older than Sierra’s father with brown hair and a beard, he wore an expensive suit and he had a British accent. Sierra recognized his voice and knew instantly who this was. This was Hugh Bathory, the Founder.

Troy cleared his throat and ran off to do some work on his computer, leaving Sierra alone with
one of the most dangerous individuals in Ultra.

The Founder smiled as he extended his hand. “Hello, Sierra. We’ve not had the privilege of a formal introduction. It’s a pleasure to rectify that now.”

Sierra numbly nodded. “You…you’re the voice from the mansion.”

The Founder nodded. “In the flesh.”

“So, they call you the Founder, as in you founded Ultra?”

The Founder nodded. “Not alone, of course, yet I am one of the few survivors. Clearly, there was your father, rest his soul, and your uncle who’s now unfortunately kidnapped. My…what bad luck seems to follow your family around.”

Sierra’s face was unreadable and she was silent.

The Founder placed his hand on her shoulder. “I promise you, it’s only a matter of time before we locate Jedikiah and brings his captors to justice and they will beg for mercy.”

And none would be given, that much was made clear.

XXX

As soon as Sierra was able to slip away unnoticed, she went straight to the Lair. The plan was off. Jedikiah had to leave and quickly before they all got killed.

Sierra glanced around for John but didn’t see him, she did, however, see Cara emerging from TIM’s room, looking concerned at the fear on Sierra’s face.

“Sierra, what’s happened?” asked Cara.

Sierra didn’t beat around the bush. “Where’s John?”

“Out getting fresh air. Why? What’s happened?” asked Cara.

Sierra bit her lip. “John was right. We need to get Jedikiah out of here now. It’s too dangerous.” She attempted to walk to where she thought she’d find John, but Cara got in the way.

Cara held up her hand. “Whoa, slow down. What happened?”

“The Founder, the paranormal who tried to get into my head the day of the ambush, he’s at Ultra,” said Sierra, gravely. “And he’s got a team of powerful telepaths hooked up to a machine to search for my uncle. We need to get Jedikiah out of here.”

Sierra expected Cara to agree, that it was too big of a risk and help Sierra get Jedikiah out of the Lair, but the older woman did nothing of the sort.

“Well, then I’d better get to work,” said Cara. She turned to leave, but Sierra grabbed Cara’s arm and pulled her back.

Sierra wanted to scream in frustration. “Are you insane? Did you not hear a thing I just said?
We need to get Jedikiah out of here.”

“I don’t need much time, I just need one more pass at Jedikiah,” insisted Cara.

“No. No. Just forget about Thanatos, Jedikiah, all of it. Now,” said Sierra, firmly. “It isn’t worth the risk. We need to abort the mission!”

“Forget your father?” said Cara, incredulously as her eyes narrowed in disapproval.

“That’s not what I meant!” hissed Sierra, angrily. “We can pick at Jedikiah’s brain another time. But right now, unless we get him out of here immediately, we’re all dead.”

“We may not have another time. Sierra, I need your help right now. I need you to stall the Founder and his goons and get Ultra off your uncle’s psychic scent,” said Cara, her tone not inviting argument.

Sierra resisted the urge to punch Cara in the face as she grunted out, “How?” How on earth was Sierra supposed to keep Ultra off Jedikiah’s trail without raising the alarm and blowing her cover?

“When I was in your uncle’s head, I saw something. A woman,” confessed Cara. “He was following her and for some reason he wanted to keep her a secret. Check Jedikiah’s files and see what’s on there. If necessary, use her to send Ultra on a wild goose chase.”

Sierra didn’t like this plan one bit but she could see Cara couldn’t be dissuaded and nor did she have time to attempt such an argument. Plus, odds were that the woman Jedikiah was following was a criminal he wanted to bring in himself at a certain time. So, having no other choice, Sierra reluctantly left for her uncle’s office

With Jedikiah’s office vacant, getting inside and into his computer was child’s play. Sierra dug up her uncle’s private files on a paranormal, a woman by the name of Morgan. There wasn’t much on file, but what little there was, was enough for Sierra to go to the Founder with.

“I think I have a lead on Doctor Price’s disappearance,” she said, loudly as she entered the ops room.

The Founder looked surprised if not somewhat skeptical. “Really? Do tell.”

Sierra handed the Founder the file she’d stolen from Jedikiah’s office. “He was investigating a breakout on his own, possibly the one who kidnapped him. And before you ask, there’s nothing in the system because as you can see here, he earmarked it for himself. I found it in his personal files in his office and I just returned it to the network.”

Sierra waited with bated breath for the Founder’s reaction, but his face was unreadable as he spoke with an ice-cold tone.

“Am I to understand you went snooping around your uncle’s private files without consent? That’s against protocol,” said the Founder.

“With all due respect, sir, when my son was abducted, my uncle did everything in his power to get Robbie back, even though it meant defying the rules. He left no stone unturned. I’m just returning the favor,” said Sierra, as politely and respectfully as she could. “And again, with respect, sir, nothing is private during an Ultra investigation.”

Rather than becoming angry as she’d expected, the Founder seemed impressed by Sierra’s show
of initiative.

“Good work, Miss Jameson,” said the Founder, smiling. He turned to one of his lieutenants. “Round up a tactical team and pursue the breakout to her last known address. Report to me as soon as you’ve made contact. Miss Jameson, please go with them.”

Sierra nodded and obeyed without hesitation, praying she wasn’t making a huge mistake.

XXX

Back at the Lair, Cara had resumed her interrogation of Jedikiah with disastrous results.Knowing that Jedikiah believed her to be human, Cara had attempted to threaten Jedikiah’s own life and had even decked him multiple times to the point where Jedikiah received a concussion as well as a bloody mouth and nose. But despite the pain, Jedikiah hadn’t answered Cara’s questions, instead he’d smoothly baited her with taunts about her past, involving her near-assault and disownment. That had resulted in Cara beating the living daylights out of Jedikiah until she’d nearly triggered the Prime Barrier and blown her cover as well as Sierra’s.

Miraculously, John had intervened just in time, pried Cara off Jedikiah and dragged her out into the hallway where Jedikiah couldn’t overhear them.

“What the hell was that?” demanded John, furiously. “You nearly got yourself and Sierra exposed! Cara, answer me!”

Cara was unrepentant as she gave an evasive answer. “Nothing. He’s hiding something, John. And not just Thanatos or anything relating to Sierra’s father. Every time I’m inside his head, I see him with you at Ultra and something about McCrane.”

John’s eyes narrowed. “What’re you implying?”

Cara gave John an incredulous look. “I think you know what I’m talking about, John. That man in there still cares about you and still has feelings about McCrane. He’s hiding something because of it. Whatever it is, it will come out. Just like it did that you can kill and Sierra can heal.”

John was furious and opened his mouth to speak but Cara cut him off.

“Whatever you’re about to say, don’t. I forgave you for lying to me once. That’s all,” said Cara, sternly before she walked off.

John sighed to himself as he went to fetch a wet rag. He was angry with Cara for her behavior as well as her insinuations but at the same time, he couldn’t entirely fault her for it. She was right. John was hiding something big from Cara as well as the people he was protecting, and not just the secrets he shared with Sierra regarding their son’s powers. It was a secret involving Roger and John’s last days at Ultra before John fled.

When John entered Jedikiah’s prison cell and unceremoniously dumped the wet rag into Jedikiah’s lap, the older man shot John a grateful, if not loving, look. “Thanks, John,” he said, before he dabbed at his bloodied face with the cloth.

“Don’t thank me,” said John, coldly. “I trusted you like a father and you used me, ordered me to kill the man who was more of a dad to me than you ever were! And he died because you failed
to stop McCrane before he went off the rails. Don’t you get it? I lost everything that day! Sierra’s trust, her love, my son!” John’s voice cracked as he mentioned Robbie and thought of those painful years he’d spent thinking Sierra was dead. He’d lost her for so long not just because of John’s own idiotic choices but because of what Jedikiah had done. And even worse, he’d lost precious time with his son that he was never going to get back, not ever. “You deserve everything you’re going to get, you bastard!”

John shot Jedikiah an icy look that sent a chill down the older man’s spine before John departed.

*Eight years ago…*

“How could Jedikiah ask John to kill Roger of all people? Roger was a pillar of the Tomorrow People community as well as a high figure at Ultra as well as a father-figure to John. What madness was this?”

Jedikiah remorsefully shook his head. “No, John. I’m afraid this is real.”

John’s heart skipped a beat. “You want me to kill the man who trained me? Your own brother? Why?”

“It pains me as well but this isn’t my call. This comes from on high, from the Founder himself,” said Jedikiah. “Roger has gone rogue and set out to destroy Ultra. He’s already blown up one lab. He must be put down and made an example of—those are the Founder’s words, not mine. But he does raise a good point. Roger’s done that already, so what’s next on Roger’s agenda? Ultra exists to put a stop to threats like this. He’s a danger not just to my kind but to yours as well and all those who care about him. I’m sorry. I wish there was another way but there isn’t.”

“But why me? You have dozens of agents, hundreds of operatives—”

“Humans who don’t stand a chance against his powers,” interrupted Jedikiah. “And our paranormal agents can’t kill. I hate to ask this of you, John, but you’re the only one with the required skills. And also, as much as I hate to do this, Roger brought this upon himself. It’s out of our hands.”

Was it, though? John’s mind raced with rather inspiring thoughts as he contemplated this. Just because the Founder had ordered the hit didn’t mean it had to happen. John had intended to leave Ultra after his last mission. Why not do it now after he took Roger away somewhere the Founder couldn’t find either of them before John went after Sierra to make amends? Could this kill order be the solution to John’s problem? It certainly seemed that way.

“Do you trust me when I say this is for the best, John?” asked Jedikiah.

John didn’t but didn’t show this as he nodded in confirmation of Jedikiah’s question.

“Then do what needs to be done,” said Jedikiah, pleased.

“I will,” said John, truthfully. No matter what the cost, no matter the consequences, John would do what needed to be done, not just for Roger’s sake but for his own, Sierra’s and so many
Meanwhile, topside, Sierra had led the ops mission to confront Morgan.

To her shock, she’d discovered that Morgan was not just some paranormal hidden in her uncle’s files, Morgan was also Jedikiah’s girlfriend, which explained why Jedikiah had gone to such lengths to keep her hidden from Ultra’s radar. Horrified by what she’d done, Sierra ended up secretly freeing Morgan and sending her to a safe house before Ultra’s agents could find the pair of them. But it didn’t end there. Knowing this could also be leverage against her uncle, Sierra had reluctantly informed John of this new development.

Soon after this, John, Cara and Russell all went to confront Jedikiah with their information. At first, when he saw them, Jedikiah acted all casual and taunting, but that ended quickly enough.

“Cut the crap, Jedikiah. We didn’t come here to make small talk. We came because we found out Morgan,” said Russell, smugly.

Jedikiah actually turned white but his expression was unreadable. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. Who’s Morgan?”

“Your little girlfriend,” said John, grinning. “You’re sleeping with a *Tomorrow Person*. Shame on you, Jedikiah, sleeping with the enemy was supposed to be beneath you.”

“You don’t know anything,” said Jedikiah, coldly.

“Really? We know who she is, where she lives and that you keep her files hidden from Ultra,” said Cara, coolly. “And speaking of whom, we’re prepared to make all that information accessible to all of your trigger-happy colleagues. I can’t imagine they’ll let either of you live—her for being one of us and a rogue or you for betraying your bosses. Consider that very carefully before you try lying to us.”

There was a moment’s tense silence before Jedikiah’s shoulders slumped as he sighed. “Fine. You win. You want to know about Thanatos? It’s not a what, it’s a *who*—a nickname, to be more precise. For Professor Aldus Crick.”

“Oh yeah?” said Russell, intrigued. “What’s his deal?”


Jedikiah looked both impressed as well as surprised as TIM went on to describe Crick’s past and current history. “Was that—?”

John nodded. “Yeah. Stolen. Sorry.” But John wasn’t the least bit sorry, as was evident by the smile on his handsome face.

“Ah, doesn’t matter. Obsolete now,” said Jedikiah, nonchalantly as he shot a scowl at TIM’s voice. “Like the eight-track of artificial intelligence.”

Though he intended to insult TIM and prove that the AI was in fact, useless, TIM proved just
the opposite and was quite smug about it.

“Oh, I’m not done,” said TIM. “Named Department Chair in 1983, tenure revoked in 1994, which is when he came to work with you and Roger, if I’m not mistaken.”

Jedikiah groaned in annoyance while his three interrogators positively glowed with pleasure.

“So, why did you bring in a dude they kicked off the Princeton campus?” asked Russell.

Jedikiah sighed yet again. “Crick’s worked had veered into…unconventional territory. Paranormals. In absent of any concrete proof, Crick’s colleagues and superiors naturally thought he was a nutcase. A rare, prescient few like myself, noted his genius and knew he wasn’t crazy. So, Roger and I brought him in and with his guidance, Roger and I conducted research, experimentation, dangerous experimentation if I do say so myself. So much so, that we started calling Crick ‘Dr. Death,’ hence, ‘Thanatos.’ And before you ask his location, you should know that Crick has many enemies in my organization. If I tell you where he is, he’s a dead man and I will not have that.”

“Well tough luck, because if you don’t ’fess up in five seconds, we’re putting out a paranormal ABP on your little girlfriend,” threatened John. “And you know I don’t bluff, so…one, two, three…”

Not wishing his girlfriend harm, Jedikiah did as he was asked without further argument or protest and gave them Crick’s location. While the information was promising and Sierra was more than hopeful that this would prove that Roger was alive somewhere, John was somewhat hesitant for reasons he refused to go into. It was also decided that a small party consisting of John, Sierra and Irene (who insisted on going as she was the only one who understood physics) would consult with Crick.

Unbeknownst to the group, however, the Founder was on a rampage upon learning that not only had Morgan not been apprehended but also that Sierra was missing and presumed captured as well and that they still hadn’t yet found Jedikiah. When one of his brain-tracking operatives gave the Founder lip and referred to Jedikiah as a ‘sap,’ the Founder had said operative’s plug removed by a human agent, which killed him. The Founder then proceeded to plug himself into the machine, amplifying its power greatly and providing another problem for Sierra and her people.

XXX

Tracking down Crick required a lot of hiking in the woods as the professor was something of a reclusive hermit. He was startled by their appearance, but once Sierra introduced herself to the professor as Roger’s daughter and explained about not only her abilities but also her son’s, Crick was more than happy to talk to them. He invited them in for tea and cake and they chatted at the dinner table.

“Wow, twenty years ago, Princeton? I was in behavioral science and Jedikiah was teaching molecular biology. He came to me one day in the cafeteria, swore me to secrecy and said he wanted to introduce me to someone who would ‘blow my mind.’ He wasn’t lying, for your father, Miss Jameson, did exactly that,” said Crick, as he poured them all tea.

Sierra couldn’t help the smile of pride that flickered across her face. “My dad always did have
thats kind of talent.”

Crick smiled as he nodded in agreement. “That he did. Anyway, that was the beginning of Ultra, an organization to gather and protect this new species and someday reveal it as a benefit to mankind.”

John scoffed and shook his head. That didn’t sound anything like the Ultra he knew and had grown up with. Ultra was only concerned with power and control, not protection and serving mankind or the Tomorrow People.

“So, what went wrong?” asked John.

Crick sighed. “Well, he would never admit it but Jedikiah was always jealous of Roger. Part of him resented not having Roger’s abilities, being human. It left Jedikiah cool and easily influenced by, amongst others, the Founder, Hugh Bathory. Dreadful man. Always gave me the willies.”

Crick shuddered. “Roger shared my feelings and didn’t trust him, so he kept the Founder out of our work. Regarding Roger’s abilities to stop time, I theorized that an unknown dimensional plane—”

“Wait, I’m sorry. My dad had the ability of temporal manipulation? I thought Robbie and I were the only ones. That’s the impression I got from Jedikiah,” said Sierra, as she shared shocked glances with John.

Crick nodded. “Well, your uncle has been known to be less than truthful.”

“No kidding,” said Sierra. Well, that explained what her dad meant in his message about taking after him. “What about biological manipulation or my son’s other powers? Could my dad do that too?”

Aldus looked regretful as he shook his head. “No, unfortunately not. You and your son are the crown jewels of your kind, a leap in evolution.”

Sierra wasn’t surprised, just a little disappointed. Sometimes she disliked being special. “Please, continue, Professor.”

“Well, the notion went that while stopping time whilst teleporting in that lag between takeoff and arrival, one would arrive in a time out of time. A place we called ‘limbo.’”

Sierra’s face lit up as her breath caught in her throat. “Limbo. My dad said I was in limbo with him the night of the ambush.” She turned to her boyfriend in excitement. “John, do you realize what this means? It means I really did see my dad that night.”

“Roger’s still out there somewhere. He survived,” murmured John, sounding both shocked and relieved by this information.

Sierra didn’t know what John meant by survived but didn’t question as she turned her attention back to Crick.

“Wait, hold on. Sierra saw her father when she was almost dead, how close did you get in your experiments, Professor?” asked Irene.

Crick looked sad if not disappointed. “Nowhere. Stopping time whilst teleporting proved impossible, even for Roger. What Miss Jameson experienced, her near-death experience, Roger wanted to attempt but I always refused. Roger was a dear friend of mine and I couldn’t bear the thought that a near-death experiment or anything along those lines might prove fatal.”
Sierra ran her fingers through her hair in frustration. She had hoped this visit would give her answers but so far, she just had more questions. “If my dad didn’t do the experiment then how did he get to Limbo? How did I get to Limbo and see him? Was it the near-death experience or did I stop time whilst teleporting unconsciously? Or was it just a hallucination brought on by the experience?”

She didn’t want to believe that what she’d seen had been nothing more than her imagination but what if it was true? What if she was on a wild goose chase that led to nowhere?

Crick shrugged and looked apologetic. “I’m sorry, Miss Jameson but I’m afraid I can’t answer that.”

“Hey, calm down,” said John, soothingly, as he intertwined his fingers with Sierra’s and squeezed Sierra’s hand. “Look, I know this is frustrating but we’ll figure out a way to get through this. I know you didn’t imagine Roger. We’ll find him and bring him home, I promise.”

Sierra smiled and squeezed John’s hand, grateful for his faith and reassurance. She privately hoped that John was right, that they were going to win this.

Back at the Lair, things had gotten progressively worse.

When Russell delivered Jedikiah’s meal of the day, the head of Ultra had faked a choking in order to get Russell close enough to grab Russell’s keys and also strangle him. Cara, who happened upon the scene, intervened on impulse and rather stupidly, exposed her still-working powers in the process by teleporting to Russell’s rescue and decking Jedikiah. Needless to say, John was not pleased when he found out as Cara’s actions threatened Sierra’s position at Ultra as well as Sierra and Robbie’s lives, but Cara was unrepentant.

“What the hell were you thinking?” demanded John.

“I was thinking that Russell was going to die. I didn’t have a choice, John. You weren’t here. It was either expose my powers or watch Russell get strangled,” said Cara, coldly.

John growled in anger, making Cara flinch and take a hesitant step back. “What did you tell Jedikiah when he found out the truth about you?”

“The only thing that I could: that the serum didn’t take because I’m immune to it like Sierra and tricked her into believing otherwise so I could escape Ultra intact,” said Cara, quickly. “It seemed more plausible than telling him we found an antidote to his serum, which had crossed my mind. I think he bought what I was selling.”

“How could you be so stupid and short-sighted?” yelled John. As he yelled, his telekinesis reacted and broke several items in the room, making Cara jump a foot. “Do you realize what the hell you’ve done? If Jedikiah doesn’t believe your story about being immune and he gets free, then Sierra’s dead and so is my son! Or worse, they’ll become Ultra’s lab rats! Cara, what the hell were you thinking?! Now, we’re backed into a corner with no way out!”

John couldn’t believe that Cara of all people had been so stupid. In Cara’s attempt to save one of their kind, Cara had foolishly damned them all. John had only just gotten Sierra back into his life
and found his son. He couldn’t bear to lose them now?

Tears glistened in Cara’s eyes as she quietly contemplated what to do next. “Maybe we’re not,” she said, softly. “Maybe Jedikiah doesn’t have to get free.”

Realizing what Cara meant, John looked horrified before angrily shaking his head. “No. No, no, no! You cannot ask me to do that!”

“John, please, it’s our only option,” begged Cara. “I wouldn’t ask you if I wasn’t completely sure.”

John scoffed. He didn’t believe that. “Now, who’s lying?” He held up his hand when Cara opened her mouth to protest. “I may be able to kill but don’t think that doesn’t take a toll on my conscience, even when I kill those who have to die. If you only knew how that felt, we wouldn’t be having this conversation. No, I’ll wipe Jedikiah’s memories of your actions and dump him somewhere Ultra can find him.”

“And what happens if Ultra manages to retrieve the memories?” challenged Cara. It was rare but not unheard of for a powerful telepath to retrieve memories supposedly erased from another’s mind. If that happened with Jedikiah, the consequences would be far worse than what John feared.

“They won’t,” said John, firmly.

John had done mind-wipes before and no one at Ultra had been able to undo his work yet. He doubted if they could now. His decision made, John headed towards Jedikiah’s cell to do what had to be done when he was interrupted by an urgent telepathic call from Sierra.

*John! You need to get Jedikiah out of there now!* cried Sierra, worriedly. After leaving Crick’s cabin, she had returned with a bruised forehead and a lump the size of egg from John, in order to provide the excuse that Morgan had injured and knocked out Sierra before escaping. Thankfully, her co-workers had bought the excuse.

*What’s happened?* asked John. *Have you been found out?*

*No, but we’ll all be soon enough. The Founder’s plugged himself into the machine and he’s zeroing in on Jedikiah’s trail,* said Sierra, frantically. *They know he’s underground and in a subway station. The Founder’s going to have Jedikiah’s location in maybe five minutes. Hurry!*

*Will do,* said John.

Inwardly, John cursed before running to Jedikiah. He wasted no time in cutting Jedikiah’s bonds and then teleporting him topside to a secluded location. Before John could attempt the memory-wipe, however, a patrolling Ultra squad car spotted John and Jedikiah. John was soon overpowered and briefly knocked out before he was dragged to Ultra’s headquarters in cuffs.

XXX

_Eight years ago…_
Quick as he could, John teleported to Roger’s location, hoping against hope that he could do this, that he could make a break from Ultra and still save Roger in the process.

But by the time John arrived, it was too late. Roger had narrowly avoided a car bomb, only to be shot in the chest by McCrane, who teleported away cackling in delight.

“NO!” cried John. No, no, this couldn’t be happening. This just couldn’t! Quickly, he ran to Roger’s side and after placing his jacket under Roger’s head, began applying pressure to Roger’s bullet wound. “Roger, no, stay with me. You have to hold on. I’m going to get you to a hospital and then we’re going to leave together.” Already, he was digging out his phone to check for the nearest emergency room.

Roger did not respond to John’s attempted medical aid, instead he tightly grasped John’s wrist. “John, stop. You have to leave me behind. Go after McCrane before it’s too late.”

“McCrane can wait! You’re more important now!” protested John. Was the blood loss making Roger crazy? McCrane was a threat, yes, but he could wait until after Roger was out of danger. “Hold on, I’m going to—”

“Listen to me!” demanded Roger. His tone was a mixture of sternness and worry. “I read McCrane’s mind. He’s going after Sierra Jameson. You have to stop him before he kills her. You have to save my daughter.”

John was shocked. The girl he loved was blood-kin to Roger and Jedikiah. How was that even possible? “Wait…what? Your daughter? Sierra’s yours?”

“Yes, but that doesn’t matter right now. What matters is her. I know you’ve been seeing her in secret for a long time now and that you ended things to protect her.” When John ducked his head in shame at how he’d treated Sierra, Roger gently touched John’s face. “Listen, I know how much you love her, John. I know what she means to you,” said Roger. He wasn’t angry or disapproving in the slightest, only sad and encouraging. “I’ll be fine, I promise but you need to protect Sierra and the rest of our kind from McCrane and Ultra. Swear to me, John. Please. Don’t let my daughter die.”

“I’ll do what you ask, I swear it,” said John, quickly. He gave John one last loving embrace before teleporting away, not knowing that by the time he reached McCrane, it would be too late. McCrane would believe he’d killed Sierra, John’s link with Sierra would be buried if not destroyed and Roger’s body would be carted off forever.

XXX

Though her body language betrayed nothing, inside Sierra was horrified and scared as John was carted through Ultra’s halls, injured and barely conscious, and in power-suppressing handcuffs. John was Ultra’s prisoner.

How long would it be before Ultra unlocked the secrets in John’s mind and discovered Sierra’s ruse? And by doing so, get them all killed?
Death's Door

My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

At Ultra, the Founder was relishing in having Ultra’s most wanted fugitive back under their control after so many years. He was so pleased, in fact, that he was overseeing John’s interrogation himself and seemed to be relishing in the pain he intended to inflict on John’s mind for John’s betrayal and for information. For although John could kill and the Founder couldn’t, the former was still heavily injured and strapped to a chair powered with D-chips, rendering him vulnerable to the Founder’s telepathic and telekinetic attacks.

Both Jedikiah and Sierra watched the interrogation from a window in the door on the Founder’s orders. Whether it was to further test Sierra’s loyalties by making her watch the horrific interrogation of her presumed ex-boyfriend or if the Founder wanted Sierra to use her biological manipulation power to interrogate John with later on, Sierra didn’t know. All she did know was that she had to find a way to rescue John without blowing her cover and that watching him suffer the Founder’s interrogation was going to kill her inside.

At that moment, John was strapped to a chair with D-chip wrist band on his right arm while the Founder stood above him, positively gloating about the turn of events.

“I’ve been waiting a long time for this, John. You can’t imagine how happy having you here back under my control makes me feel,” said the Founder.

John rolled his eyes. “You think I give a rat’s ass how you feel or what makes you happy?”

“No, probably not. But you will reconsider that very quickly, I can assure you. I hate to damage such a precious commodity such as yourself but needs a-must if you refuse to cooperate,” said the Founder. “So, here’s how we can proceed. The simplest and most painless way for you tell me all I need to know. In which case, we’ll allow you to return to Ultra a full agent, on a leash, of course, until your loyalties have been fully proven and our trust is regained. Or we’ll simply execute you for your actions. What say you?” When John scoffed and looked away from the Founder, the older man was unsurprised. “I thought as much. You always were a stubborn little fool, John.”

Sierra’s heart beat like crazy with fear when the Founder walked towards John with a dangerous look on his face. She didn’t need her telepathy to know what was going to happen next.

“Well, you should have taken my offer when you had the chance. Because now, whether you do as I ask or not is irrelevant. Once I have what I need from you, you’ll be executed,” said the
Founder. “Or maybe you’ll be a comatose vegetable first, I don’t know. Either way, you’ll be dealt with once and for all and I will know everything that I need to, including where your little rebel friends are hiding. The only difference is, I might have to work a little bit harder with you and you’ll suffer in ways you can’t possibly imagine. But make no mistake, your time is limited, Mister Young. Very limited.”

The next sound Sierra heard was John’s painful, gut-wrenched scream as the Founder proceeded to inflict horrendous pain on John’s mind and body.

“Tell me what I want to know and you can be done with this, boy,” said the Founder. “Why put yourself through this when it can be over so quickly?”

John’s only response was a blazing glare in the Founder’s direction.

A few moments later, the Founder’s torture ceased and John was allowed to catch his breath.

“If I ever get free, mark my words, I’ll drag you to hell myself!” spat John.

The Founder raised an eyebrow. “Oh really? Prove it then.”

John’s shackles then came undone but the power suppressing bracelet remained on his wrist, still leaving him vulnerable to the Founder’s powers, as was evident by what happened next. John slid off the chair with a painful thud before shakily rising to his feet in determined anger. He then attempted to punch the Founder in the face, only to be blocked by the Founder’s telekinesis.

The older man scoffed and looked bored. “Oh, please, boy. Is that the best you can do? I broke out before you were born!”

The Founder then proceeded to slam John against the wall, hard and painfully before making him fly back towards the Founder’s face. John’s limbs then went up in the air, rigid and stiff as a board and then John’s face began turning a faint shade of blue as the Founder proceeded to choke him.

At that point, Sierra could no longer contain herself.

“ENOUGH!” yelled Sierra, as she and Jedikiah burst in. “STOP IT!”

The Founder released his hold on John, dropping him to the ground and allowing him to breathe.

“Pardon the interruption,” said Jedikiah.

Sierra ignored her uncle and glared at the Founder. “You may not be able to kill him but if you make him a vegetable, he can’t tell us where the Tomorrow People are hiding!”

The Founder seemed to smile as he shook his head. “You’re truly your father’s daughter. You have his misplaced compassion and for John Young of all people. If only you knew the truth, you’d strangle John with your bare hands or better yet, use your powers to torture him into insanity yourself.”

Sierra frowned in confusion. “Truth? What truth?” What was the Founder talking about?

“Go ahead and tell her, John,” said the Founder, as he turned to the younger man with a sickening smile on his face. “Think of it as a last confession.”
John did not reply. He just looked down at his shoes and didn’t meet Sierra’s eyes.

The Founder shook his head and made a tsk-tsk noise. “Oh, come now. She ought to know how her father died, don’t you think?”

Sierra’s eyes widened. *What? Died? What the hell’s he talking about? “I beg your pardon?”*

“Go on, John, tell her,” said the Founder, smirking. “Tell Roger’s daughter how you were ordered to kill Roger Price when he went rogue, but instead of doing as you were told, her father died in your arms all those years ago after McCrane shot him dead to get back at you and Ultra. Tell her how instead of taking Roger with you when you turned Judas to a hospital, you left him behind to pursue McCrane. Now, you may not have pulled the trigger, but you as good as killed Roger yourself.”

Sierra’s breath caught in her throat. John had always said her father disappeared. John had never said that John had been ordered to kill her father or that Roger had been killed by McCrane much less that he’d been there and watched it happen or that he’d left Roger to die alone in the streets. Sierra refused to believe it. It couldn’t be true, it made no sense. There was no reason for John to do such a thing or lie to Sierra about it. The Founder had to be lying, he had to be!

“You’re lying. That never happened,” said Sierra, fiercely.

Maybe John had been given the kill order and refused it, but why would John let Roger die and lie to Sierra and the Tomorrow People about it? John had cared about Sierra’s father and was trying to find him. They had trusted each other! John told everyone her father would return to help them survive and find Thanatos. John wouldn’t have let Roger die and then just lied to everyone like that! He wasn’t like that.

Sierra looked at John and tried to confirm her belief, but her heart sank at the expression of regret and shame on John’s face.

“I’m sorry, Sierra,” he whispered.

Sierra’s heart broke and then she was overwhelmed with fury and grief. “YOU LYING SON OF A BITCH!”

Without thinking, she lashed out and punched John hard in the face, sending him spinning to the floor. She probably would’ve done more had Jedikiah not grabbed her arm and pulled her back.

“Sierra, don’t!” he hissed. “Calm down!”

Sierra didn’t reply. She just yanked her arm free and stormed out of the room without looking back. She furiously wiped away the angry tears that were streaming down her cheeks. As soon as she located a disused storage room, Sierra went in and locked the door behind her. She then slumped against the wall, slid down to the floor and proceeded to cry into her knees. Her heart was broken and it felt like the night John dumped her all over again.

Regardless of her belief in Thanatos and her father’s whereabouts, how was she supposed to get past this betrayal and lie? She’d just made amends with John and rekindled their relationship. Was this going to break them again? More importantly, how was this going to affect Robbie and the boy’s view of his father, whom he worshiped like a superhero? Not to mention, there was the Tomorrow People to consider. How would they take the news that John had been concealing this from them all these years? Lying to them to their faces? Protecting them yet giving them possibly false hope? Sierra had no intention of revealing John’s secrets but she still felt burdened by it all.
What was she supposed to do now that she knew what she knew?

Sierra’s musings were interrupted by the sound of Cara’s telepathic call.

*Sierra, are you okay? What just happened?* asked Cara.

Sierra wiped away her tears and took a deep breath as she stood up. *Nothing happened, Cara.* Even if Sierra felt like discussing it, she wasn’t about to do so with Cara. John’s secrets were his own and Sierra would not betray him.

*Don’t lie to me,* said Cara, sharply. *What you just felt, Robbie just felt too.* To keep Robbie safe, the boy was staying with the rest of the Tomorrow People in the Lair until John was safe again. *He’s worried about you and John. You’re hurting, aren’t you? Both of you. Talk to me.*

*I can’t, Cara, not now,* said Sierra, firmly. *Right now, we need to focus on getting John out of here before the Founder kills him or worse. Have you got any ideas?*

Thankfully, Sierra was firm enough that Cara dropped the matter and changed the subject.

*One, a very dangerous one but it’s all we got,* said Cara, sighing. *We need to find your uncle’s girlfriend so we can kidnap her and use her for leverage against Jedikiah.*

*Morgan? Are you kidding me? I just got her to safety and you want to put her in the line of fire again?* said Sierra, incredulously. Regardless of her rather questionable taste in men, Morgan was a harmless, innocent paranormal—one that Sierra had no intention of endangering again. *Cara, what the hell are you thinking? Morgan may be my uncle’s girlfriend but she’s innocent. Hasn’t she been through enough?*

*I don’t like it anymore than you do, but what other choice is there? It’s not just John who’s at risk here, we all are if we don’t rescue him before the Founder finds us,* said Cara. Her tone switched from firm and determined to desperate pleading with her next words. *Sierra, please. I don’t like this anymore than you but we’re running out of time and options. Please, help us do this.*

Sierra sighed as she leaned against the wall. Much as she hated to admit it, Cara was right. They had to use Morgan if they were to save John’s life. Sierra really hated the plan but what choice was there? If John died or if his secrets were exposed, everyone under John’s charge, including Robbie, was dead or possibly much worse.

*Okay, fine. I’ll help,* said Sierra. She didn’t know where the hell Morgan was, but she had an idea of where to look for a clue of some kind. *I’ll check Jedikiah’s office.*

After making sure Jedikiah’s office was empty, Sierra searched it from top to bottom with no results until finally, she found a photograph kept underneath the keyboard of Jedikiah’s laptop computer. The photo was of Jedikiah and Morgan standing on a hill overlooking the sea and a small mountain. Jedikiah was smiling, which made him look even creepier, if that was at all possible. Quickly, Sierra snapped a photo of the picture and sent it to Cara and Russell before she left Jedikiah’s office, hoping they might find some clue as to where the photo was taken and in turn, find Morgan’s location.

*Any luck?* asked Sierra, after a few tense moment

*Yep,* said Cara, sounding pleased. *It’s a cabin at Montauk Point and the owner’s listed as one ‘Jack Price.’*

*Jack Price, my father’s real first name and Jedikiah’s last name. Typical,* said Sierra. It wasn’t
surprising that Jedikiah would use such an alias for a safe house. After all, who would question it when the owner was listed it as dead or missing as long as the house payments continued as scheduled? Find Morgan and do what you need to do, quickly.

Will do, said Cara.

Sierra heaved a sigh of relief when she felt Cara’s presence leave her mind. She was glad as now she was alone with her thoughts without having to shield them from prying eyes. She didn’t know how she and John were going to past this new turn of events, but one way or another, they were going to have to deal with it and in the best way possible, for Robbie’s sake if nothing else.

XXX

Whilst all the above was occurring, Jedikiah headed to his apartment to meet Morgan for lunch as they had arranged. But upon his arrival, there was no hot meal waiting for him at the table and instead of Morgan’s smiling, loving face, he was met Cara’s determined if not cold and angry face as she sat at his dining table. Jedikiah didn’t need to be a telepath to guess what had happened and what Cara’s business was.

“Where the hell’s Morgan?” he growled, as he went for his gun.

“She’s somewhere you’ll never find her, but she’s safe and alive, for now. But she won’t be for long if you don’t do what I ask,” said Cara, coolly.

Jedikiah’s eyes narrowed. “How do I know you’re telling the truth?”

Cara glared before grabbing Jedikiah’s hand and forcefully entering his mind, showing him the image of Morgan strapped to a chair with a power suppression cuff.

Realizing he was trapped and at Cara’s mercy, Jedikiah holstered his gun and took a seat across from Cara. Call him foolish or a sentimental old fool, but for all Jedikiah’s harsh methods, he did truly love Morgan and for Morgan’s sake, he would cooperate with even the devil if he had to.

“I presume this is about John? You want him released, don’t you?” said Jedikiah.

Cara nodded. “If you return the one I love, I might return the favor.”

Jedikiah sighed as he rubbed the space between his eyes. “You realize I can’t do that, don’t you? If John escapes on my watch, the Founder will raise hell for it.”

Cara didn’t seem bothered by this. “The Founder isn’t my problem. You are and Morgan’s well-being will be yours if you don’t do what I ask. I don’t care how you do it, but you will do it if you want your little girlfriend back.”

Jedikiah growled in irritation as he contemplated this. He didn’t like the situation one bit but he didn’t have much choice in the matter.

“If I manage to free John and I can’t promise that I can—I’m not arguing, just stating a fact,” he added, when Cara opened her mouth to protest. “Then I need something else from you beyond Morgan’s safe return to me.”
“And what’s that?” asked Cara, warily.

“If I succeed in this, the Founder will pick at my brain and I’ll be under a microscope for who knows how long. Morgan won’t be safe if I know her whereabouts, which means I can’t know where she is. Which also means the safest place for her will be with you and your band of rogues,” said Jedikiah. The idea of being away from Morgan like that killed Jedikiah inside but at least she would be alive and safe and eventually, they would be together again somehow.

Cara immediately frowned and shook her head. “No, absolutely not. How do I know you won’t send a kill squad right to us if I take her in?”

“As much as I would love to, I’m not about risk Morgan’s safety. You’ve read my mind, you know how I feel about her,” said Jedikiah, sternly. “You want the man you love back safe? Then if I manage to succeed freeing him, then I need you to protect the woman I love. That’s the deal, take it or leave it. Your choice.”

Jedikiah waited a few painfully long, anxious moments as Cara wrestled with this deal before sighing in defeat.

“Fine. It’s a deal,” said Cara. “But if you can’t do as you promised, then we’ll have another problem on our hands.”

Jedikiah heaved a sigh of relief. “I’ll see what I can do.”

XXX

Meanwhile, after Sierra had sufficiently regained composure, she gained permission to visit John alone from the Founder after claiming she wanted to make John suffer for his actions against her father. To Sierra’s relief, the Founder had bought it and granted her full access to John. He even granted her wish to interrogate John alone without any guards or cameras watching.

When Sierra entered John’s cell, he was still strapped to the chair only now he was sporting numerous nasty-looking injuries and he looked away in shame when he saw Sierra.

Sierra didn’t speak as she made her way across the room and when she touched John, she healed every single one of his injuries, restoring him to full health.

“Thanks,” he murmured, softly.

“Don’t thank me. The Founder thinks we’re having a little chat, which means I can’t let it stick for long,” said Sierra, coldly. “We need to talk, John, and so help me, if you lie to me, you won’t like the consequences.” She was past the hurt and now all she felt was anger from John’s supposed betrayal.

“Fine, what do you want to know?”

“How about the truth?” demanded Sierra, angrily. “From day one, you’ve been keeping secrets and lying to me, again! I thought we were past this, John! But apparently, not. You knew what happened to my father. You were ordered to kill him. You didn’t pull the trigger yourself, but you still knew McCrane killed my dad and you didn’t tell me. What happened, John? Tell me the truth.”
John sighed as tears dropped down the sides of his face. “I didn’t exactly let Roger die. The day I got the kill order was the day I planned to leave Ultra, find you and make a clean slate. I thought I could save Roger too, but when I got there, McCrane put a bullet in his chest. You have to believe me, Sierra, I tried to save Roger. I was going to take him to a hospital but Roger begged me to leave him.”

Sierra looked at John in disbelief. “My dad begged you to let him die? Why?”

“Because of you. He read McCrane’s mind and knew Killian was going after you. Roger also knew about us, how I felt about you. So, Roger chose your life over his own, made me swear I’d save you and protect our people. He swore to me he’d be okay,” confessed John, brokenly. “You have to believe me, Sierra, I didn’t want to leave him but I couldn’t let you die either. I owed Roger everything. I had to do what he wanted and I couldn’t lose you. You know what happened next.”

Sierra did know and it was because of that that she understood John’s motives. She didn’t like what John had done or failed to do but she couldn’t fault him for it. But it didn’t excuse John keeping the truth of her father’s disappearance from her either. Her anger gone, she took a deep, shuddering breath to steady her nerves.

“Why didn’t you just tell me? Why did you lie to me, to everyone back at the Lair? You said he’d disappeared, you never said a word about what really happened,” said Sierra, unable to keep the pain from her voice.

“I didn’t know how to,” said John, brokenly as his eyes glistened with fresh tears. “I wanted to believe that Roger had had a backup plan. I wanted to believe that he’d found Thanatos. The Refuge was the only thing giving our people hope. I couldn’t take that away from them and when you decided to find him, I couldn’t bear to tell you the truth.”

“And now? Now that I’ve been to Limbo and spoken to my father? Do you truly believe my dad’s still out there or was it just a lie to make me feel better?” asked Sierra, dreading the answer.

John didn’t hesitate. “Now? Now, I believe Roger’s out there. I have to. Can you ever forgive me?”

Sierra could tell John was telling the truth and felt reassured by this. Her anger and hurt had also left her. “I already have forgiven you, John and I’ll find a solution to this, I promise,” she vowed. “I’m going to get you the hell out of here.”

Before John could reply, there was a knock on the door and quickly, Sierra undid the healing she’d done just as Troy poked his head in.

“Jameson, Doctor Price wants to see you. Now. He says it’s urgent.”

“Tell him I’m on my way,” said Sierra, briskly. To maintain her cover in front of Troy, she quickly punched John hard in the jaw before she then departed from the room.

When she arrived in Jedikiah’s office, the man was sitting at his desk, looking over some security footage on his laptop and what’s more, he looked like the cat who’s swallowed the canary. Sierra’s heart sank at this but she strove to conceal it from Jedikiah.

“You wanted to see me?”

“Yes, come here,” said Jedikiah, gesturing for her to stand next to him. “Can you explain what it is I’m seeing here. Take a look at this footage here, will you? You see that?”
Sierra’s brow wrinkled in confusion at the footage of Sierra supposedly removing Cara’s powers. She didn’t see anything out of the ordinary. “What am I supposed to be seeing here, sir?”

Jedikiah wasn’t surprised. “Easy to miss, isn’t it? I missed it myself several times until I ran the footage uber slowly, like you’ll see here.” Jedikiah replayed the footage, frame-by-frame and it was then that Sierra spotted it. The color of the serum in Sierra’s syringe changed from lime green to clear as water. “This is interesting because when Cara and her little gang kidnapped me, she still had her powers, which were working just fine, I might add. When I asked how, she claimed she’s immune to the serum like you and that she fooled you into thinking otherwise when you stripped her powers.”

Sierra’s heart skipped a beat and she felt a wave of angry frustration towards Cara that she barely concealed from her uncle. Cara, you idiot!

When she’d helped with their plan to abduct Morgan, she’d assumed that Russell was carrying out the orders and nor had Sierra been aware that Cara had exposed herself in front of Jedikiah back at the Lair. Now, instead of just one problem, Sierra had a mountain of problems she didn’t see a solution for.

“I…” she began but Jedikiah interrupted her.

“Now, I would love to believe that, I really would,” he continued, as he stood up, “but a little twinge of doubt kept nagging at me. So, I dug into the footage and that’s when I saw this, which provides a much more logical explanation than the one Cara gave me. The devil is in the details as you can clearly attest to. See, I think you stopped time and switched the serum for something innocuous like saline and let Cara waltz out of here with her powers intact. Also given the fact that Kurt Rundle was recently discovered with considerable memory damage and his powers removed, leads me to quite the conclusion, Sierra.”

A cold shiver went down Sierra’s spine as she looked away from her uncle. She was terrified down to her core. This was it. Any plans for taking down Ultra and finding Roger were gone now. Her cover was blown. She was going to die and Robbie was going to have to go into hiding for the rest of his life all because Sierra and Cara had made rather stupid mistakes.

“John, Cara…I’ve got to say, you’ve really got a soft spot for the enemy, Sierra,” said Jedikiah, a little too sweetly for Sierra’s liking. “One would almost think you were in league with these people.”

“I’m not, I swear to God,” said Sierra, quickly. Her mind was racing with a possible way out of this mess without destroying everything. She knew she was taking a risk with her next words but the jig was up. “It wasn’t like that that. I don’t have a soft spot for John or Cara and I’m not in touch with either one of them. I was just trying to protect my son. I did what I did for Cara because I owed her and I don’t like having debts. She saved Robbie’s life. I had to repay my debt and to do that; I couldn’t let you hurt her. But more than that, I couldn’t risk the chance that removing her powers wouldn’t also damage the telepathic link between her and Robbie. I had to protect my son.”

Much to Sierra’s surprise, Jedikiah seemed understanding. “The lengths we will go to, to protect those we love is unprecedented, isn’t it? But I also think part of you did this because of John and his new relationship with this woman. Regardless of what he’s done to you, he’s still Robbie’s father and part of you still loves him. Don’t you?”

Sierra nodded as her throat tightened. “Look, I know it was stupid and reckless—”

“And yet, in this case, pardonable,” interrupted Jedikiah. “You were protecting your son. I know what it’s like to not want to watch someone you love get hurt. In fact, it’s why I’ve asked you here, today. I, too, have grown attached to one of your kind.”
Sierra stared at Jedikiah in stunned disbelief. Her uncle, a known hater of her kind, was in love with one of them? Granted, she knew he’d been sleeping with a paranormal but actually loving Morgan seemed so far-fetched in Sierra’s opinion. Her uncle didn’t seem capable of genuine love for anyone, not Roger, not her or Robbie, and certainly not Morgan.

“Excuse me?” she said.

“I know. It seems difficult to believe but it’s true,” said Jedikiah. “Now, the problem is that Cara and her band of misfits have abducted Morgan and are using her as leverage against me unless I let John out of here. Obviously I can’t do that, which means we’re at an impasse.”

“But how can we get out of it?” asked Sierra. At this point, she was willing to do anything to keep her position at Ultra and those she loved safe, even if it meant complying with one of Jedikiah’s plans. But how, she didn’t know. “Even if you get John out of here, how’re you going to deal with the Founder? He’s not going to take kindly to John escaping on your watch. And if I help in any way, I’m putting Robbie at risk, which is what I was trying to avoid in the first place.”

Jedikiah waved a hand dismissively. “Let me worry about the Founder. In this business, you’re clean. All you need to do is take John his meal.”

Sierra didn’t understand, but she didn’t argue as she obeyed Jedikiah’s orders. She went to the lunch room and filled a tray with a meal for John before heading to John’s cell, which was now occupied with two armed guards. When she came in, John lifted his head ever-so-slightly in Sierra’s direction.

“Sorry about the jaw,” he said hoarsely.

Sierra blinked in puzzlement. “Jaw? What jaw?”

Instead of answering her, John suddenly burst out of his chair, punched Sierra in the face and threw her onto one of the guards, which resulted in the guard’s head being slammed into the wall and knocking him out. John took advantage of the confusion and ruckus to fight the remaining agent, take his gun and knock him out with the butt of the gun before holding it threateningly in Sierra’s direction.

“Move if you want to live!” snarled John.

Sierra didn’t need to be told twice as she held her hand behind her head and allowed John to drag her out of the room.

“You couldn’t have warned me? asked Sierra, in minor irritation. And how the hell did you get out of the suppression cuff? It was locked with a special key.

I had to make it look real, didn’t I? Besides, I said I was sorry, reminded John. And you can thank Jedikiah for the key. He slipped it to me when he visited to ‘say good-bye’ and told me to wait for you.

Sierra was forced to concede to this point, and she then pretended that John was using her as a hostage as they ran through the halls.

“So, what the hell’s your plan here? This floor’s lined with D-chips! I may be able to teleport out, but I can’t take you with me,” she warned. Not without blowing my cover!

“Let me worry about that. Just move!” grunted John. “Put up a little fight, will ya? We’ve got to sell this, remember?”
Sierra scowled in irritation and painfully head butted John and attempted to disarm him as they came across two armed agents down the hall they were attempting to turn down, only for John to sweep her legs and retrieve his gun before dragging her almost painfully back the way they came. When they returned from whence they came, the two of them found themselves surrounded by half a dozen armed Ultra agents.

“Back off or she dies!” yelled John, warningly. When no one listened, John raised the gun to Sierra’s temple and raised his voice. “I said BACK OFF! Unless your boss wants to lose his only niece!”

“Yeah? Your kind can’t kill,” sneered Troy.

Sierra inwardly winced and shook her head. Troy really was a complete idiot. Didn’t he ever read Ultra’s files? If he had, he’d know that John was the sole survivor of the Annex Project which had burnt out the Prime Barrier in John’s brain and enabled him to kill.

“Wanna bet?” John shot back. As if for proof, he fired off at least three shots into Troy’s chest, knocking him down and severely bruising him, if not cracking some ribs in the process. “I aimed for your vest but the next one’s in your face!”

At that moment, Jedikiah appeared, holding his arms up in a surrender position. “Hold your fire!” he ordered. When the agents obeyed, Jedikiah took a few hesitant steps forward towards John. “You know there’s no way out of this. Your powers don’t work here, John. Let the girl go.”

John glared darkly at Jedikiah.

Realizing they were sitting ducks and needed a solution then and there, Sierra glanced around for the D-chips and spotted two on the ceiling adjacent from each other. She then bashed her heel into John’s leg in the same areas, signaling this. Thankfully, John took the hint, threw Sierra to the ground and fired off a bullet at each chip before making a clean teleport away.

Sierra sighed in relief as she picked herself off the floor. Despite the threat of the Founder still lingering, Sierra couldn’t help but feel better than she had in hours. John was away and safe from Ultra for the time being, her cover was still in place and her son was still safe.

Was it naïve to think that just maybe things might be looking up?

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Later that day, Jedikiah faced an interrogation by the Founder, one much less intense than the one John had suffered but an intense one nonetheless. Jedikiah sat on a sofa in his office while the Founder paced behind it, lurking like a vulture after its next meal.

“It’s a shame about John Young’s escape, but you have to remember that he was a formidable agent and the sole survivor of the Annex Project,” said Jedikiah, casually.

The Founder scoffed. “Yes, I remember quite well of John’s time here at Ultra. But do you know what I also remember? You taking quite a shine to him and taking him under your personal wing. Is there something you’d like to tell me, Jedikiah? I’m asking because I’d like to spare you the humiliation of having your mind read.”
Jedikiah sighed as he rubbed his hands together. “No, you’re right. There is something that… for lack of a better way of saying it, I have been deceiving you about. It has nothing to do with John. But I am hiding something from you. A personal relationship. The nature of which, if our colleagues found out about, it would undermine my authority. John’s rogues found out about it when they abducted me and used her safety as leverage.”

The Founder scoffed rather incredulously yet again at the implication of Jedikiah’s words. “You mean to tell me that you’ve been fooling around with one of my kind? Really, Jedikiah. Of all the indiscretions! And out of all the women in the world, why her? Why not turn her in as protocol demands? Was she a pet project like John or was she something more like Roger’s daughter? Tell me the truth or I will go through your mind with a fine-toothed comb.”

Jedikiah shrugged. “You can pick through my brain as much as you’d like, but the truth of the matter is, it was an affair of the heart and that’s the truth. Somewhere along the line, my scientific curiosity became…unprofessional, I guess you could say.”

The Founder shook his head at Jedikiah, clearly unimpressed by Jedikiah’s foolish behavior and weakness. “Well, don’t beat yourself up, Jedikiah. You’re only human.” He spoke as if Jedikiah’s human status was a slur or something disgusting. “Now, I trust you tied up that loose end?”

Jedikiah nodded immediately. He’d been prepared for this scenario. In the event of the Founder’s interrogation, Jedikiah had faked Morgan’s death and none of his memories could prove that Morgan was anything but dead, keeping her safe from the Founder as well as Ultra.

The Founder looked pleased to hear this and after a few more questions, gave Jedikiah the all-clear with a warning to not fail in such a manner ever again. He also made it clear that if it weren’t for Jedikiah’s niece and grandnephew, the Founder would have very little patience for Jedikiah and that Jedikiah was to keep that in mind as Sierra was groomed for her “ultimate purpose.”

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John groaned in contentment as he sank into Sierra’s soft mattress.

It was almost ten o’clock and between the pains of his time at Ultra and having to help Morgan get comfortable into her new life at the Lair, the blond man was completely exhausted. It hadn’t helped that after all that had happened, he’d joined Sierra and Robbie for dinner and after which, he’d chased Robbie all around the apartment playing games—not that John had minded. He’d needed some happy moments with his son after the horrible morning he’d had. It’d also brightened his mood considerably when Robbie had John be the one to tuck him into bed and read him a bedtime story.

“Sounds like you’re more tired than I am,” said Sierra, smiling as she slipped under the covers beside him. A look of concern flickered across her. “Are you going to be okay? I know I healed you, but…”

“Hey, don’t worry about it,” murmured John, as he stroked back a lock of Sierra’s hair. “I’m fine, I promise. Besides, I’ve had worse. How about you? Are you okay?”

John wasn’t just referring to incident at Ultra with the Founder and the revelation of the truth
behind Roger’s disappearance. After she’d been allowed to leave Ultra for the day, Sierra had attempted to reach Limbo by stopping time whilst teleporting rather than trying the near-death experience as she’d previously endured. All attempts had failed and left Sierra completely exhausted, both physically and emotionally.

As the events of the day sunk in, tears came to Sierra’s eyes and her shoulders shook. “No,” she admitted. “No, I am definitely not okay, John. I had to watch you get dragged into Ultra beaten to a bloody pulp and then I had to watch the Founder torture you. And the whole time, all I could wonder was if Robbie and I were going to lose you again. This time for good. God, John, I was so scared…!”

“Hey, hey, shh,” interrupted John, gently. “Don’t think about that. I’m home and I’m safe now. Everything’s okay now. C’mere.” He sat up and pulled Sierra up with him before he held her tight against his chest. Sierra buried her face in the crook of John’s shoulder and she wept into it while he rubbed soothing circles onto her back. Eventually, when the cascade of tears down John’s bare skin ceased, Sierra broke apart from John’s embrace to wipe her eyes before laying back down with John. Her head was pillowed on his bare chest and John’s arms were tenderly wrapped around Sierra’s slender frame.

“Feel a little better?” asked John. When Sierra nodded against John’s chest, John asked, “What else is on your mind? Is it Roger?”

“Yeah. I’m running out of leads, John. If I can’t reach my father this way, I may have to try the other method,” said Sierra, as she absently traced patterns onto John’s chest.

John tensed. He knew it was their last resort and possibly their only way of reaching Roger, but he still didn’t like it. “Are you sure? Sierra, we all want to find Roger but there’s no sense in killing yourself. If your plan backfires, you know what’ll happen. I can’t lose you again.”

Sierra reached out and squeezed John’s shoulder. “Calm down. I haven’t made up my mind yet. Besides, if and when I do it, I swear, I’ll take every possible precaution and fight like hell to get back to you and our son.”

John didn’t seem very reassured by this but he relaxed a little when Sierra gently caressed his face and then kissed him tenderly.

“Besides, I’m more worried about the Founder,” she admitted. “I mean, he’s one of our kind yet he’s trying to kill us all. Why? What’s his endgame?” It scared Sierra that the Founder was one of her own kind yet he persecuted and controlled paranormals like a vicious dictator.

“I don’t know,” said John, as they snuggled up together. “But we’ll cross that bridge when we get to it. Besides, there’s something else I need to tell you. I want to tell Cara and the others the truth about Roger’s disappearance.”

Sierra tensed as she sat up and stared at John incredulously. “Tell Cara and the others? John, what the hell? You know what that would do to her, to all of them. I don’t mean to be cruel but what if they kick you out for it or worse?” Despite her earlier reaction, Sierra had had time to reflect and realized that John’s motives for keeping the truth hidden were good ones. Like it or not, John had only ever done what he thought was right for their safety. Who knew what would happen if the truth got out? It might lead to chaos and an uprising in the Lair.

John sighed as he sat up. “I know there’ll be consequences, but I’m prepared to face them. Whether or not I truly believed Roger made it to some hideaway, I still hid things from them. I can’t live with this anymore. And besides, Cara has a strong connection with Robbie and suspects
I’m hiding something. She’s going to find out sooner or later and I’d rather it’d be on my terms.”

“That may be but—” Sierra was cut off when there was a knock at the door, making them both go rigid with fear.

“Are you expecting someone?” whispered John.

“No,” said Sierra, worriedly. As part of their agreement, Jedikiah had sworn that Ultra would only come to her apartment if it was a life-or-death situation and even then, she would be given forewarning about it. Even Astrid, Cara and Russell had agreed to let Sierra know beforehand before showing up as part of a new security measure. The fact that Sierra had had no warnings meant that something might be seriously wrong. “Stay here, wait for my signal. If anything happens, grab Robbie and go.”

John tensely nodded as Sierra slipped a robe over her pajamas and went to the front door. Much to Sierra’s surprise. Marla was on the other side of it. The older woman was carrying a worn out cardboard box in her hands.

“Mom?” she said, surprised. “You can relax, John. It’s just my mother, not Ultra. I’ll get rid of her as quick as I can. The last thing Sierra wanted to explain was John’s presence in her apartment or that John was Robbie’s long-lost father suddenly returned to their lives. At least not yet.


Unable to come up an excuse to refuse her, Sierra nodded and led Marla into the living room. “Uh, Mom, don’t take this the wrong way, but what the hell are you doing here at this hour? How do you even know where I live?” Last time she’d checked, Sierra hadn’t given Marla or even Luca her new address and Sierra wasn’t listed in the phone book. So, how had Marla tracked Sierra down?

Marla looked apologetic as she placed the box on the coffee table. “I asked Astrid and she gave it to me. I’m sorry, I know it’s late and I should’ve called but I wanted to give you this before I lost my nerve. It’s a box of your father’s research. I put it all here after he left.”

What? Sierra couldn’t believe this. Marla had had this all this time and never said a word. “I appreciate it, but why are you giving this to me now?” Why not sooner?

Marla sighed. “Last time you were over, Robbie asked a lot questions about your father. I was able to answer some but not all. He also mentioned that you were looking into Roger, so I thought maybe you would like this. A lot of it is just keepsakes, scribbles and number formulas—all meaningless to me, but maybe you can figure something out.”

“Thanks, Mom,” said Sierra. She didn’t know what she expected to find in the box but hopefully, it would lead her to Roger somehow. Suddenly, an idea came to Sierra’s mind. If Marla had had Roger’s research, maybe she knew something about his work. “Hey, Mom, did Dad ever mention Thanatos to you at all?”

Marla tensed as she shook her head. “No. I don’t know what that is.”

Sierra narrowed her eyes in skepticism and briefly touched Marla’s mind.

How does she know about Thanatos? thought Marla.

“Mom, please don’t lie to me,” said Sierra, harshly. Hypocritical as it was, Sierra was getting sick and tired of secrets and lies. “Either tell me the truth or get out of my apartment, okay? Don’t
just sit there and lie to my face.”

Marla’s eyes widened as she flinched. “Excuse me?”

“I know you like to shut down and shut people out whenever the topic of Dad comes up, but don’t do that anymore, not to me. I’m trying to find out more about Dad because he and his work is key to some important research I’m doing,” said Sierra, sternly. “What are you hiding from me?”

“I’m not!” said Marla, quickly. She sighed. “Sweetie, I’m just trying to protect you and Robbie. From what I understand, you two have been trying to make your father into something he never was and I’m terrified that when you find out the truth of what he was, you’re going to be disappointed. Maybe you should leave it alone.”

Sierra sighed as she rubbed the space between her eyes. She understood that Marla was trying to protect her but even so, Sierra didn’t need or even want Marla’s attempts at protection.

“If you really believed that, you wouldn’t have given this to me. You’d have thrown it all out. And I’m sorry, Mom, but I can’t let it go, not yet. I need to see this through and if I am disappointed, then it’ll be my disappointment, not yours. Okay?”

Maybe Sierra was setting herself up for dashed hopes and the like but that was on her and no one else. Like it or not, she’d come too far to just quit now. She had to see this through however it ended, for both her sake and the sake of everyone else she cared about.

XXX

The following day was a tense one.

Though John hadn’t yet told the others, he had told Cara. And as Sierra had predicted, Cara was furious and her trust in John deeply shaken if not completely broken when John showed her his last memory of Roger. Although John fiercely defended himself, saying that he’d always believed that Roger had made it to the Refuge and that all John had done was what John thought was right and for Roger, it did little good. In Cara’s mind, John had betrayed not just her but also everyone in John’s charge and that she was going to have a hard time forgiving, if she ever did. But thankfully, Cara did swear she wouldn’t tell anyone else. If anyone was going to do that, it would be John himself.

While this was happening, Sierra rifled through her father’s box. Most of it was as Marla had said—sentimental keepsakes such as photos and the like along with dozens of papers filled with Roger’s personal notes and numerical formulas, which made no sense whatsoever to Sierra. Just when she was about consider that Marla may have been right about the box’s contents, she found a memory stick with video files and had TIM play it. After over an hour of watching Roger try and fail the same teleporting time-stopping experiment Sierra had the previous day, she came across the ending of the video which proved to be promising.

After attempt number four hundred and fifty-seven, Roger nearly broke the camera in frustration before sitting himself down on the floor in a mediation position to calm himself down.

“Relax, Roger. We’re not giving up quite yet. After all, there’s still attempt number four
“If only it were that simple. I need to find a solution now. I’m running out of time. The Founder...” Roger’s voice wandered off as he ran his fingers through his hair in worried frustration. “Aldus, I think we have to try the alternate method.”

Crick paled and looked ill. “The alternate method? You can’t be serious! It’s suicide!”

“What other choice do I have?” said Roger, brokenly. “I have to protect my family.”

At that moment, the video frizzed out and ended.

Sierra rose up quickly from the couch. The alternate method, the one that Crick thought was mad and refused to help with, was that what Sierra had suspected all along? Was Limbo to be reached not by simply stopping time in between teleporting but rather stopping time in between the time between life and death itself? There was only one way to find out and she needed to find out fast.

“TIM, tell John I’m going to Professor Crick’s. I’ll be right back,” said Sierra.

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra teleported to Crick’s cabin and much to her surprise and worry, the cabin was almost completely empty as the Professor was neatly packing everything he owned into cardboard boxes and there was a moving truck in the driveway.

“Oh, Miss Jameson!” said Crick, startled by her sudden arrival.

“Sorry, Professor, I know I should’ve called first but this is urgent. But I see you’re packing to leave. It’s not because of me, is it?” asked Sierra, concerned. Had her visit to him the previous day gotten Crick on Ultra’s radar and hit list? She hoped that wasn’t the case.

Crick kindly shook his head. “Not at all, not at all, I assure you. It’s just a long overdue change of scenery, that’s all.”

Sierra sighed in relief but still felt a twinge of worry that she pushed down. “Call me Sierra. Where will you go?”

Unsurprisingly, Crick didn’t answer her properly. “Who of us knows where we are headed? That’s the beauty of life, we can never see around the next bend individually or as a species.” He gave Sierra a fond look. “Who would ever have imagined that a people like you would be born from our own primitive building blocks? You are a very special young woman, Sierra. And your son is a very special young man, just like his grandfather. But I digress. What’s so urgent?”

Sierra took a deep breath. “The Thanatos project you and my father were working on. I saw the tapes, I know about all the failed attempts and I know he wanted to try an alternate method that you objected to. My dad had to die first, didn’t he? Or at least be on the brink of death. That was your theory, wasn’t it?” When Crick sighed and reluctantly nodded, Sierra continued, “Did my dad ever, to your knowledge, actually attempt it somehow?”

Crick hesitated for a moment before replying. “I suspected,” he admitted. “But I never knew for certain. If he did attempt it, it wasn’t with me. A scientific theory that can only be tested once is hardly worth the risk, in my opinion. As I told you, I always refused to consider it as your father was a very dear friend of mine. And if he did attempt it, I can’t say that he was successful.”
Sierra’s breath caught in her throat at the implications. If Roger had attempted the alternate method without Crick’s knowledge, if he had somehow succeeded and managed to get to Limbo the night that McCrane supposedly killed him, that meant there was hope. That Sierra hadn’t been hallucinating all that time ago, she had reached her father and spoken to him. And that meant that maybe, just maybe there was a way to bring Roger home.

“My dad was successful, Professor. I know it because I did it to and I spoke with him myself,” said Sierra, fiercely. “I reached Limbo.”

Crick’s brow wrinkled as he frowned. “Yes, I do recall you mentioning that before. How on earth did you manage that exactly?”

“A while back, three of my people were killed and I tried to revive them. I’d never done that before. Anyway, I succeeded but when in the process of reviving the third victim, I overdid it. I nearly died and I must’ve stopped time accidentally in the process because the next thing I knew, I was with Roger and he told me to find Thanatos,” explained Sierra. “Your experiments worked.”

Crick looked astounded and opened his mouth to reply, only to fall silent when the sound of a paranormal teleporting onto the grounds hit their ears followed by the sounds of bullets firing not two seconds later before Sierra had time to react. To Sierra’s horror, all the bullets hit Crick straight in the heart and she found herself cradling the old man in her arms.

“No! Professor!” she whimpered. Oh, God, no! Please, no! This couldn’t be happening! She placed her hand on Crick’s chest and was about to try and save him when the Professor grabbed Sierra’s wrist.

“Let me die,” whispered Crick, as blood pooled and dribbled out of his mouth. “Please, don’t let him…use…me…”

Sierra’s eyes pooled with tears as she reluctantly fulfilled Crick’s request. Though it broke her heart, Sierra wouldn’t deny Crick’s dying wish. She wouldn’t restore him to life only to have him live as a fugitive, always looking over his shoulder or worse, as one of Ultra’s lab rats under the Founder’s thumb. She would let him escape to where no one could ever hurt him again.

Just before the Founder and his goons entered the cabin, Sierra teleported away to the safety of the Lair, still covered in Crick’s blood and deeply shaken. Upon her arrival, Cara, Russell and John all rushed over to her with worried, horrified looks on their faces.

“Sierra, are you hurt? What the hell happened?” asked Cara.

Sierra swallowed painfully. “It…it’s not my blood, it’s Crick’s. Ultra killed him right in front of me. I wanted to revive him but he begged me not to so I just…oh, God…I just left him there.” Sierra started to break down as John pulled her into his chest. Even after all she’d seen and endured, Sierra was still easily shaken by the horrors that Ultra inflicted on others. More than that, part of Sierra hated herself for not saving Crick, for leaving him there to be picked apart by Ultra.

“It’s not your fault…” murmured John, comfortably. “It’s going to be okay.”

Sierra didn’t see how this could possibly ever be okay but she didn’t argue.

Russell frowned in confusion. “Why would they kill Professor Crick?”

Sierra sniffled and wiped her tears as she broke away from John before replying. “Because Crick confirmed my theory about the way to reach my dad. Stopping time while teleporting was never going to work because it can’t work. Limbo exists in the place between life and death, that’s
why I saw him the night of the party. I almost died because I overused my powers and must’ve accidentally stopped time without realizing it, reaching him.”

Save for John, who already knew what Sierra meant, Sierra’s audience looked worried with this information if not somewhat skeptical.

“Wait, what exactly are you saying, Sierra?” asked Cara, slowly.

Sierra took a deep breath. “I’m saying that I have to kill myself.”

Cara and Russell looked at Sierra as though she’d gone insane.

“Wait, what? Kill yourself?! Sierra, even if that were possible, it’s insane! And what the hell are you talking about?” demanded Cara.

“You don’t have to answer that,” said John, quickly, shooting a warning glare in Cara’s direction. He knew Sierra’s story as she’d confided in him the secret and he’d helped her get past it.

Sierra gave John a look silencing him before turning to Cara and Russell. She didn’t want to tell anyone this, she’d never planned on it, but she had to now. “There’s something I need to tell you two, something that cannot go beyond the four of us. If anyone found out, especially Jedikiah, it would be catastrophic and we’d all be in danger. Swear to me you’ll keep this secret?” When both Cara and Russell swore they would keep Sierra’s secret, she took a deep breath to steady her nerves before confessing one of her most deeply guarded secrets. “I’m more of a freak of nature than anyone knows, even for one of our kind. The Prime Barrier, the thing that prevents our kind from being able to kill…I’ve never had it.”

Cara and Russell looked confused before becoming horrified and hurt.

“Wait, are you saying that you—” began Russell.

Sierra nodded as fresh tears pooled in her eyes and made their way down her cheeks. “I can kill,” she confessed. “I’m just like John.”

There was a moment’s tense silence before Cara broke it. “How the hell can you kill and how do you know that you can?” Her tone was tense, if not cold and judging.

Sierra took yet another, deep shuddering breath as her mind flashed back to that terrible day so long ago when she’d taken her first and only life.

“When I was breaking out, before I met John, I woke up in a lot of places I hadn’t gone to sleep in. During one such episode, I woke up in a scary part of town, alone and in my pajamas. I couldn’t teleport properly back then, so I walked home. On my way there, some scumbag in a mask with a knife jumped me. He wanted money, I had none, so he wanted something else from me. Something I refused to give him. I panicked and we wrestled for the knife. Before I realized what I was doing, I’d plunged the knife into his heart and he was dead in the alley. All the while, the Prime Barrier never activated and even when I’ve come close to killing someone in self-defense, I never felt it. Not once. I’m sorry not telling you sooner, but I was so scared. Please, forgive me.”

Sierra felt sick to her stomach as she waited for Cara and Russell’s reactions. She shouldn’t have kept something like this secret from them but after John told her none of her kind could kill unless the Prime Barrier was burnt out, she’d been terrified of their reactions. She hadn’t been prepared to take the risk that others like her would see her as a freak, a monster or a murderer,
possibly all three. She hadn’t wanted to be an pariah among even her own kind and knowing that Ultra would exploit her if they knew that she was what they most feared, she’d kept silent and begged John to do the same.

There were also questions she knew they’d want answered. Why hadn’t Sierra killed Jedikiah from the start if she could simply take that shot? The answer was simple. Taking a life just the once had killed Sierra inside and she’d sworn never to do it again. As a paranormal agent, Sierra had never been given a firearm and even if she had been given one, she’d never had a clear shot at Jedikiah. No opportunity to commit such an act. And if even she had, what good would it have done? Even if Jedikiah died, there was still the Founder—a far more dangerous enemy to deal with. Not to mention, taking a life while working at Ultra meant a fate worse than death, a fate Sierra refused to accept.

Russell was the first to react. He still looked unnerved but his eyes hadn’t lost their warmth. “I’m not going to forgive you because there’s nothing to forgive. You’re not like McCrane, you were just protecting yourself. You’re not a freak. You’re one of us.”

Sierra smiled in relief before turning to Cara, who had yet to speak. “Cara?”

Cara still looked unhappy about Sierra’s secret, but nevertheless, she relaxed somewhat as she gave Sierra’s shoulder a gentle squeeze.

“While I wish you’d told us sooner, I guess I understand why you didn’t. If anyone finds out your secret, it won’t be from me,” promised Cara. “You’re still my friend.”

Sierra relaxed considerably as she leaned against John, who wrapped an arm around her shoulders. She was relieved that they’d accepted her rather than rejecting her as she’d feared for so long. It gave her a twinge of hope that things might be okay.

“Thank you. Anyway, the point to all this is that I know why Roger begged John to leave him that night. It wasn’t just because he wanted me to be safe from McCrane, it was because he knew he needed to die or at least be close to death so that he could get away from the Founder and escape to Limbo. It was all part of his plan and now, whether anyone here believes it or not, I have to recreate that moment. It’s the only way to get my dad back.”

It was an insane, reckless plan. One that could easily backfire and one that Sierra was terrified of enacting as she didn’t want to die, not permanently. But what other choice was there? If this was the only way to bring Roger home, then that’s what she needed to do.

Nobody looked happy about this but for once, nobody argued with Sierra.

“How do you want to do this? When do you want to do it?” asked John, reluctantly.

“Three days from now,” said Sierra, determinedly. “It’ll take at least that long to set everything up properly and besides, tomorrow is Robbie’s eighth birthday and you three are all invited.”

Even though it was a child’s birthday party, the idea of enjoying fun and laughter celebrating their favorite kid in the world brightened up everyone’s moods considerably.

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For Robbie’s eighth birthday bash, they had a party at Marla’s backyard at Sierra’s request. Marla was only too happy to host the party as it gave her a chance to further mend fences with Sierra and spend time with her grandson. The party was a huge success. All of Robbie’s friends were attendance, there were brightly colored decorations everywhere, fun party favors and games, a mountain of pizza, a birthday cake shaped like Robbie’s favorite superhero, plenty of colorfully wrapped birthday presents and best of all, John was in attendance with Cara and Russell, which was the best part of the party in Robbie’s opinion.

Sierra was smiling to herself as she watched John be playfully tackled by Robbie and his friends in a game of heroes and dragons before John playfully roared and “gobbled them up,” making all the little boys squeal and laugh in delight.

“Hey,” said Astrid, snapping Sierra out of her thoughts. “I got to say, for a girl who dislikes parties, you sure know how to throw a good one. But I got to know, who’re your three new pals?”

Russell was performing little magic tricks for two Robbie’s friends, Cara was chatting with Marla by the punch bowl and John was now giving Robbie a piggyback ride to the refreshments table.

“Remember those other friends I told you about? That’s them. Cara is Robbie’s not-so-imaginary friend and Russell’s the adorkable big brother Robbie never had,” said Sierra.

“I see.” Astrid looked almost longingly at John. “And the handsome hunk that’s wrapped around Robbie’s finger is—?”

“Off-limits,” said Sierra, half-teasing, half-warning. “That’s John Young. Robbie’s dad. We’re back together.”

Astrid whistled low and looked envious. “You always did have good taste in men.”

Sierra chuckled and cast a fond smile in John’s direction. “Yeah, I guess I do.”

It’d taken her a long time, but in the end, she’d gotten past the heartache of her past with John, something she hadn’t thought possible before. John had given her an irreplaceable gift, their child, and a love she never dreamed she could ever have. Now, she only recognized the good times between them and what would hopefully be their future together one day.

“Hey, not to be a downer, but is there something you need to tell me?” asked Astrid. “I mean, as much as I have loved finally meeting the Tomorrow People and seeing Robbie’s dad, I know something isn’t right. Why’s it suddenly so important for the people from your double-life to meet?”

Damn it. She should’ve known Astrid would figure it out. It was only to be expected. Astrid had known Sierra for years and knew Sierra’s MO. Part of her wished Astrid hadn’t, but at the same time, Astrid had the right to know.

Sierra sighed. “Something big is going to happen in a couple of days. I’m going to try and bring my dad home but the process to do it is risky and it’s something that I might not come back from. If that happens, I need you to know this part of my life so that if I don’t make it back, Robbie will be taken care of. I know it’s a lot to ask but—”

“I’ll do it,” interrupted Astrid, quickly. “You don’t even have to ask. I’ll protect him and take care of him, I swear. Just promise me you’ll come home.”

Sierra didn’t even hesitate to nod. “I promise.”
But whether or not she could *keep* that promise, Sierra didn’t know.

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A couple days later while Robbie was at Astrid’s house, Sierra was sitting on a cold medical table in the Lair’s infirmary, dressed only in her bra and jeans while she stuck the necessary medical devices onto her torso as her boyfriend and friends watched.

“Devil’s advocate. If you’re wrong, won’t we have another Chosen One dead or worse?” asked Russell. Though he was doing as Sierra wanted, he was still very much against her plan.

“It’s a risk we have to take. Now, get me the phenobarbital, please,” said Sierra, briskly.

Russell sighed in annoyance as he obeyed Sierra’s orders.

“He’s got a point,” said John, quietly.

“I know,” said Sierra, in agreement. As much as she didn’t want to admit it, Cara and Russell were right. There were so many things wrong with her plan, so many things that *could* go wrong. But this was a desperate time and such a time called for a desperately drastic measure. “But whatever happens, it's on *me*. No one else needs to be responsible for this.”

Knowing the toll that killing took on John and being unwilling to subject him to that was the reason that Sierra was so determined to do what she needed to do herself.

When John looked down at his folded arms, Sierra gently grasped John’s chin and slowly raised it up so that she could look into his blue-grey eyes.

“I love you, always have and always will,” said Sierra, her voice thick with emotion. “Promise me you won’t forget that. And promise me you’ll take care of Robbie, tell him that I love him every day, keep him away from Ultra and please, look after my mom and my brother. Don’t let them think I abandoned them and do whatever it takes to keep them safe.”

John did not speak at first. Instead, his arms snaked around Sierra’s waist and he pulled her in for a gentle kiss that seemed to last forever.

“I promise,” he whispered, as tears slid down his cheeks. “Just remember that I love you too.”

Sierra promised and then Russell returned with the drug and Cara right behind him.

“You sure about this? You’ve gone over the plan?” asked Cara, hesitantly.

Sierra nodded and prepared the syringe. “Once I add the drug, my heart rate’s going to slow until it flatlines. TIM’s going to monitor my vitals. If it works and I reach Limbo, I should be back fairly soon.”

“And if it doesn’t? If you *don’t* reach Limbo?” challenged Cara, not unkindly.

Sierra didn’t answer that. Though John was supposed to resuscitate her if she didn’t return within a specified time, they all knew what would happen if he wasn’t successful, if plan failed and none of them, especially Sierra liked to think about it.
“Can I ask you for a favor?” When Cara nodded, Sierra asked, “Can you let John off the hook? You have every right to be upset with him but he’s only ever done what he thought was right for us. Our kind’s hanging on by a thread and when you two are fighting, we’re all vulnerable. Plus, it really upsets Robbie. So, please?”

Cara sighed and looked as though she wanted to refuse but after a moment or two, she nodded in compliance. It would take time, but perhaps Cara and John could make amends and be friends again, if not leaders of their group of rogues.

Sierra smiled in relief and then it was show time. She swung her legs over and laid flat on the table. Then with a pounding heart and trembling hand, Sierra plunged the syringe into her arm and closed her eyes. After what seemed like an eternity but was actually only a few seconds, Sierra felt the darkness claim her and then she forcefully stopped time around her, causing Sierra’s consciousness to be plunged into the terrifying world that was Limbo.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I'm one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T's—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There's a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

While Sierra lay braindead on the medical table, her audience exchanged worried, panicked looks as they waited for any sign that Sierra was successful and hadn't just committed suicide.

“Did it work? Did she do it?” asked Russell.

He frantically looked to Cara and John, hoping either one of them would provide a reassuring answer that Sierra’s plan had worked. But that didn’t happen.

“I don’t know,” admitted John. He placed his hand on Sierra’s right temple and tried to contact her telepathically, but nothing happened. He couldn’t even feel their shared link, which did not bode well. “I can’t reach her telepathically. Something’s blocking me.”

“I can’t reach her either,” said Cara, panicking. She looked up at TIM. “How long do we have to bring her back if she doesn’t return of her own volition?”

“Sierra has approximately sixty seconds before she sustains considerable brain damage,” replied TIM.

Nothing further needed to be said as John grabbed the syringe containing the epinephrine drug that would resuscitate Sierra and held it to the crook of her elbow. Though everything in John’s body was screaming at him to bring Sierra back now, he resisted the urge until the appointed time as he knew it was what Sierra wanted.

Sierra? Sierra, can you hear me? he called.

But there was no reply whatsoever.

“Twenty seconds,” reported TIM.

Time was up.

“That’s it, I’m bringing her back,” said John, determinedly. And with that, he plunged the drug straight into Sierra’s bloodstream. But nothing happened and Sierra’s heart rate still read as flat lined, forcing John and the others to act. John attempted CPR while Cara pumped fresh oxygen into Sierra’s lungs. “Come on, Sierra, I’m not letting you die. Come back to me, please! Please, don’t leave us. I don’t know if we can survive without you.”
But for all their efforts and prayers, nothing happened. Sierra’s heart rate remained the same and she didn’t move a muscle. Just as they’d given up and John cradled Sierra’s body in his arms, Sierra’s eyes suddenly shot open and she sat up like a shot, gasping for breath and clutching John for dear life as she shook like a leaf.

“Oh, thank God,” whispered John, in relief as he kissed Sierra’s head. “What the hell happened? What did you see?”

Sierra took in large gulps of air for several minutes before replying. “It worked. I was in Limbo. I saw my dad. We have to find his body. I think it’s being guarded by someone called Simon Plame. We need to find him.”

Everyone stared at Sierra in shock.

“It worked? Are you sure? Sierra, none of us could reach you telepathically while you were under. Are you sure you saw what you think you saw?” asked Cara, warily.

Sierra nodded determinedly as she held out her hands. “You couldn’t reach me because my shields were amplified big-time in there. But I swear, what I saw was real and I can prove it. Let me show you the memory.”

Despite some hesitation, everyone took a hold of Sierra’s hands and then they were plunged into her memory of her most recent Limbo trip.

Sierra was back in Limbo.

It was just like she remembered, the black hallway lit with a blue-green light and everything rippled as though it were water. She looked around and spotted her father, whose face lit up when their eyes met.

“Sierra?” gasped Roger.

“Daddy!” sobbed Sierra, as she flung her arms around him.

Sierra and Roger shared a tight embrace for the first time in years. They were both crying and neither one of them wanted to let go of each other. Sierra felt like a child again, safe and loved in her father’s strong arms.

“My beautiful baby girl…” Roger’s voice was thick with emotion and he was smiling through his tears when they broke apart. He touched Sierra’s face. “I was so scared that McCrane would find you. Thank heaven you’re all right. Look at you, you’re all grown up.”

Sierra smiled back. “I’ve got so much to tell you, Dad. McCrane’s gone for good, John and I are together and we have a child. A little boy named Robbie Luke Jameson, for you, John and Luca.” In spite of her past grievances with her father at time, when her son had been born, Sierra had been unable to resist using her father and John’s shared middle name for him. “You have a grandson.”

Roger’s eyes sparkled with proud joy. “That’s wonderful! Congratulations.”

“Thanks.” Sierra’s smile faded as she remembered her time was limited and she cut to the chase. “Dad, I didn’t come here just to catch up. I came here to bring you back.”
Roger looked grim, rather than excited as Sierra had imagined. “How did you find this place?”

“Same way you did,” she replied. “Temporal manipulation.”

“You can stop time, just like me?” Roger looked concerned but he sounded so proud. “Can your son do it too?”

Sierra eagerly nodded. “Yeah. And that’s not all we can do.” She quickly filled Roger in on the things she and her son could do. Roger looked exceedingly proud but also shocked and terrified. Then she asked the question that had been bothering her for quite some time, a question she hoped that Roger would be able to answer. “Dad, how is it that I can kill? And why don’t Ultra’s D-chips or their power stripping serum affect me?”

The look on Roger’s face changed from proud to remorseful. “It’s all my fault.”

“Your fault? How?”

Roger sighed. “I always worried what would happen if you or Luca broke out. I wanted you to be able to protect yourselves from the Founder and Ultra. So, I used Jedikiah’s serum to create an experimental formula of my own that enabled a paranormal to kill and render them immune to the D-chips and the power-stripper. I secretly injected it into you and Luca and then I destroyed all trace of it afterwards. I couldn’t risk it falling into the Founder’s hands and I also never knew for certain if it worked, until now. I’m so sorry, sweetheart.”

Sierra was stunned. So, while her other abilities were the result of evolution, her ability to kill, which she had no love for, wasn’t. It was only due to her father’s attempts to protect her from Ultra. It explained so much, especially as to why Jedikiah’s D-chips and his power stripping serum never affected her. They couldn’t because Roger had seen to that.

“It’s okay, Dad. You were just trying to protect me and it worked,” said Sierra, gently. “That’s what parents do for their children. And believe me, I know.”

Roger smiled proudly at his daughter. “You’ve become so wise. I’m so proud of you, Sierra.” He squeezed her shoulder affectionately when she looked overjoyed from his praise. “Now, tell me quick…Luca, your mom—?”

“They’re fine, Dad,” said Sierra, quickly. “Mom and Luca are both safe and happy. Mom’s a successful nurse and Luca’s on the football team. They’re fine. But they need you, Dad, we all do. John blames himself for what happened to you. He’s doing everything he can to protect our kind, but Ultra’s grown too strong. The Founder—”

“The Founder?” interrupted Roger, looking panicked. “Does he know about your powers? About Robbie’s? Does the Founder know whose son Robbie is?”

“In that order? Mine, yes. Robbie’s, no. Jedikiah’s kept Robbie’s abilities and his father’s identity hidden from the Founder and even Jedikiah doesn’t know about Robbie’s last gift,” assured Sierra. She frowned in concern. “Why do you ask?”

“If the Founder uses you or Robbie like he tried to use me, then it’s not just our species that it’s in peril. It’s the humans as well,” said Roger, gravely. “Listen to me, you have to find Simon Plame.”

Sierra was at loss to explain her father’s behavior. After all this time, after all she’d done to try and find him, he wasn’t even going to try to come home? “What are you talking about? Why don’t you come back with me?”
“I want to, baby girl, but I can’t. Not until you find my body,” said Roger, regretfully. He suddenly looked alarmed as their surroundings suddenly darkened, signaling that Sierra’s time in Limbo was almost up. “But there’s no more time to talk. You have to go, now! Protect your son! Find Simon Plame, he’ll explain everything!”

Sierra could feel herself being pulled away and she knew her time with her father was almost gone. She fought against it but it did no good. She couldn’t stay, no matter how much she wanted to.

“Daddy, please!” she cried. She couldn’t do this. She couldn’t lose him again!

“I love you, sweetheart,” said Roger. His voice grew fainter, his face became blurred and distant as she was pulled away. “Tell John what happened to me wasn’t his fault and never forget about London.”

Sierra was yanked away from limbo before she could reply.

And with that, the memory ended and everyone had left Sierra’s mind.

“Oh my God, it’s true. Roger’s alive,” gasped John. Though part of him had believed it, it was quite the relief to know that it was actually true. Roger hadn’t died when McCrane shot him, Roger had slipped away to Limbo to protect himself and his loved ones from the Founder.

“What did Roger mean by ‘remember London’?” asked Cara, puzzled.

John’s eyes glistened with tears as he smiled. “When I was a kid at Ultra, I had a horrible day. I didn’t think it could ever get better. Roger found me in my room, crying. He comforted me and then he took me to London to see Les Misérables and one of the song lyrics stuck with me, ‘even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise.’ It was Roger’s way of telling me to be brave, that there would always be hope in the world and sooner or later, everything would be okay. It was our secret, mine and Roger’s. I never even let Sierra or Robbie see it.”

If that wasn’t solid proof that Roger had truly seen Sierra and told her that, then what was? Not to mention, where had the name Simon Plame come from if Roger hadn’t spoken it?

“TIM, pull up all there is on Simon Plame,” said Russell.

TIM reacted swiftly and Simon Plame’s file appeared on the screen behind them. “Simon Plame, born April 6, 1964. One of the original breakouts. But I’m afraid I only have access to his declassified dossier. There’s no further record of him since Roger’s disappearance.”

It was a lead, granted it wasn’t the huge one they’d been looking for, but a small lead in the right direction was better than none.

“Also, I hate to damper the celebrations, but you asked me to remind you about the dinner with your mother tonight,” said TIM. “You need to leave in the next fifteen minutes if you don’t want to be late.”

Sierra face palmed. In all the excitement about Limbo, she’d completely forgotten she had a special dinner with her mother scheduled that evening. It was special due to the fact that in yet another attempt to further mend their relationship, Sierra was going to introduce John to her mother properly as Sierra’s boyfriend and Robbie’s father.
“Ah, damn it!” she cursed. She was exhausted and part of her wanted to cancel the dinner, but she knew she shouldn’t. Not after all the effort Marla had gone to with Robbie’s birthday and the evening’s dinner. “I forgot. John, can you pick up Robbie while I get changed, please? I’ll grab the dish we were going to bring.”

John nodded and then teleported away to pick up their son while Sierra got dressed.

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Despite cutting it rather close, Sierra managed to arrive at Marla’s in time for dinner while accompanied by John and Robbie.

“Hey, we brought lasagna. Sorry we were almost late. Work was murder and I had a hell of a time getting away,” said Sierra, breathlessly, as she hung up her coat.

“Yeah, we can tell. Sis, have you looked in a mirror lately? You look dead, like patient-zero-in-the-zombie-apocalypse kind of dead,” said Luca, bluntly.

“Luca,” said Marla, warningly.

Luca held up his hands in a surrender position.

Sierra just chuckled and then cleared her throat before gesturing to John, who was placing the hot pan of lasagna onto the table before sitting down next to Robbie. “Mom, Luca, you remember John from Robbie’s party?”

“Yes, of course. Nice to meet you again,” said Marla, politely as Luca nodded. “It’s always nice to meet one of Sierra’s friends.”

“Mom, John isn’t just one of my friends,” said Sierra, slowly. She took a deep breath to steady her nerves. “John’s actually Robbie’s father and my boyfriend. We’re back together.”

Luca nearly choked on his drink in shock as Marla’s eyes widened in surprise before she put on one of her brightest smiles.


John smiled politely. “Thank you.”

“Are you serious?” demanded Luca. He looked furiously at John as he remembered all too well the night Luca found Sierra crying her eyes out because John had broken her heart and dumped her out of the blue. Luca had immediately disliked Sierra’s then-unnamed boyfriend and his dislike turned to hatred when Luca learned that Sierra was pregnant with ‘the jerk’s kid,’ he had called. “Him? This is the guy? You’re seriously back with him. Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t bust his nose right here and now for what he did to you and Robbie.”

“Luca!” said Marla and Sierra, in unison.

Sierra understood and appreciated Luca’s anger and protectiveness, but in this moment, she wished he’d back off. Sierra was a grown woman more than capable of making her own decisions and even so, Luca didn’t know the full story behind the past she shared with John.
“Uncle Luca, please, don’t,” begged Robbie. He looked up from the drawing he was doing with great tears in his eyes. “Don’t fight.”

John held up a hand, signaling that it was okay. “No, it’s all right. I deserve it and more. I was a jerk to Sierra all those years ago, I admit it. I made a mistake and I’ve regretted it everyday since. I never should’ve left Sierra. But I swear, I’m not going to make the same mistake twice. I’m going to take care of my family no matter what. And if you want, I’ll let you deck me one.”

Luca’s eyes narrowed and he glared at John for what seemed like an eternity before finally relaxing and backing off. “Okay, I believe you. But if you hurt my sister again, the cops will never find your body. Got that, pretty boy?”

John laughed and nodded. “I got it.”

“Anyway, moving on past my relationships, what’s going on with you guys?” asked Sierra. She was done talking about her love life now. “Mom, you seem to be glowing. And is that a new hairstyle? It looks lovely.”

Marla blushed as she unconsciously touched her hair. “I’ve just been experimenting a little but thank you for noticing.”

Luca grinned. “Mom’s got a new boyfriend.”

Sierra was stunned as Marla chuckled and her blush deepened. “Oh, come on, I’ve got on three dates, he’s not my boyfriend.”

“Not yet, but date number four’s on the books,” teased Luca.

Marla was now the color of a tomato. “Luca, please, stop. Nothing’s official, yet.”

“Well, all evidence to the contrary. Congrats,” said Sierra, as politely as she could.

It was credit to her time at Ultra that Marla didn’t detect Sierra’s true feelings. While Sierra knew it was to be expected, given that Roger had been gone for over a decade, Sierra wasn’t exactly thrilled that Marla was dating again. Sierra wanted Marla to be happy, there was no argument there. But it wasn’t just that. Part of her wondered what would happened between Marla and Roger when Sierra finally brought him home, not to mention Sierra had never even seen anyone besides Roger with her mother. Combined with all that had happened over the last few days, it was a lot for Sierra to wrap her head around.

Sensing her feelings, John reached under the table and squeezed Sierra’s hand, calming her down and causing her to smile a little.

Sierra then turned to Robbie, who had yet to put down his sketch pad. “Honey, why don’t you put that in the living room so we can start dinner?”

“Can I show you my picture first?” asked Robbie. It's important, Mom. I saw something.

Knowing what Robbie meant, alarm bells went off in Sierra’s head but she showed no outward sign of this as she nodded and stood up. “Sure, Robbie. Come with me.”

Robbie obediently rose up from his chair and followed Sierra into the living room, where he showed her the drawings of his newest visions.

One of the pictures was of a terrified little girl about Robbie’s age with John’s blond hair and
Sierra’s eyes. She was dressed in ratty hospital scrubs and was clutching a raggedy old doll to her chest as she floated in a cell. The other picture was of an apple orchard surrounding what looked like some kind of governmental facility. In the corner of one of the pictures was a name, Charlotte.

“Robbie, who is this?” whispered Sierra, worriedly. “Who’s Charlotte?”

“I don’t know,” admitted Robbie. He looked scared and upset. “But she’s like us and I feel connected to her. Can we help her?”

Though she didn’t know how that would be possible, given how little information they had, Sierra nodded. “Of course we will, I promise. Just keep this between us and your dad until I can verify this. Do you understand?”

Robbie nodded and then they returned to the dinner table and the meal resumed it course, albeit there was a much less happy mood now. Sierra couldn’t stop thinking about Charlotte. For some reason, she seemed familiar to Sierra in a way she couldn’t quite place and she worried what was happening to the poor girl. The fact that Robbie felt connected to her did nothing to allay Sierra’s concerns. What was going on?

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The Citadel

Hidden deep in the forests and apple orchards of New Kane lay an offsite Ultra facility known as the Citadel, a secret facility known only to the higher-ups at Ultra such as Jedikiah and the Founder and those they trusted to run and guard the place.

The Citadel was truly worth its name, for it was a highly fortified fortress designed not only to keep its paranormal prisoners locked inside, but it was where the Annex Project originated from. Those in the Citadel were those who had refused to work with Ultra yet were declared too invaluable to have their powers removed. They were subject to inhumane experiments designed to expand their powers and eventually brainwash them into the perfect Ultra weapons in the shadow war. And despite their abilities, all the cells were completely sealed off and could not be breached by the prisoners.

Among them was one of Ultra’s greatest breakthroughs, a little girl by the name of Charlotte with hair a few shades darker than John’s and Sierra’s dark green eyes. She was one of their most powerful paranormals, but she was also the sweetest little child you could find and everyone’s best friend. At that moment, she was floating in her cell, clutching her raggedy doll to her chest while she imagined her family, whom she longed to be with.

Charlotte closed her eyes tighter when she heard the dreaded sound of Ultra’s doctors entering the area with their keys and handcuffs. It was time for one or more of the inmates to be subjected to further torture from Ultra’s experiments.

“Come on, Errol, you know the drill,” said the orderly. “Stick your hands out so we can cuff you. Wouldn’t want you using your powers out here, now would we?”

As per protocol, all inmates stuck their hands out through a doggy door on the cell door so they
could be cuffed with power suppressants before they were taken to the labs.

Errol, a powerful telepath who was the size of a car, glared darkly as he seemingly allowed himself to be handcuffed by the orderlies before he was dragged out of his cell.

“You too, Miggs,” barked the orderly to another inmate. “Hope you’re excited. The boys in the lab have got a big night planned for you clowns, especially you, you Looney Tune.” Miggs was one of the more dangerous ones insomuch that he was a bit on the looney side from all the experiments done to him. But generally, he was harmless to those who meant him no harm and was usually cooperative. Until today.

When Miggs presented his hands to the orderly, the medical officer was shocked and horrified to see a bloody linen bandage covering a stump where Miggs’s right hand had once been. Miggs cackled in delight as the orderly spun around in horror to see that Miggs’s hand was in Errol’s possession and had been placed in Errol’s suppression cuffs.

Quickly, before anyone could stop him, Errol elbowed his guard in the gut, grabbed his keys and unlocked the rest of the cuffs, freeing him and granting him use of his powers.

“We’ve got a breakout!” yelled the orderly.

The orderly started emergency protocols, but it did little good.

“Thanks for the hand, Miggs,” said Errol. It had been a dangerous, risky plan to escape but in the end, it’d paid off. “This one’s for you.”

And with that, Errol let out a powerful psychic burst of energy that decimated half of the room and sent all of the orderlies and guards flying into the walls, causing them to sustain numerous horrible injuries and even knocking a few of them out. Around Errol, his fellow inmates cheered him on and encouraged him to escape so that they would have the chance to do so too.

Errol was just about to leave when he was stopped by Charlotte’s voice.

“Errol?” whimpered Charlotte, as tears pooled in her eyes. “Be careful. Find my family, please.”

For some time now, Charlotte had had powerful visions of her parents and her brother whom she had never met thanks to Ultra’s actions and she longed to see them more than anything.

Errol looked torn at the thought of leaving Charlotte behind but there was no choice. Powerful as he was, Errol couldn’t take on the Citadel alone. He needed help from the Tomorrow People if any of the inmates wanted their freedom. He needed Charlotte’s parents.

“I promise. Just hold on, kiddo,” assured Errol. There was no hope of him returning to his old life. His wife was gone, his career over and he had no other family. But he would ensure that Charlotte had the future he was denied and a life worth living. “I’ll come back.”

Charlotte did not reply as Errol then teleported out of the Citadel.
The following day, Sierra snuck into the room where Ultra was rumored to keep their AI system. In the room hung a slick, shiny white device that reminded Sierra vaguely of EVE from Wall-E.

“Hello?” she said, hesitantly. “Are you the AI interface?”

“Hello, Miss Jameson,” came the reply. “I am ALICE.”

Sierra raised an eyebrow. A female AI. That was a new one. “Can I ask what that stands for, just out of curiosity?”

“Certainly. It stands for Artificial Linguistic Intelligence Computer Entity,” replied ALICE. “How many I be of assistance to you?”

“Yeah, could you access the Simon Plame files for me, please?” asked Sierra, politely.

There was a moment’s pause before ALICE replied. “Simon Plame’s file is classified. Do you have your uncle’s permission to access the files?”

“No, but I guess I was hoping being the boss’s niece would grant me that access,” admitted Sierra. She didn’t think there was point in lying to AI. If TIM could sense something was amiss and he was considered ‘obsolete,’ then ALICE could too.

“You would be wrong in that regard. As per your uncle’s instructions, I’ve informed him that you’re inquiring about Simon Plame and he’s arriving in less than a minute,” said ALICE, bluntly.

Sierra groaned. This was what she’d been hoping to avoid. She wanted to teleport out but there was no point. Jedikiah now knew she was asking questions she shouldn’t have been asking and she would have to face him whether she liked it or not.

Ten seconds later, Jedikiah burst into the room, looking far from happy. “Sierra, what the hell are you doing asking about Simon Plame? How do you even know that name?” he asked, getting straight to the point.

“From my father,” she said, truthfully. “Look, lately, Robbie’s been asking questions about my dad, his grandfather. He wants to know more about his lineage, where he comes from. I’ve been doing my best to help him. I even found a box of my dad’s old research, but I’m still coming up empty. I was hoping that maybe Simon Plame could answer a few questions.”

It was a half-truth, one that Sierra hoped that Jedikiah would accept without getting too suspicious. And to her relief, it happened.

“Sierra, I understand the position you’re in, but maybe it’s best if you let your father rest in peace. I hate to say this, but he got…delusional, towards the end of his life. He was obsessed with reaching parallel dimensions and he saw enemies where there were friends. He was a threat to himself and to your family. That’s a fact.”

Sierra met her uncle’s cool gaze with one of her own. “Then would you mind if I have Simon Plame confirm this? What’s that old saying? Trust but verify.”

“Well, you can do that later. Right now, you and I need to talk about a more urgent matter,” said Jedikiah. He looked up at the AI. “ALICE, seal the room, please.”

“Right away, sir.”

Immediately, the room darkened and the door locked, cutting the pair of them off from the
world outside of the room. Sierra was at loss to explain as to why.

The expression on Jedikiah’s face was a mixture of worry, horror and anger, something that Sierra had never seen before on her uncle and he was much tenser than she’d ever him before. It frightened her considerably.

“Sir, what is it? What’s wrong?” asked Sierra.

“What do you know about the Citadel?” asked Jedikiah.

Sierra blinked in surprise. The Citadel? She’d heard rumors about it, some of them frightening like a horror novel, but she’d dismissed them as just that—rumors. “Not much. Just that it’s Ultra’s prison for the more dangerous breakouts who don’t get the needle, breakouts who are experimented on. I never found any official records, so I just assumed it was a tall tale, the Tomorrow People’s boogieman story.”

“Well, it’s real,” said Jedikiah, bluntly. “Where do you think the Annex Project originated from? It’s an offsite Ultra facility meant to contain the more dangerous breakouts before they join us. In some cases, experiments are performed to expand their powers. But sometimes there’s a special case, like this one.”

Jedikiah handed Sierra his tablet, which held the file of a young paranormal girl, Charlotte Jamie Young.

“The Annex Project wasn’t the only operation Ultra attempted in order to create the ultimate super soldier in this shadow war. There was a time when we attempted to combine the DNA of some of our most powerful paranormals to create such a life. But the project was such down when we discovered that the process had a flaw, rapid aging and death in a matter of days. However, it’s come to my attention that the side-effect was fixed and the project rebooted when your DNA entered our systems. Your DNA and John Young’s was combined and after some difficulties, Charlotte was created. She may look eight, but technically she’s only a few months old. But I digress. She’s your daughter, Sierra, yours and John’s and she’s in danger from the Founder,” explained Jedikiah.

Sierra couldn’t believe this and she nearly broke the tablet as a result. A child had been grown from a petri dish using her DNA and John’s. Just when she thought Ultra and Jedikiah could sink no lower, they had to prove her wrong.

“You bastard. Are you seriously telling me that Ultra used my DNA and John’s for some kind of X23 program without my knowledge or my consent?” growled Sierra, in furious horror. “How long have you known about this?”

“I only just found out an hour ago,” said Jedikiah, honestly. “But I’ve taken action to shut it down, I promise. The scientists who created her are dead and their work’s been destroyed. I want to win this war, Sierra, but not this way. Not like this.”

Sierra didn’t believe it. “Bull,” she spat. “I’ve seen you cross lines I never thought possible nothing happens within Ultra’s walls without you knowing about it. You expect me to believe you didn’t know about Charlotte being my daughter and one of your guinea pigs? When I came to work for you, you swore that my family would be untouched by Ultra! This violates the terms of our agreement!” She should’ve expected this, given Jedikiah’s constitution for lying, but a small part of her thought that Jedikiah might actually keep his word as long as he got what he wanted from Sierra.
“Believe what you want, it’s true. Hell, poke around in my mind for proof if you want—” Jedikiah began, but he was cut off when Sierra took him up on his offer.

Sierra relentlessly dug through Jedikiah’s memories of that day and found that he was telling the truth. Jedikiah hadn’t known about Charlotte. Her creation had been ordered by the Founder behind Jedikiah’s back. For the first time, Jedikiah was completely innocent. Why he was feeling the way he was, she didn’t know or care. And perhaps she should’ve gone deeper into her uncle’s mind for the information she wanted but in that moment, Sierra didn’t give a damn. All that mattered to her was getting Charlotte free.

“I believe you,” said Sierra. She folded her arms across her chest and narrowed her eyes. “Now, what is it you want from me? I want Charlotte freed, but I’m also loyal to Ultra. I can’t just break her out without violating our deal and getting the Founder on my back after we’ve only just gotten rid of him again. I can’t do anything about this, you know that.”

Sierra was not being heartless. She couldn’t just launch a full-scale rescue ops without some kind of plan that wouldn’t get her and her people killed. If that happened, Charlotte would remain in danger and things would only get worse.

“Which is why I was hoping you might be able to contact John again,” said Jedikiah. “As much as I hate to him wreck Ultra’s work, I’m not about to let this continue. Yes, Sierra, even I have scruples that I won’t compromise, even for my work or the Founder,” he added, rolling his eyes when Sierra gave him an incredulous look. “If I didn’t, would I really be bringing this to you? I’ll make you a deal. You get a hold of John, tell him about the Citadel and your little girl and I’ll get you Simon Plame’s file.”

Sierra didn’t even hesitate to accept. It was too good a bargain to pass up. “It’s a deal. I’ll see what I can do, but I can’t make any promises.”

Jedikiah nodded in agreement and then Sierra stormed out of Ultra.

XXX

Back in the Lair, John had called all the Tomorrow People for a meeting to inform them of what’d happened on the day of Roger’s disappearance, John’s involvement in the Annex Project and what Sierra had discovered. He also apologized for not telling them all sooner. While some accepted this without any troubles, others did not.

“You really think a simple apology’s going to make up for the lies you’ve been spinning us?” spat Victor, a bald black man, angrily.

John remorsefully shook his head. “No, I don’t. I know I let you all down. I probably let Roger down too, but I’m trying to fix that. Sierra’s seen Roger in Limbo and showed us the memory of it. He’s still alive and he’s out there, just not the way I hoped or said. But regardless, from here on out, I swear I’ll do everything in my power to find Roger and bring him home.”

This placated some of John’s audience but not all of them. Victor being the loudest voice among those who no longer trusted or respected John now that they knew his secrets.

“You’re just an Ultra freak who can kill,” sneered Victor. “Your little girlfriend and her brat’s no different! If it were up to me, the three of you would never be allowed back into the Lair!”
Victor’s supporters backed off at this as Victor was the only one who had those type of feelings about Sierra and Robbie’s evolutionary powers.

Cara took angry step forward. “Then it’s a good thing you’re not in charge, isn’t it, Victor? Like it or not, John’s the only reason any of us are still alive and not trapped in Ultra or worse. From day one, he’s provided for and protected all of us! More to the point, John never volunteered for Ultra! He was a kid who was captured, lied to and experimented on. All so Jedikiah could turn him into a weapon.”

John shot Cara a grateful look. While he preferred to fight his own battles, John was thankful for Cara’s support as it meant a great deal to him and also meant their friendship was also on the mend.

“Cara’s right,” said John. “I made a mistake. But now I’m asking for forgiveness and I’m prepared to do whatever it takes make things right.”

“Then prove it now,” demanded Victor. “You want us to trust you again? Then step down until you’ve regained that trust. I challenge a vote for a change in leadership and I nominate Cara! Unlike you, she’s always been upfront, which will be a good change of pace around here. Who agrees with me on this matter?”

John’s heart sank and Cara looked dismayed as half of the Tomorrow People agreed with Victor. They wanted John to step down. Their faith and trust in their fearless leader who’d cared for and protected them was now gone. So, having no other choice, John and Cara agreed to the vote. As per the custom, one candle was lit for each member of the Tomorrow People in the Lair and placed on a table with John and Cara on either end of it. Those who voted in favor of John would move their candle to the right in front of John and those who voted for Cara would do the same on the left side.

One-by-one, everyone took their vote and astoundingly, the vote was split down the middle. Half in Cara’s favor, half in John’s. John hadn’t lost the vote but nor had he won, which meant a compromise had to be reached. After much heated discussion, it was agreed that Cara would serve as John’s co-leader and had the power to overrule any decisions that John made regarding the safety and well-being of the Tomorrow People. In that sense, John retained some of his power but he had still also lost a great deal, including the respect of many of his people despite all he’d done for them.

“I’m sorry, John,” said Cara, softly when they were alone. “I didn’t want this.”

With his earlier gratitude gone and replaced with anger, John didn’t believe her. From day one, Cara been challenging his decisions and that had only worsened in the recent months. But he didn’t say this to her. “Doesn’t matter. You’ve got it. Just don’t screw it up.”

Before Cara could reply, Sierra teleported in, looking furious and upset. “Get Russell. We have an emergency situation.”

Nothing further needed to be said as the four of them gathered in TIM’s room and Sierra informed them of the Citadel, Charlotte’s existence and Jedikiah’s rather insane request for help in shutting the wretched place down for good. Out of all in Sierra’s audience, John was the angriest of the three of them and nearly took off to put a bullet in Jedikiah’s head himself right then and there.

“I knew Ultra was dirty, but this? This is low even for them,” growled John, as he angrily paced around the room.
“And I agree, but if we got in guns a-blazing, all we’re going to do is get ourselves killed! So, will you please sit and calm down?” demanded Sierra. She grabbed John’s arm and forced him onto the couch. “We need to figure out a solid plan if we’re going to rescue Charlotte and the others. But I don’t know what I find harder to believe, the fact that she’s named Charlotte, which was what I was going to name Robbie if he’d been a girl or that Jedikiah actually wants me to go behind the Founder’s back like this.” When Sierra had been pregnant with Robbie, some nights he would kick up a storm until she played Charlotte’s Web on the DVD player, which calmed him down enough for Sierra to sleep.

John nodded in agreement.

“You don’t think Jedikiah asked because he knows the truth about you, do you?” asked Cara.

Sierra shook her head. “No. My cover’s still intact. Jedikiah claims he has scruples and that he wants to maintain the terms of the agreement I made with him. Whatever Jedikiah’s deal is, I don’t care. All that matters to me is saving Charlotte. If she can kill like John or I can and they discover this, she’s going to be next Annex Project. I can’t let that happen.”

The idea of mutilations, deprivations, and all kinds of unholy Ultra experiments to test the limits on one’s powers or even expand them beyond the normal limits being performed on her daughter was more than Sierra could bear.

“Well, if we’re going to do that, we need to find Errol and try to decipher any clues from Robbie’s pictures,” said Russell. “But we need more clues than just an apple orchard. Do you have any idea how many there are in the country? Too many!”

Sierra was quiet for a minute and then her face lit up with an idea. “Or maybe we don’t need the drawing, not entirely. According to Ultra’s files, one of the Citadel’s inmates escaped, a powerful telepath called Errol, the first to ever do so. If we can find him—”

“We find Charlotte,” finished Cara, in realization. “Errol can lead us straight to Jedikiah’s house of horrors where our kind’s being experimented on. We just need to locate him and then we can save more our of people than ever have tracking individual breakouts in a year.”

“Yes, but how? The guy slipped out of the Citadel, something nobody’s ever done before. Errol isn’t going to be easy to find,” reminded John.

“Ultra’s going to be all over Errol, which means I’ll be all over Errol. The minute I get a bead on Errol, I’ll let you know,” decided Sierra. “But we need to handle this more delicately than usual. Okay? Jedikiah may have asked me to talk to John but he cannot suspect that I’m in league with you or else this is all for nothing, which means we up the ante. That also means I can’t help with the Citadel siege beyond that and the less I know, the better. At least until Charlotte’s safe from Ultra.”

John looked repulsed at what Sierra was implying but didn’t argue about it. They couldn’t afford to keep doing what they’d been doing before if they wanted to survive. The time had come to turn the heat up on Jedikiah and that time was now.

XXX

Later that very same day, Sierra and her temporary human partner struck gold when the city’s
police found Errol conked out outside of a bar, looking like a homeless person loitering. Sierra’s partner picked Errol up from the police. He then brought Errol to Ultra’s specially designed transportation truck which was hidden in a dark, disused parking garage where Sierra was waiting.

“I can’t believe we caught this poor bastard,” said the agent, as though Errol weren’t there. “You won’t believe this, but the local PD found him sleeping outside of a bar. What an idiot! One of the Citadel’s most promising paranormals and he got caught so damn easily. I almost feel bad for the guy.”

Sierra scowled as she got out of the passenger seat of the car. John, we’ve got him. We’re at Hillsides and Parsons. Get here as quick as you can. Aloud she said, “Stop talking and get him in the back of the damn car already, okay? I’m on overtime and I want to go home.’

Thankfully, the agent shut up or Sierra might’ve decked him one just for insolence.

“Please,” begged Errol, as he shivered against the cold. “Don’t take me back there. You don’t know what they did to me! Please, let me go!”

But Errol’s begging ceased when Sierra stepped into the dim light of the parking garage and then he stared at Sierra in shocked horror before his face twisted with disgust. But he said nothing until he was alone in the back of the truck with Sierra.

“You,” said Errol. “You’re Charlotte’s mother. And you’re working with these butchers? Do you know what they’ve done to me? To Charlotte? You sick—”

“Shut the hell up!” interrupted Sierra, quickly. After making sure they hadn’t been heard, she lowered her voice to a very quiet whisper. “It’s not what you think. I’m a double agent. I’m trying to bring down Ultra from the inside. Right now, that mission involves saving my daughter but I can’t do it without your help.”

“What do you need from me?” asked Errol, as he was forcefully seat belted into the back of the truck. His attitude had immediately changed upon hearing Sierra’s words. “Whatever it is, I’ll do it as long it’ll help that little girl survive.”

“In a minute, we’re going to be ambushed by Charlotte’s father and his friends. When that happens, go with them and give them the location of the Citadel. Do whatever it takes to get Charlotte safe,” instructed Sierra. “I’ll be fine but I need you to put on a good show, okay? Ultra can’t know I’m part of this or that you know anything. Understand?”

“You have my word,” assured Errol.

Sierra held her breath and then waited for the ambush to strike.

She did not have to wait long for the moment the driver tried to move the truck, the truck was forcefully lifted into the air by John’s team before it was turned over like a bouncing ball. The driver was then forcefully removed from the vehicle and knocked, which was followed by the back doors of the truck being broken open. Suddenly, Sierra cried out in pain as a bullet lodged itself into her shoulder and she was slammed into the back wall of the truck by the force of the bullet. Her partner was then telekinetically pulled out of the vehicle and knocked out.

John then made his way into the back of the vehicle where he unlocked Errol’s cuffs with the key they stole from Sierra’s pocket. As he did this, Sierra activated the emergency signal on her cell phone, calling for backup as protocol demanded.

“Go. They’ll be here in two minutes,” she gasped, as she tightly grasped her shoulder, which
was screaming in the worst pain Sierra had ever experienced. John hadn’t hit anything vital but it still hurt like hell and was bleeding heavily. Getting shot was not something Sierra had ever wanted to endure, but at this stage of the game, if she wanted to maintain her position at Ultra, she had to show more proof of her loyalties than just a few wounds. She’d needed something far more serious, like the bullet injury. When John looked worried at the sight of Sierra’s bullet injury, she yelled, “GO! I’ll be fine!”

John didn’t need to be told twice. He grabbed Errol and disappeared just as Sierra fell unconscious.

XXX

When Sierra came to, she found herself lying in Ultra’s infirmary, dressed in a hospital gown with a bandage tapped on her shoulder where the bullet had gone in. There was an ache of pain dulled by the IV pumping painkiller drugs into her bloodstream. She groaned and squinted as the harsh lights of the room hit her eyes.

“You’re awake. How’re you feeling?”

Sierra slowly blinked open her eyes as Jedikiah came into her field of vision. “Like I’ve been shot. How do you think I’m feeling?” she grunted.

Normally, Sierra wouldn’t have been so disrespectful towards her boss but the drugs and the pain from the bullet wound were loosening her lips and lowering her inhibitions. Luckily, Jedikiah just lightly chuckled as he stood over Sierra’s bed.

“Take it easy there, kiddo. You’ve done well. You’ve actually taken a bullet for Ultra. You should be proud. Any and all remaining doubts about your loyalties have been crushed,” said Jedikiah.

Sierra nearly popped a vein. “Are you serious?! I took a freaking bullet for Ultra and people still doubt me?! Who the hell’s doing that?” If it was Jedikiah, so help her, she was going to damn the rules and kill him right then and there.

Jedikiah held up a hand. “Relax. It was just a handful of agents who got too big for their britches. Nothing more. Your place at Ultra’s set in stone, Sierra, I promise. But I do have to admit, I am a bit curious as to why John, my star pupil known for his accuracy, shot you like he did. After all, given your history, I wouldn’t have thought John would shoot the woman he loves and if he didn’t, then why did he only hit soft tissue and not something vital?”

Sierra gritted her teeth as she resisted the urge to telekinetically throw Jedikiah across the room. “For the last time, John and I are over! We may have history, but that’s all it is: history! John doesn’t love me, not anymore. How many times do I have to make that clear? When I gave him the intel as you ordered, he said he was grateful, but he also made it clear in no uncertain terms that he wants me near Charlotte. We’re still through and that’s never going to change,” said Sierra, as a tear escaped her eye. “That’s why he shot me, to make an example of me and to remind me of that. He only let me live for Robbie’s sake. Otherwise, I’d be dead now.”

To Sierra’s relief, Jedikiah bought her explanation and he shook his head in disappointment. “I’m sorry, Sierra. I know what he meant to you.”
“Meant, past tense. We’ve been over ever since he dumped me all those years ago,” said Sierra, tiredly. She was suddenly finding it hard to keep her eyes open and found that alarming. “Did you up my meds? I can’t stay. I have to get home to Robbie.”

Sierra tried to sit up but Jedikiah gently forced her back down onto the bed and pulled the blanket up to her shoulders.

“Relax. I called your little pal Astrid and informed her you would be working overtime on a project at Ultra and asked her to take care of your son. All’s good. You just need to rest up so you can heal faster. Can’t have my best agent out of commission for too long, can I?” said Jedikiah, smirking.

It was thanks to the drugs and Sierra’s inability to stay conscious that she didn’t punch her uncle in the face right then and there.

XXX

Back at the Lair, Errol was being tended to.

After he was given a physical exam, food and a fresh change of clothes, he was more than ready to help the Tomorrow People break into the Citadel to free the other inmates, especially Charlotte. Apparently, Charlotte had Robbie’s precognitive abilities and through them, she’d often seen her biological family. She’d shared those visions with Errol whenever she could, which was why Errol had tried to track down Sierra and John.

“Can you tell us where the Citadel is?” asked John.

Errol shrugged hopelessly. “I’ve been trying to figure that out, but the truth is, I never knew where we were held. And when I escaped, I teleported to the first place I could think of, the Trinity Church in the East Village.”

It wasn’t much of a start but it was better than nothing. Immediately, TIM pulled up a map of a radius of Errol’s possible teleportation abilities. While TIM was able to narrow the field considerably given the mention of the apple orchard Robbie had foreseen, it still left a great deal of ground to cover that they didn’t have time for and time was running out.

“Errol, think hard. Is there anything else you can think of that could help us narrow this down?” pressed Cara. “Anything at all? Even if it’s insignificant?”

Errol thought hard and long before snapping his fingers in realization. “When I left, one of the docs had a newspaper in his pocket. New…something or other.”

That did the trick and as there was only one newspaper with the prefix ‘new’ in it near an apple orchard, TIM was able to find the Citadel’s location in New Kane.

“Russell, tell the team to suit up. John, I need you to stay here and man the screens,” ordered Cara. “Errol, are you coming or staying?”

“Coming,” said Errol, firmly.

While Russell obeyed Cara’s orders, John rose up from where he’d been sitting in anger.
“What the hell do you mean I’m staying here?” he demanded. As the coleader of the Tomorrow People, the sole survivor of the Annex Project and as Charlotte’s father, there were more reasons for John to go than there were to stay behind.

“Exactly that,” said Cara, quickly. She grasped John’s shoulders, making him stay in place as she looked right into his eyes. “John, listen, I know how badly you want to burn the Citadel to the ground but right now, I need you here more than ever, acting as my eyes and ears. Jedikiah may have asked for our help but that doesn’t mean that his and the Founder’s antenna aren’t still way up high. If this plan doesn’t work, not only will our people still need you as leader, but Sierra and Robbie will need you more than ever. And if all else fails, I’ll need you to use Morgan as our get-out-of-jail free card.”

John couldn’t argue with the rest of Cara’s point but he looked disgusted at the idea of Morgan, an innocent young woman, being used as cannon fodder against Jedikiah.

“You want me to use her? As what, a hostage?”

Cara was unrepentant as she shook her head. “Collateral. I don’t like it anymore than you do, John, but I cannot and I will not let what happened to you happen to anyone else. This is an aggressive, calculated risk, one that we have to take to stop people like us from being tortured. People like your daughter. And if she or anyone else is going to survive this, then maybe we need to start using that bastard’s tactics against him. More than that, the people out there as well as in here need this to happen. And the best way for it go off without a hitch is for you to do as I say and ensure our people’s safety. So, please, John, no more arguments.”

While most of Cara’s argument was sound, John didn’t like most of what he was hearing or what Cara was turning into and he shook his head at Cara. “Just be careful you don’t lose sight of what’s important or lose yourself or you will have failed as a leader and we’ll be lost as a people,” he warned. “Watch yourself, Cara.”

Cara frowned in annoyance but said nothing as she then left John alone.

XXX

When they arrived at the Citadel, TIM was able to hack into the facility’s mainframe and briefly disabled the security system. However, it wouldn’t last for very long and nor could TIM deactivate the cells holding the inmates prisoner due to some technical issues, which meant that Cara’s team had to move quickly if they were to succeed.

While Russell and his team took down the Citadel’s security guards, Cara made her way to the cell block with Errol. It didn’t take long for them to find Charlotte’s cell and when they did, the little girl rose up from her seat in sheer delight.

“Errol!” breathed Charlotte, happily. “You came back!”

“Just like I promised,” said Errol, gently. He opened the doggy door and squeezed Charlotte’s hand. “Your parents aren’t with me now, but these people are friends of theirs. We’re going to get you out of here, kiddo. You’re going home to meet them. We’re all getting out of here for good.”

Charlotte nearly cried in joy at the idea of finally being with her parents and her brother.
“I hate to interrupt but we don’t have much longer before a kill squad shows up. How do we open these cells?” asked Cara, urgently.

Errol snapped into action as he showed Cara the control system and how it worked. But when Cara attempted to unlock the cells, they discovered the system was being disengaged. To make matters worse, Russell teleported in looking frantic.

“Cara, the kill squad’s here and they’re on their way up. We have to either get these people out of here or get the hell out of here now!” said Russell, quickly.

“I have an idea. If you all work together to do a TK burst, you might be able to destroy the cells. I can buy you some time to do that,” said Errol, quickly.

Cara looked at Errol with dread in her eyes as though she was guessing what he planned to do in order to ensure success for them. “How?”

“By giving them what they want.” Errol cut Cara off when she tried to protest his arguably suicidal plan. “I’ve been ready for this for a long time. My life as I knew it is over, but theirs aren’t and neither is Charlotte’s. Just promise me you’ll take care of them whatever happens.”

Cara trembled and tears stung her eyes as she nodded. “I promise,” she choked out. Errol’s noble sacrifice would not be in vain, Cara would see to that come hell or high water.

Errol gave Charlotte one last gentle hand squeeze and smile before teleporting the room, despite Charlotte’s pleas for Errol to stay.

Cara quickly shook her head to regain her composure and shouted for all her team to join her. For this to work, she needed every single ounce of paranormal energy she could get. Once they were all together, every single one of them focused every last ounce of their energy into one giant burst and when they released it, the biggest telekinetic burst of energy was released into the room, destroying not only the cells but a good chunk of the Citadel in the process.

Miraculously, no one was seriously injured and the prisoners were able to get out of the twisted remains of their cells. Once they did so, they all grabbed the Tomorrow Peoples’ hands and performed a joint teleportation to the Lair just as the kill squad arrived.

The Citadel was gone and its prisoners were now freed of their sufferings and prisons. The mission was a success, but not without the cost of Errol’s life. A hard price to pay.

XXX

Sometime later, Sierra was conscious enough and the pain had dulled down enough for her to leave Ultra’s infirmary. And when that happened, she wasted no time changing and headed straight down to her uncle’s office. Jedikiah was going over some paperwork when she knocked on the door.

“Hey, look who’s up. Come in. How’s the arm?” asked Jedikiah.

Sierra gave Jedikiah a withering look. “Only hurts when it rains,” she said, with forced politeness. When she got home, she would have Robbie heal it up properly and then fake it for a few days. “So, I noticed the air sirens have stopped. What’s the word on the Citadel? What the hell happened while I was out?”
“What happened is what I expected to happen after Errol escaped custody. The Tomorrow People sieged the Citadel and escaped with all the breakouts, including the girl,” said Jedikiah. “The Citadel’s also been destroyed. It’s completely useless now.”

“Well, I can’t say I’m sorry about that,” said Sierra. The Citadel was hell on earth if ever there was one, and Sierra was glad that it was gone. And Charlotte may not have been able to live with her and Robbie without Charlotte’s safety being compromised, but Sierra took comfort in knowing that Charlotte was safe and cared for with John in the Lair. “If my daughter hadn’t been among the prisoners, I would feel very differently about it. On that note, I have something to ask. If by some miracle, we find the Tomorrow People, I want Charlotte turned in my custody, away from John. Regardless of how she came to be, Charlotte is my daughter and I’ll decide her fate, no one else.”

While Sierra didn’t think Ultra would ever find the Tomorrow People or Charlotte, she needed a guarantee that Charlotte would be safe from the Founder and Jedikiah if the worst ever happened.

Jedikiah didn’t look too kindly to be ordered around but nevertheless, he agreed to Sierra’s request and then continued the discussion “Naturally, I had to inform the Founder about this unfortunate development and as you can imagine, he wasn’t happy about it. But he’s thrilled that Errol was at least disposed of in the crossfire.” Jedikiah’s rather calm, unbothered tone in describing the incident sickened Sierra to her core and she felt a new wave of disgust for her uncle.

Sierra gritted her teeth to force back the nausea and the fresh jolt of pain from her shoulder. “So, I take it we’re to expect another loyalty-test visit from the Founder because of this?” She hoped that wasn’t the case, because if it was, she was going to blow a gasket. She may have been a double-agent, but Sierra had been working her butt off day in and day out to prove her loyalty to Ultra and all she’d gotten for it were numerous nasty injuries, a bullet to her shoulder, frequent suspicion and smoke and mirrors. What more did she need to do to prove herself to Ultra that she was a good soldier? “Have I earned the right to be trusted or not?”

Jedikiah shook his head. “In that order? No, thank God. We’ve dodged that bullet. As far as the Founder knows, you and I are clean in this matter. Our only fault is in not preventing this from happening. As for your trust, it has been earned, believe me. And I’ve also persuaded the Founder to never reboot the insane program that created Charlotte ever again by pointing out that it’s too risky and gotten us nowhere in this war.”

Sierra sighed in relief and then changed the subject. “Our bargain?” she prompted.

Jedikiah nodded and then produced a file from his desk drawer which he handed to Sierra. “Simon Plame was another student of Professor Aldus Crick’s. He was brilliant in his own way, but he was flawed. Frankly, I think he suffered from an overzealous loyalty to your father.”

Sierra frowned. “Overzealous, how?”

“On the tragic day your father was killed, Simon broke into this very building to try and steal your father’s corpse. Can’t imagine why. Anyway, I ended up killing Simon myself for trying to take your father away from me and to prevent any other incidents like Simon’s, I cremated Roger’s body myself and scattered his ashes over our parents’ graves. I’m sorry if that’s not what you wanted to hear.”

Sierra’s throat tightened as she glanced over the file. Roger’s body was cremated, destroying any chance Sierra had of ever finding Roger and bringing him home. All Sierra’s plans, her hard work, her efforts and her sacrifices…it had been for nothing. Roger was never going to come home.
As Charlotte was busy being looked over by Morgan, who insisted that Charlotte be given a little time to adjust before meeting her family, Sierra didn’t rush straight to meet her daughter when she arrived at the Lair with Robbie. Instead, Sierra convened a meeting with John, Russel and Cara to inform them of what she’d found out from Jedikiah. Everyone but John became rather despondent at this revelation as it was a heavy blow to their morale.

“So, Plame’s dead and Roger’s body is still in the wind. It’s a setback, but we’ll deal with it,” said John. “We’ve dealt with worse.”

“It’s not just a setback, John. Don’t you ever watch Supernatural? My father can’t come back to his body when there’s no body to come back to,” said Sierra, sadly. “Everything I’ve done to find my dad has been for nothing. My dad’s trapped in Limbo forever and I can’t ever bring him home.”

Rather than sharing in her feelings of despair as Sierra had expected, John seemed rather upbeat. “I don’t buy it. Jedikiah’s lies tell lies. Do you honestly think he’d incinerate his own brother and scatter the ashes miles from here?”

Sierra had to admit the idea sounded ludicrous when said aloud and everyone else nodded in agreement. Within moments, everyone was agreeing with John. Nobody believed that Jedikiah had actually cremated Roger’s body, which meant that there was still hope. Roger’s body was still out there and one way or another, they were going to find Roger and bring him home.

Just then, there was a knock on the doorway and Morgan peered into the room. “Hey, sorry to interrupt, but there’s someone here who’s ready to meet you.” She looked down and to her left, which was just out of sight of Sierra’s vision. “Come on, honey. Don’t be shy.”

Charlotte.

Immediately, Cara and Russell vacated the room to give the family some privacy while Sierra, John and Robbie stood up. Sierra’s breath caught in her throat as Charlotte hesitantly poked her head in the doorway whilst clutching her doll to her chest. She was now cleaned with her hair neatly combed and she was wearing a fresh set of clothes.

“Hello,” said Charlotte, shyly. “Are you my family?”

Sierra was crying and laughing at the same time as she nodded.

“Yeah, Charlie,” said John, warmly as he and Sierra knelt down to Charlotte’s level. “I’m your dad. This is your mom and your brother, Robbie.”

“Welcome home, sis,” said Robbie, smiling.

Charlotte returned the smile and then she ran straight into her family’s opened arms. Within moments, all four of them were sharing a tight group hug. Sierra couldn’t restrain her laughter or her happy tears. It didn’t matter how Charlotte had come to exist, all that mattered was that she was Sierra and John’s child and that she was safe. In a way, it felt like the day Robbie had been born all over again. Only a single moment had been shared between them and already Sierra felt an overwhelmingly powerful urge to protect and love the little girl in her arms.
“We love you so much, Charlotte,” murmured Sierra, as she stroked Charlotte’s blond hair. “I promise you, we’re never going to let anyone hurt you ever again.”

Charlotte snuggled closer into her family’s arms. “I love you too.”

Sierra tenderly kissed Charlotte’s head, wishing that their beautiful moment could last forever.

While finding Roger and bringing him home would always be Sierra’s dream, she couldn’t let it be her sole priority. The well-being of her family and her people had to come first. It was victories like Charlotte’s safety and happiness that truly mattered in the long run and through victories like this that would ensure that the Tomorrow People would win the shadow war against Ultra. And if it came down to it, the Lair would become the promised Refuge. As corny as it sounded, it was one of the few things giving Sierra hope that one day, they were going to survive and get out of the darkness and step into the sun someday soon.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son and daughter, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

Six years ago

Cara’s stomach rumbled loudly as she gazed longingly at the fruit stand nestled outside the little shop.

She was a pitiful sight with her lank, unkempt hair, pale and dirty face, and her threadbare clothes but no one gave her so much as a second glance as they went about their business. Ever since she’d gone on the run for accidentally killing the bastard who’d tried to rape her, Cara’s life had been hell. She slept on the streets and was always freezing to death and hungry beyond measure. She had no friends or family and was completely alone in the world with her fugitive status and her powers.

Despite the risk it posed, Cara couldn’t bear her hunger any longer and after making sure no one was looking, telekinetically scooped up an apple into her long coat sleep before resuming her walk. She hadn’t taken more than three steps when her path was suddenly blocked by a bulky man in a dark overcoat and communication device.

“Nice trick. Why don’t you do it again at headquarters?” he said.

Cara’s heart skipped a beat and her blood ran cold. “Are you the police?”

“Something like that,” he said.

Though the man showed no outward threat, everything in Cara’s body was screaming at her to get the hell out of dodge. So, without thinking twice, Cara ran for her life and before long she found herself being pursued by at least four additional people. Quick as she could, Cara located an empty alleyway where she could teleport away without exposing herself and ran straight for it, only to slam into a man who appeared out of nowhere before he teleported them both to a fancy apartment building.

Cara yelped in fear as she nervously backed up against the wall. Her mind was racing. What the hell just happened? Who were those people and why had she been taken to that building?

“Hey, hey, hey, take it easy,” said a beautiful slender brunette woman, gently. “Calm down, you’re among friends. You’re safe. Nobody’s going to hurt you, I promise. What’s your name,
honey?”

Cara swallowed painfully as she frantically glanced around her surroundings for the nearest exit or a sign of trouble. “Cara. Who are you? Why am I here?”

“My name’s Nelly and this lug’s Julian. You’re here because we saved your life,” said Nelly, gesturing to the man next to her. Though he was smiling, something about him gave Cara an uneasy feeling. “All those things you can do, Cara, we can do them too. You’re one of us.”

Cara couldn’t believe what she was hearing as tears slid down her cheeks. All this time, Cara had believed she was a freak of nature, that her powers made her some kind of a monster. But hearing that she wasn’t changed all of that. “I thought I was alone,” she said, her voice thick with emotion.

Julian shook his head as he held out his hand. “You’re not alone, Cara. Wanna learn some magic?”

Present Day

Back at the Lair, Cara was in a foul mood, as was evident by the way she was stomping around barking orders at anyone who could hear her. Though she was technically coleader now, she had taken up more of a sole leadership role without realizing it and she was beginning to feel the pressures of it all. It didn’t help that although she was glad they’d saved over a dozen innocent lives from the Citadel, they now had over a dozen more mouths to feed which made resources scarcer and also meant more lives were depending on Cara to take care of them.

They’d had their hands full helping the new recruits to the Lair recover both physically and mentally from their traumatic time at the Citadel and it’d also been a challenge and a half training them as most of the rescues found it hard to train without having a horrific flashback to their time at the Citadel.

“…running low on food. If Sierra doesn’t make a drop in the next two days, I’ll need you to organize an afterhours grocery run. Russell keeps bringing back junk food,” ordered Cara, as she glared at Russell, who was playing a game of pool.

Russell’s face twisted into a teasing expression. “Are you calling me fat?”

Cara’s glare darkened. “I’m calling you lazy. And why aren’t you running TK drills with the newbies like I asked you to? Ultra will fry their brains if they get caught because you didn’t train them properly!”

Russell held up his hands in a surrender position. “Chillax, Chief. We ran drills of all kinds for six straight hours. Okay? Even John would agree that’s long enough for one day. They’re exhausted and hungry. Let them rest a bit before I have them beat each other up again.”

Cara growled in irritation but had to admit that Russell was right in that regard, so she didn’t speak anymore on the subject. She’d just opened her mouth to discuss something else of importance when Sierra suddenly teleported in with Robbie and a giant wagon bursting full of groceries, medical supplies and water. Robbie was holding a box wrapped in pink paper with a gold ribbon on it.
“Hey, we come bearing gifts,” said Sierra. “I’ve got at least two weeks of food and supplies here. Can someone help unload it?”

Cara shot Sierra a grateful look before ordered the supplies be unloaded. Though they were more than capable of organizing secret grocery runs that wouldn’t get them caught from Ultra, the infrequent contributions Sierra was able to make helped the Tomorrow People immensely. More food meant one less risky trip topside and one less chance of getting caught by Ultra.

“This really helps, Sierra. Thanks,” said Cara, gratefully.

Sierra nodded. “Turns out being shot in the shoulder earns you a few points at Ultra, so Jedikiah ‘graciously’ gave me a ten percent raise in my paycheck. So, I should be able to help out with supplies a little more often now. I just wish I could do a little more. How is everyone down here?”

“Yeah, where’s Charlotte? I brought her a present,” said Robbie, holding up the brightly wrapped gift he was holding.

To Sierra and John’s immense joy, Robbie and Charlotte had formed a close sibling relationship within moments of their meeting. When Robbie visited the Lair, he could be found playing or practicing TP abilities with his sister. Charlotte especially loved Robbie’s visits as they were the highlight of her day and she was always begging that Robbie be allowed to sleepover on the weekends.

“She’s napping on the couch, but she’ll probably wake up soon. Why don’t you go wait for her? Quietly,” said Cara, kindly.

Robbie nodded and smiled as he scampered off to sit next to his sleeping sister, who lay on the couch, sound asleep with her dolly.

Sierra smiled fondly at her son before turning back to Cara with a concerned look. “Seriously. How are things down here? How’s everyone adjusting?” Though Sierra helped the Citadel rescues as much as she could, especially Charlotte, she was unable to visit as often as she liked due to her hectic life up topside. “Are you okay? You look stressed.”

“But I lost Errol,” said Cara, sadly. Though some time had passed since the attack on the Citadel, Cara had yet to forgive herself for Errol’s death.

Sierra’s face softened. “Errol made a choice to save the people at the Citadel, to save you. I know it hurts to think about, but you have to stop beating yourself over Errol’s choice. The best thing you can do to honor Errol’s memory is to keep doing what you’re doing and not let Ultra win.”

Whether they liked it or not, lives were going to be lost in the shadow war against Ultra whether they could prevent it or not. How they dealt with those losses and chose to honor them was
up to the survivors of the war. It was somewhat harsh but true.

Cara relaxed a little and opened her mouth to speak when suddenly, a horrible high-pitched telepathic scream went off, causing everyone in the Lair to clutch their heads in agony. When the sound of all-too-familiar whimpering hit their ears, everyone, including John who bolted out of TIM’s room where he’d been doing maintenance, ran straight for the couch where Charlotte was no longer sleeping peacefully. Instead, she was twisting her body this way and that and Robbie’s attempts to wake his sister by shaking her shoulder were proving unfruitful.

“What the hell’s wrong with her?” groaned Cara, as she clutched her ears.

John knelt down beside his daughter and touched her forehead. “She’s having a nightmare and a panic attack. I had them all the time when I was breaking out.”

“I had the same problem after McCrane attacked me,” said Sierra. She bit back a cry of pain of her own as the volume of the telepathic screams increased. Charlotte, sweetie, wake up. It’s just a dream. You’re safe. Wake up.

“Come on, Charlie, wake up. Whatever you’re seeing, it’s not real,” said John, wincing in agony. “We’re here, your family’s here. You’re safe.”

“Wake up, sis!” begged Robbie, as he shook Charlotte’s shoulder harder.

Charlotte’s eyes suddenly opened and she sat up like a shot, breathing hard and looking terrified. Her eyes filled with tears as she frantically glanced around to make sure what she’d seen hadn’t been real and that she was safe in the Lair.

“It’s okay, it’s okay, it’s okay. We’ve got you,” whispered John, soothingly as he stroked Charlotte’s hair. “Daddy’s here, and so is Mom and Robbie. Take a deep breath, Charlie.”

Charlotte took several deep breaths before bursting into tears. “Every time I close my eyes, I’m back at that place. This time, you were all there too. You were hurting and I couldn’t save you.”

Sierra’s heart broke as she wrapped Charlotte in a one-armed hug. What kind of hell had Ultra put her sweet girl through? “Sweetie, that’ll never happen. I promised no one was ever going to hurt you again and I meant. And nobody is ever going to do that to us, I swear it. We’re all safe here.”

“But you’re not, Mommy. You work for them to keep us all safe,” protested Charlotte. Ever since she found out Sierra worked for Ultra as a double-agent, Charlotte had been terrified that Sierra’s ruse would be exposed and Charlotte would lose her mother. “What’ll happen to you if they find out—?”

“That won’t happen. I won’t let it,” said John, firmly but gently. “None of us will. As long as we stick together, we’ll be safe. I promise. And if it’ll make you feel better, all four of us will have a campout tonight and watch a movie of your choice. Sound good?”

Sierra’s job as a double-agent was a huge risk and Charlotte had every right to be worried whenever Sierra set foot in Ultra, but Sierra worked hard each and every shift to ensure she would return safely to her family and if anything did happen, John was prepared to burn Ultra to the ground to bring Sierra back home safely.

Charlotte relaxed a little at the mention of John’s promise and she nodded in agreement to John’s suggestion but she was still shaken and upset by her nightmare and her panic attack.
At that moment, Robbie decided to lighten the mood and he held out Charlotte’s present to her. “Open this. I picked it out myself. It’ll make you feel much better.”

Charlotte looked thrilled at being given a present and her smile brightened when she saw the box’s contents. Inside were two fantasy books and a new stuffed rabbit companion for Charlotte’s dolly. Charlotte was overjoyed with her presents and hugged Robbie tightly in gratitude.

Sierra’s watch then beeped, reminding her of the hour. “Shoot. Listen, Charlotte, I have to run, but your dad and Robbie will be here all day and you can call me if you really need me. I’ll be back tonight for the campout, I promise. Okay?”

Charlotte hesitantly nodded and then gave Sierra a quick, tight hug before Sierra then reluctantly departed for her shift at Ultra. She didn’t want to leave Charlotte like this but there was no choice. Hiding in the Lair didn’t pay the bills and if she wanted to keep Jedikiah from doubting her again, Sierra had to go back to Ultra. But she felt some peace in knowing that John would take care of Charlotte and would help her recover.

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When Sierra arrived at Ultra, she was ordered to Jedikiah’s office where he was talking with two new male Ultra agents. He looked up and smiled when she knocked on the door, gesturing for her to enter the office.

“Ah, Sierra, perfect timing. I’d like you to meet our newest recruits,” said Jedikiah. “Trainee Agents Mark Amell and—”

“Hilton Cole?” exclaimed Sierra, stunned.

The first new trainee was completely unfamiliar to her, but second new trainee was none other than Sierra’s workaholic ex-boyfriend, whom Sierra hadn’t seen or heard from in a number of years. Judging by the look on Hilton’s face, the man was just as surprised to see Sierra there, if not more.

“Sierra Jameson, as I live and breathe. No offense, but this is the last place I expected to find you,” said Hilton, stunned. “Especially after all the stories I heard about you after we…parted ways.”

Sierra scowled at Hilton. Apparently, Hilton’s looks weren’t the only thing Hilton had kept after Sierra had ended their relationship all those years ago. When they’d started dating, Sierra had wanted it to work out with Hilton but that hadn’t been the case when Hilton’s workaholic and perfectionist nature had gotten in the way. Added to the fact that Hilton had seemingly taken Sierra for granted and had also stood her up on their dates one time too many had led to their inevitable breakup.

“I could say the same thing about you, Hilton,” she said, coldly. She strongly disliked her past being brought up. Yes, Sierra did drop out of high school and yes, she had seemingly gone nuts before disappearing from Marla’s house. But none of that had been her fault. She hadn’t even known she was breaking out at the time until John found her and explained everything. Did people really have to keep bringing it up? Sierra wanted to forget it. “I never expected you to be a breakout. Weren’t you supposed to be some wealthy CEO by now or did that plan fall through like
all your other stupid schemes?"

“I take it you two know each other?” interrupted Jedikiah, before Hilton could reply in anger.

Sierra nodded stiffly. “Agent Cole and I dated a long time ago prior to my breakout. But you can be assured, it won’t interfere with our professional lives, sir.” She had no problems with working with her ex-boyfriend but that all depended on whether or not Hilton was the same workaholic jerk she remembered. If he proved to be a pain in her butt while at Ultra, she was going to return the favor.

“I’m pleased to hear it because you’ve just been promoted by the Founder himself thanks to my glowing recommendations,” said Jedikiah, smirking. “Congratulations, Sierra, you’re now in charge of the Founder’s new trainee program. Starting with these two.”

Sierra could not disguise how taken aback she was by this news. A promotion? Her? Granted, she’d made a fuss over being trusted by Ultra but this? This was the last thing she’d ever expected. “I’m sorry. What??"

Hilton’s eyes narrowed as he spluttered. “Excuse me?!”

Mark said nothing. He just shifted uncomfortably to the side.

“Did I stutter? As of this moment, Ultra undergoing a new training regime,” said Jedikiah, briskly, as he took his seat behind his desk. “As per the Founder’s orders, your powers are now a privilege, not a right. If we didn’t need your kind for certain functions and if my niece here—”

“Your niece?” interjected Hilton, shooting an incredulous look at Sierra. “Her? You’ve got to be kidding me!”

Sierra resisted the urge to kick Hilton in the leg and instead, settled for an icy-glare that made him flinch and look away from her.

Jedikiah ignored Hilton’s interruption as he continued, “—weren’t immune to the serum as well as our D-chips, I would gladly depower all of you. Now, that said, Sierra’s place at Ultra is concrete due to her skills both here and on the field as well as her exemplary proofs of her loyalties. But you two have yet to do the same as we’re still in the winnowing process, separating the wheat from the chaff. For now, we’re starting with the two of you. As of this moment, Sierra owns both your asses. Until the time comes when I ask for Sierra’s professional opinion of not only your skills on and off the field, she’s going to be evaluating you, testing you and making sure you’re not a pair of screw-ups that Ultra can’t trust. And you can start by not losing breakouts and if necessary, hold your hand over the candle flame until it burns to the bone if it’s required. If you fail to meet Sierra’s standards, your powers will be stripped and you’ll be expelled from this agency. Is that clear?”

Both Hilton and Mark quickly nodded, though there was a great deal of irritation if not resentment in Hilton’s eyes as he did so.

“Now, to get your feet wet, we’re going to give a rather dangerous assignment. Julian Master. Anyone know that name?” asked Jedikiah.

Hilton promptly answered before Sierra could speak. “A breakout from five or six years ago. He was known for torturing homo sapiens as well as recruiting young and impressionable young breakouts. He was presumed to have left the country, sir.”

Jedikiah nodded. “Well done. Unfortunately for us, the scumbag’s back in town and he’s
catching the attention of the local law enforcement. Your job is track down the bastard and bring him in as soon as possible. Exposure is not an option. Consider that whilst you prove that either or both of you two belong here. Dismissed.”

And with that dismissal, Sierra and the two trainees left Jedikiah’s office. As soon as they were out of earshot, Sierra got down to business. Jedikiah wanted the two trainees trained and evaluated? Fine. She would start them off with a few rounds of Pin the Opponent.

“All right boys. Let’s get down to business. Time for training. Hit the gym,” she ordered. “Pin the Opponent, best out of five. Now!”

Mark obeyed swiftly and silently and Hilton did the same, but not without giving Sierra a hard look of resentment. Clearly, he didn’t believe what Jedikiah had said about Sierra’s time at Ultra and firmly believed that she was only a privileged agent because of Jedikiah being her uncle. And if he truly hadn’t changed from the man she remembered him as, then Sierra knew that Hilton would look to exploit any kind of weakness from his fellow agents to cement his position at Ultra, even from his own supervising agent. Sierra now had another problem to deal with, one she was not looking forward to at all.

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Later that day, before the planned campout, Sierra convened an emergency meeting, telling the others about Julian Masters and the risk he posed, not only to Ultra and the Tomorrow People but also to the rest of humanity as well.

“. . .and the worst part is, Julian’s not even trying to hide his powers. All his victims’ stories are consistent: he targets rich and privileged humans and then tortures them until he basically collapses,” finished Sierra. “If he could kill, Julian would probably make McCrane look like Ghandi.”

John shook his head in worry and disgust. “Sounds like Julian’s riding the edge of the Prime Barrier. He can’t kill like you or I, but he’s pushing the envelope as far as he can.”

Russell’s face twisted with revolt. “Damn. What a sicko.”

Sierra nodded in agreement. “Local cops are also getting suspicious.”

Cara, who’d yet to speak or move from where she’d been standing, turned around and said, “Sounds like Ultra’s got it covered. You shouldn’t need our help.”

Sierra didn’t like Cara’s flippant attitude towards the problem one bit but didn’t voice her irritation. Instead, she sighed and looked down at her hands. “Normally, Cara, I would agree with you. But in this case, I’m going to need some help. I’ve been promoted at Ultra. Apparently, both the Founder and Jedikiah decided that I have a concrete place there now and I’m in charge of the new trainee program the Founder’s set up. I have to see which of the two trainees under my watch make the cut and become agents or end up with their powers stripped.”

Russell whistled low. “Damn. Didn’t realize Ultra had their own Triwizard Tournament.”

“It’s more complicated than that. One of the trainees I’m supervising is my ex-boyfriend, Hilton Cole, who’s not making my job any easier with his holier-than-thou attitude or his stupid
belief that the only reason I’m as high up as I am at Ultra is because I’m Jedikiah’s niece,” said Sierra, as she rubbed the space between her eyes.

John raised an eyebrow before bursting out laughing. “Wow. You do have a thing for Ultra agents.”

Sierra rolled her eyes as she punched John’s shoulder. “Shut up, John.” She did not have a thing for Hilton, not anymore. That ship had sailed a long time ago and besides, she was in a happy relationship with John and she had no intention of ending that. Especially not for someone like Hilton.

Cara looked sympathetic but she remained firm. “I’m sorry about your problems, Sierra, but I know Julian. He’s a nihilist. An anarchist who doesn’t care about exposure or humanity. We do.”

Sierra looked surprised to hear this. Cara knew Julian? That was a surprise she hadn’t expected. “Care to share more with the class?”

Cara sighed and reluctantly explained a little. “When I first got into town, our paths crossed. Julian and his girlfriend Nelly helped out of a tough spot with Ultra and I thought I had friends if not a family with them. But thanks to my recklessness and naiveté, our relationship soured and we didn’t part on the best of terms. I guess you could say that Julian is my McCrane. That’s all I want to say on it. I’m sorry, Sierra, but I can’t help you. We’re not the paranormal police.”

There was a lot more to the story but it was a great deal more than

Sierra gave Cara a sympathetic look but then rose up from where she’d been sitting and placed a hand on Cara’s shoulder.

“Cara, I know better than anyone how you feel right now, but the fact of the matter is, Ultra could take Julian in tomorrow and he’ll still haunt your dreams. He won’t stop being a problem to you until you take action, if not for yourself then for everyone else here,” said Sierra, gently. She then brought up another important matter. “What happens if Julian tracks you down and then turns everyone here into Ultra in exchange for his freedom and vengeance on you? Then we’re all screwed. We need to stop him before it’s too late. I won’t force you but just think about it, okay?”

Cara didn’t reply as she teleported out of the room to give herself time alone to think while Sierra prepared for the campout with John and the kids. Inside, Cara knew Sierra was right, even if she didn’t want to admit it. But how could she go up against Julian and expect to win? He pushed the envelope of the Prime Barrier easily and probably had more paranormals at his disposal than Cara did. Yet if she didn’t do something, people were going to die or worse. What the hell was she supposed to do?

Six years ago

After getting a decent meal, her first hot shower and giving her hair a decent brushing in a good long while, Cara changed into the fresh set of clothes Nelly offered her and then rejoined her new friends in the living room.

Nelly smiled at the sight of her. “Wow. You look insanely beautiful.”

“Really? Thanks,” said Cara, shyly.
“Enough of the small talk. We need to get down to business,” said Julia, briskly. “Ridding yourself of the wet street rat look was just the first step of making yourself stronger. Step two is getting information. Remember those guys in black who were chasing you?” When Cara nodded, Julian continued, “They’re members of an organization known as Ultra. They hunt down people like us, superior people with the powers of gods.”

Nelly’s eyes narrowed as she swatted her boyfriend’s shoulder. “Julian, don’t scare her. And how many times do I have to tell you that we’re not gods? We can’t even kill!”

Julian scowled at his girlfriend. “Hey, you convinced me to bring in your little pet. Don’t go questioning how I do things. If she’s going to do what we do and live with us, she needs to know these things and be prepared. And not just be a pretty face.”

“Prepared for what?” asked Cara. She was beginning to regret staying with Nelly and Julian. They sounded like a pair of dangerous criminals, which was not what she wanted to be or associate with. “What is it you want from me? I don’t understand. Could you please explain?”

Julian’s face twisted with rage and contempt, not directed at Cara, but nevertheless, it frightened her. “We’re a superior species, we’re the predators but we’re hunted down like rats, like prey. We should be batting them around like a cat does with its play toys. So, if you want to stay with us, we need you to practice your powers, get your strength built up and enhance your skills. And we’re going to start now by trying to find the killer inside her. Hit me with your best shot.”

Cara stared at Julian like he’d lost his mind. Hit him? The killer inside her? She wasn’t that kind person. She wasn’t a monster, no matter what kind of powers she had.

“What, don’t think you have it in you to be a fighter? Then walk into Ultra and surrender your powers right now. Best case scenario, they’ll take your powers. Worst case? They’ll cook your brain or kill you by putting a bullet in your head. But if you stick with us, we’ll teach you how to survive then we’ll teach you how to live. So, what’s it going to be, Cara?” said Julian.

Cara didn’t like either scenario but as she had no choice in the matter if she wanted to survive, she chose the latter and TK’d Julian into the wall as hard as she could. Once it was over, Cara ran to Julian’s side, horrified by what she’d just done.

“Sorry! I’m so sorry. Are you hurt?” she fretted.

But much to Cara’s shock, Julian was laughing and seemed pleased by Cara’s show of strength. “Sorry? Damn girl, you should be proud. Been a while since I met someone with your strength. You’re going to fit in quite well here.”

Cara didn’t know if she liked the sound of that or not, but there was no turning back now.

XXX

The next day, Cara decided to attempt to persuade Julian to leave town. If she was successful, it would mean one less problem for everyone, both the Tomorrow People and Ultra to deal with. If she wasn’t, then she didn’t know what would happen. She brought a small party with her to a moving yet empty subway car, consisting of Russell and John, the latter was armed with his gun just in case things went south and only as a last resort.
“How do you know Julian’s going to show?” asked Russell.

“I sent up a psychic flare and he hates me. Trust me, if he’s on the island, he won’t pass up the chance to see me,” said Cara.

Right on cue, Julian teleported into the subway car. “Cara Coburn. What a pleasure. See you’re still affecting Nelly’s style and her attitude. Pale imitation. You’re still the same old Cara. Now, what the hell do you want?”

Cara glared at Julian. “What I want is for you to leave town while you still can. We came here to warn you. You’re not only on the cops’ radar, you’re on Ultra’s. And they’re not looking to invite you into their ranks. So, I suggest you leave while you still can.”

In spite of this warning, Julian wasn’t bothered in the least. “Thanks, but no thanks. I just got back. I’m going to stick around.”

Cara exhaled slowly so as not to lose her cool. “Ultra’s gotten a lot stronger since you’ve left, Julian. As am I.”

Julian sneered. “Oh, so it’s leave or you’ll give me the boot? Who’s going to make me? You and your formidable new gang? I’ve heard about their sorry existence. Life trapped underground hiding like the filthy rats you are. Hell, you all look vitamin-deficient. Have some fun, soak up the sun. Or is that not your style?”

Not one to enjoy listening to people diss his friends, Russell began to lose his temper at this point and stepped towards Julian. “Who the hell do you think you are, man? Acting like you own the town? One word from my boss and I’ll drop you like a bag of dirt.”

Julian’s sneer disappeared and was replaced with a cold hard glare as he got right into Russell’s face. “I do own it! And FYI, you couldn’t take me if you tried, sewer rat!”

Cara stepped in between the two men before a fight could break out. “Enough of the bickering. What’s it going to be, Julian? Are you leaving or not?”

Julian’s glare deepened as he got right into Cara’s face. “Like you have the right to speak to me! Let alone look me in the eye!” he spat.

John moved for his gun hidden in his jacket but one glance from Cara stopped him. “We are not at war with the saps,” said Cara, through clenched teeth. “We are trying to coexist. We do not torture people. It doesn’t serve anyone’s interest.”

A cold, bitter laugh escaped Julian’s throat. “Coexist? Why the hell should I want to coexist with the vermin who took everything from me? Humans are our enemies, Cara. Or don’t you remember? You should. You were there. Frankly, I’m surprised your two puppies even follow you considering what a jelly-spined, ineffectual skank you are. Amazing you’re still alive considering how pathetic and weak you were back in the day.”

At that point, Russell finally lost his temper, grabbed Julian by the lapels of his jacket and tossed the rude little man into the wall. Before he could get much further with the “ass-kicking,” all of Julian’s subordinates teleported in. There were at least half a dozen of them, all armed to the teeth and looking ready for a reason to beat the living crap out of people.

Even with John and his gun, Cara’s party was still outmanned and outgunned and therefore, there was no point in fighting a battle they couldn’t win. So, Cara ordered a retreat, much to
Julian’s immense delighted pleasure.

“That’s right. I’m not going anywhere. New York is mine, bitch!” he crowed, as Cara and her team teleported away.

They had gone there to achieve victory and instead they’d lost and achieved nothing. Now, what were they going to do?

XXX

When Cara returned to Lair, she was quite upset about the botched mission.

It had been six long years and although Cara had grown considerably stronger and had a strong group of people behind her, Julian still had a hold over Cara just as Sierra had said. Was this never going to end? Was Julian always going to have such a powerful, tight grip over Cara?

“Hey, just wanted you to know, Robbie’s here for the rest of the day until Sierra picks him up,” said Russell, snapping Cara out of her thoughts. “Also, where the hell did Julian get such a posse? Those guys looked prison hard.”

Cara sighed. “I’m sure Julian scoured the world for sadistic scum just like him.” It didn’t surprise her. That was always Julian’s favorite method next to the torturing of innocent lives.

Russell sat across from the bar Cara was leaning on. “So, what’s our next move, Chief?”

Cara sighed yet again. “For now, we lay low. Now that we know Julian’s got his own psycho army, we just have to wait.”

Russell frowned. “Wait until when?”

“Until we can find a better way to deal with him. But odds are, thanks to Julian’s idiotic recklessness, he’s going to be caught by Ultra sooner or later. Sierra’s got the manpower to take Julian at Ultra, we don’t. But we will keep tabs on him for now, just in case he decides to come after us first.” said Cara. Cowardly it mean have seemed but for now, it was their only means of survival against Julian and his band of nutcases.

“Who do you want to tail him?” asked Russell.

“I will,” said Cara, with a newfound determination. She would not risk anyone else’s life. She was expendable if she was caught. The others were not.

Russell stopped Cara before she could take off. “Wait, maybe you should stay with the troops. I mean, Charlotte’s pretty panicked as it is and if the woman who helped save her life takes off, she’s going to be even more upset. Why don’t I go? I’ll be like a fly on the wall.”

Cara had to admit that Russell had a good point and decided to allow it. “Any developments, you report back immediately, don’t engage him and Russell, please be careful. If Julian catches you ___”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be careful,” promised Russell.

He then took off, leaving Cara alone with her thoughts.
Cara’s peace was disturbed, however, by yet another powerful telepathic panic attack from Charlotte. This was one was far worse than all the others, stronger in pain and immensely louder in the high-pitched screaming. Before any of the adults could attempt to snap Charlotte out of it, Robbie burst forth and grabbed his sister’s hands before pulling her into a tight hug.

*Charlotte, it’s me! yelled Robbie. I know you’re scared but open your eyes, it’s just a dream! Wherever you are, it’s not real! I’m here, so is Daddy! Follow my voice, come back to me, sis! You’re safe, we’ll all safe. No one’s ever going to hurt us ever again, just wake up!*

Upon hearing her brother’s voice, Charlotte snapped out of her panic attack induced nightmare and looked panicked for a moment.


Robbie shook his head as he hugged her again. “No, you didn’t. You’re safe. We’re both safe.”

Charlotte returned the embrace and buried her face in the crook of her brother’s shoulder.

John knelt down beside his children and pulled them in for a tight embrace. “It’s okay, kiddos. You’re safe with people who love you, I promise. I’m right here and I’m never going to leave you. Just hold on to me until you calm down.”

Charlotte didn’t hesitate to bury her face into her father’s chest while she slowly attempted to calm herself down. In her father’s arms, she felt safe and loved and she never wanted that feeling to stop. Not ever. But how long would it be before she had another attack and people got sick of her? She wasn’t an idiot, she knew everyone was getting wary of her panic attacks.

When Charlotte had sufficiently calmed down, she broke apart from her father and brother’s embrace and looked to John for what to do next.

“Both of you, go wait for me in the training room. I think it’s time to start training you both,” said John, as an idea came to him. “It’ll be good, I promise.”

Robbie looked excited at finally starting his training with his father, though Charlotte was more hesitant than her brother. But nevertheless, as ordered, they went to the training room to wait for their father’s arrival.

When they were gone, Morgan stepped forward. “I hate to be the bearer of bad news but you should know something. Charlotte’s attacks are attacking all of us and there’re only getting worse. With all they’ve been through, there’s been talk of sending Charlotte to live with Sierra until she gets her powers under control,” admitted Morgan. “I wasn’t one of them. But I’m beginning to wonder if it wouldn’t be such a bad idea. I mean, Sierra is Charlotte’s mom and she does know a thing or two about kids and trauma.”

John’s eyes darkened with rage at the mere idea of sending his daughter away. The panic attacks weren’t Charlotte’s fault! How dare they! Was this what they did now? Kick the weak from herd? Well, they would do so over John’s dead body.

“Over my dead body,” growled John. He turned to the crowd. “If anyone wants to kick Charlotte out, they’ll have to go through me. Do you really want that? We don’t do this to our own!” Regardless of his rank among the Tomorrow People, John would do whatever it took to keep Charlotte safe. Even from his own people.

“He’s right,” said Cara. She stood before the crowd with a new look of resolve. “Chloe screamed in her mind when she first moved in. And Dunbar’s telekinesis was like a firehose before
we trained him properly. If we kicked out everyone who showed up with bruises or trauma, there’d be none of us left. You know Ultra’s now stripping the powers of the agents who don’t make the cut? If we kick Charlotte out, we’re no better than they are. Charlotte stays. Any objections?"

To John’s immense relief, nobody objected to Charlotte staying after Cara’s rousing speech. Some even felt ashamed of themselves for even considering it considering their own past histories. And there was a unanimous agreement to treat Charlotte better and to better help her with her trauma.

XXX

Back in the training room, John had started his children on a small training regime. It was small due to the fact that while his kids were quite powerful, they were still very young and John had no desire to make them endure the same brutal training tactics he’d endured at Ultra. He taught them basic fighting moves, how to concentrate on their breathing and little tricks on controlling the abilities. Robbie loved it and seemed to relish it. But due to her trauma, Charlotte did not. She struggled immensely, despite her best efforts.

“Okay, this is good. You’re making progress,” said John, encouragingly, as she hit the punching gloves that John was wearing.

Charlotte didn’t share in her father’s opinion, as was evident by the tears in her eyes. “This is not good! This isn’t going to work! I’m going to be kicked out to live on the streets or I’ll have to live with Mom and that’ll just get her exposed and killed!”

“That’s not going to happen. Cara and I had a talk with the others. Nobody’s going to kick you out or make you do anything you don’t want to do,” said John, firmly.

“I won’t let them,” added Robbie, fiercely.

Tears slid down Charlotte’s pale cheeks and she started breathing so quickly that she was almost hyperventilating.

“I’m trying to do what you said. I’m trying to focus on my breathing but it’s not enough,” said Charlotte, panicking.

John shook his head. “No, you’re learning to concentrate on your breathing,” he corrected. “Once you learn that, you’ll be able to take all that anger, confusion, frustration and turn it into something good. Just like your mom and I did, just like your brother did.”

Charlotte’s head shot up and she looked at her father in surprise and confusion. Though she knew bits and pieces of family’s pasts, she didn’t know the full story. So, it was quite a surprise to hear that they had been through traumatic experiences similar to Charlotte’s own.

“I was taken by a bad man who hurt Mom,” admitted Robbie. Unconsciously, he slid his hand into his father’s and it was gently squeezed by John. Though it had been months, Robbie still had occasional bad dreams about the time McCrane abducted him and forced Robbie to undo the cellular damage Sierra had inflicted. “He threatened me and made me heal him.”

“And when I was not much older than you, Ultra took me. They experimented on me, turned me into their weapon,” explained John. “They hurt me, just like they hurt you. And before your
brother was born, your mom was attacked and hurt pretty bad by the very same man who later kidnapped your brother.”

“So, what happened? It seems like you all turned out okay,” said Charlotte, in both admiration and frustration. Her family had been through hell too and yet they were some of the strongest people that Charlotte had ever seen. Nothing seemed to faze them as far as she could tell.

“Well, we’re all okay now, but a long time, we were all messed up pretty badly and we only started to heal after we were able to take our fear of those who hurt us, what we thought were our greatest weaknesses, and turn it into something powerful,” said John. “And we did that by taking the darkness inside of us and using it as weapon.”

Charlotte still looked confused and even Robbie was looking a little puzzled by this.

“Both of you, close your eyes,” said John.

Charlotte and Robbie did as told. They closed their eyes and even took each other’s hands while John encircled them,

“All those bad memories, all those horrible nightmares are like dark storm clouds passing through your minds. And the cloud that’s about Ultra is the darkest of them all and blocks out the sun,” said John. “Now, imagine that you both reach out with one hand, you take that black cloud and you—”

Without thinking, both Charlotte and Robbie’s eyes shot open and their free hands clenched into fists, which they shot out like a bullet and from their hands came a powerful telekinetic burst of energy that sent John flying into the wall and the resulting shockwave also decimated a number of the pipes in the room like glass.

Charlotte and Robbie looked both shocked and excited about what they’d just done and John looked immensely proud of his children as he stood up.

“You did it, you two. You did it,” said John, smiling, as he hugged them. “I’d say you both earned yourselves an ice-cream sundae.”

For the first time since she’d been rescued, Charlotte smiled brightly and truly believed that all was going to be well.

XXX

Meanwhile, Russell was reporting to Cara of what he’d found out from his spying on Julian at said lunatic’s current place of residence, one that he’d forcibly taken from an unsuspecting human he’d tortured.

“This is the place that Julian was targeting his next attack,” said Russell. He gestured to the image of a fancy, highly expensive, luxurious apartment building in the high end of town. There were countless innocent people in those apartments.

Cara didn’t like this. “Which apartment?”

“All of them,” said Russell, grimly. “He’s calling it a shopping trip. Sounds like a B&E.”

Cara shook her head. She knew Julian all too well and she knew damn well this was no
breaking and entering crime. Not if Julian had his way. “It’s not the loot they’re after. Julian will torture and terrify anyone he can get his hands on.”

Russell looked sickened. “What’s this guy got against humans?”

Cara sighed and a wave of grief and guilt threatened to overwhelm her. “He thinks they’re weak, that our kind is superior. Julian can’t kill, so he figures beat them half to death and scare them the rest of the way. But more than that, humans killed the only one Julian ever loved.”

And Cara should know. After all, she was there.

Six years ago

Cara wept as she placed pressure on Nelly’s wound, but she knew it was no good. How had everything gone so wrong?

Earlier that day, Cara had been dragged along a robbery of a wealthy man’s house. The house was supposed to be vacant and the man’s property insured so no real damage would ensue. But from the moment they’d set foot in the mansion, everything had gone south. The owner had still been there and when he’d discovered the trio in his mansion, Cara had wanted to flee with what they’d stolen but Julian had been against it. He’d knocked out the owner and ordered the man be tied up while he and Nelly continued to loot the place.

While the man regained consciousness, he’d begged Cara to free him, claiming that he had a heart condition and he was going to die soon if he didn’t get his medication if Julian didn’t kill him first. He swore that if free, he’d leave and wouldn’t call the police. Foolishly, Cara had believed him and freed him. But in doing so, caused the death of Nelly for as soon as Nelly returned to Cara, the man had returned with a powerful gun and shot Nelly before Julian arrived and dealt with the owner.

“Nelly? Nelly, stay with me baby,” he begged, as tears pooled in his eyes. “Nelly, please!”

But it was no use. Nelly’s injuries were too great and within moments, she died in Julian’s arms.

“What the hell happened?” demanded Julian, as his grief turned to rage. “What did you do?”

Tears streamed down Cara’s cheeks. “I’m sorry…I-I didn’t…” Oh, God, how could she have been so foolish? If it wasn’t for her, none of this would’ve happened. Nelly would still be alive if she hadn’t be so stupid! “Julian, I…”

“You were weak!” hissed Julian, furiously. “And now Nelly’s dead because of you!” He grabbed Cara by the throat and would’ve killed her had the Prime Barrier not kicked in right then and there. “IF ONLY I COULD KILL YOU!”

Cara yelped in pain as Julian released her and she took in deep gulps of air.

“Ultra will find you within a week at best,” said Julian, coldly. “And when they do, they’ll lock you up, strip you of your powers. You will die human, Cara. That’s what you deserve!”

And with that, Julian teleported away, leaving Cara alone with Nelly’s body and her tears.
“You know, if we can get a suppression cuff on him, I’m betting the rest of his mutts will scatter,” said Russell, snapping Cara out of her thoughts.

Cara gave Russell an incredulous look as though he’d gone mad. “And if they don’t? I don’t want any of our people compromised!”

“I’m not talking about everyone, I’m talking about me,” said Russell.

Cara shook her head. Getting a suppression cuff on Julian was a good idea but it was still far too dangerous for any of them to do it. Now, they knew more about Julian’s plans and his location, they had to give this mission to people in a better position to take Julian down.

“Absolutely not. Russell, it was a recon mission. I’m passing this off to Sierra. Let her and Ultra deal with it,” said Cara, firmly.

“Cara, please,” begged Russell. “At least let me check the place to see what else Julian might be up to.”

Cara sighed in exasperation and threw up her hands. “Fine, but you come back as soon as I say so and you do not compromise Sierra or her team. Is that clear?”

Russell grinned and nodded before taking off to Julian’s place.

XXX

Back at Ultra, Sierra was going over the personnel files of Mark and Hilton yet again while they trained. So far, both were holding their own pretty well against different opponents but when they fought each other, Hilton always won due to his cutthroat nature. Jedikiah was going to ask about Sierra’s professional opinion on them soon and she wanted to be prepared to give a full and honest answer. She had to be one hundred percent certain about her decision whether or not to allow Mark and Hilton to become full Ultra agents.

Sierra had gone over their papers at least three times, she’d had numerous talks with them, getting an idea of what they were like and had even had a few practice missions to see how well they handled following orders and bringing in breakouts. So, far both candidates had done well in all regards but she couldn’t be completely sure of them until she had a chance to see them on the real battlefield. But did she dare risk it, especially with Hilton? It didn’t help that there was a tension between her and Hilton so thick it could be cut with a knife.

Sierra, I’ve got a head’s up on Julian’s next move, called Cara. He’s going to attack the apartment building on the corner of Hilltop Sunrise. Don’t take any chances with him. You need to take him down and turn him into Ultra before any of his crew arrives.

Sighing in relief at the chance to get out of the office for a bit, Sierra handed the files to a guard who was supervising the training match.
Great, I could use the chance to stretch my legs, said Sierra.

Just be careful. You may be evolved and able to kill but you don’t know Julian like I do, warned Cara.

I’ll watch myself, promise, assured Sierra. She then clapped her hands, stopping the current sparring match between Hilton and Mark. “Time! Take a lunch break. I’ll be back in a little bit.”

“Where are you going?” demanded Hilton.

“That’s on a need-to-know basis and last time I checked, you don’t need to know. Stay put and wait until I get back,” said Sierra, sternly. While she knew now was the best time to test Mark and Hilton on an actual battlefield, she didn’t want to have to explain how she’d found out Julian’s location without raising up a lot of unwanted questions. “That’s an order.”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra left Ultra for Julian’s location. She arrived in the basement of the apartment complex just as Julian did and she was just about to make her move when Hilton suddenly teleported in behind her.

“What the hell are you doing here?” hissed Sierra. “I told you to stay at the base!”

“I could ask the same of you,” Hilton shot back. “And for your information, I had your phone pinged so I could follow you. You’re going after Julian alone, aren’t you? How did you even find him and why didn’t you tell anyone at Ultra?”

“None of your damned business! I’m your superior officer and I will not be questioned by the likes of you!” hissed Sierra. “Now, shut up!”

Julian was right around the corner and he realized he’d been compromised, he would bolt and the whole mission would be botched. Thankfully, Hilton obeyed and drew his tranquilizer gun. He’d just taken a step forward when he tripped and in doing so, created a loud noise that warned Julian he was not alone.

“Damnit!” hissed Sierra. “Hilton, no!”

But this time, Hilton didn’t listen as he quickly rose up and attempted to take Julian down by shooting him with tranquilizers but Julian evaded Hilton easily and teleported away. Once he was gone, Sierra slammed Hilton up against the wall by his throat.

“What the hell was that? Julian’s gone, thanks to you!” snarled Sierra.

She knew Hilton could be an opportunistic jerk but this was pushing it.

Hilton was unrepentant as he forced Sierra’s hand off him. “I saw a chance to nab Julian and I took it. And for your information, I’m trying to make the cut at Ultra like a good agent!”

“And how exactly do you expect to make the cut by screwing up my ops?” demanded Sierra. Hilton was complete moron if he couldn’t see just how badly he’d messed up. “Do you want me to fail you to Jedikiah? Is that it?”

Hilton actually sneered. “Oh, please. Just because you’re the boss’s niece doesn’t mean you have any actual power at Ultra. Face it, Sierra, you’re still the same girl I used to date all those years ago. You’re soft, weak—”

At that point, Sierra lost her temper and she touched Hilton’s face and invoked her power of
biological manipulation, causing Hilton to experience such horrendous pain as his body destroyed itself that he collapsed to his knees in agony and gasped for breath. Sierra stood threateningly above him and glared darkly at her ex-boyfriend.

“Get this through your thick skull, Hilton. You don’t know a damn thing about me or my service at Ultra. If you’d bothered to check my file, you’d know that I didn’t rise through the ranks because of my connections. I earned my place, just like Jedikiah said. And I am not the same person you knew! I’m a hell of a lot more powerful now and I’m not afraid to use that strength on anyone who goes up against me. So, if you ever disrespect, cross me, threaten me or my ops again, I won’t just fail you to Jedikiah. I’ll plunge the damn needle into your neck and dump your sorry ass in a hellhole myself without so much as a second thought,” growled Sierra. “Jedikiah wasn’t exaggerating when he said I owned your sorry butt. So, I suggest you shape the hell up or else. Is that clear?”

Harsh though it may have seemed, Sierra didn’t have anymore patience for Hilton or his stubborn foolishness. His actions not only jeopardized the lives of countless innocents, but it also put Sierra and her family at risk—something she would not tolerate.

Hilton, who could barely breathe let alone speak, just nodded quickly before reaching for Sierra’s hand. When she took it, she undid the damage she’d done to Hilton’s body and not a moment too soon. Moments later, Hilton was standing on shaky knees and gasping for breath but he was also looking at Sierra with newfound respect and possibly, admiration.

“Looks like I underestimated you, Jameson,” he said. “I won’t make that same mistake twice.”

“See that you don’t,” snapped Sierra. “And see to it that you never disobey me again. Now, get back to base before I decide to tell my uncle about how you screwed up in capturing Julian and I recommend you for depowering. Go! NOW!”

Hilton didn’t need to be told twice as he teleported back to Ultra headquarters.

Sierra sighed. Her problem with Hilton was dealt with, but that was just the tip of the iceberg as far as her problems went. She still had other, much bigger issues to deal with and they would not be gotten rid of so easily.

*Cara, bad news. Julian’s still on the loose,* said Sierra.

*What?* said Cara, sounding scared. *What happened?*

*Hilton screwed everything up,* said Sierra.

*Dammit. Russell!*

Sierra’s blood ran cold. *Russell? What about Russell?*

*He went to spy on Julian,* confessed Cara.

*He WHAT?!! Cara, he needs to get out of there NOW!* exclaimed Sierra. What the hell was Russell doing spying on Julian? Was he trying to get himself killed? Sierra could only pray that Russell would get out of Julian’s house in time before he was caught.
Not long after Julian escaped, Russell could not be contacted and soon after, he was found on an empty subway car. Poor Russell had been caught in Julian’s house and the bastard had beaten Russell to a bloody pulp before letting his goons take a turn. Only when Russell was out cold and on the verge of death did he dump Russell to be found by Cara and John. And it was only thanks to Robbie’s visions that Russell was even located at all.

Everyone in the Lair looked horrified at the sight of Russell’s bloodied and broken body as Cara and John carried him through the Lair and onto a couch.

“What happened?” gasped Morgan.

“Julian and his goons found him and beat him to a bloody pulp, that’s what happened,” said John, shortly. “Left him on a subway train for us to find. He’s alive but just barely and not for long.”

“John, get Sierra. Tell her we need her now,” ordered Cara. If Russell was going to make it, they needed Sierra’s biological manipulation ability right then and there. “I never should’ve let him go on his own to spy on Julian. I may not be able to kill Julian, but I swear to God, I’m going to make that bastard wish he was dead!”

John nodded and then sent out a telepathic call to Sierra. Moments later, Sierra teleported in and ran straight to Russell without so much as a word and then she placed her hands on Russell’s injured body. He was then healed completely of all of his injuries but Russell still didn’t wake up.

“Why isn’t he waking up?” asked Cara, worriedly.

“Because he’s exhausted and needs to sleep. I can heal physical injuries but I can’t cure exhaustion,” explained Sierra. “I heard him whisper about box cars and snake eyes. Trust me, Russell’s fine. We just let him rest.”

Cara heaved a sigh of relief and chuckled. “Unconscious and he’s still throwing dice. Thank God you’re an evolved Tomorrow Person or he’d be a lot worse off.”

“Yeah, thank God. But you realize we’re back to square one? Julian’s still out there and he did this to him to send you a message,” said Sierra. “He thinks he can scare you. Only question is, is it working? What do you want to do, Cara?”

Cara’s hand clenched into a fist. “What I should’ve done in the first place. I’m going after Julian alone and I’m going to take him down.”

Sierra’s eyes widened in alarm and she rose up to stop Cara in her path before Cara could take off. “Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. Cara! You said from the start that Julian was too dangerous to go up against alone. This just proves you were right. We can’t lose you, not now.”

“So, what am I supposed to do? Risk my team?” asked Cara.

Sierra shook her head. “No, I think after what I’ve seen here, it might be best to send mine.”

Cara raised a skeptical eyebrow. “A couple of Ultra trainees? And do you really trust Hilton not to screw it up after he botched your first attempt to nab Julian?”

“I think I scared Hilton straight, to be honest,” admitted Sierra. Though she still had little like for the man and he was probably going to try her patience again, Sierra had to admit that Hilton
had the makes of a good agent once he was polished up a little. Especially after the scare that Sierra had given him that afternoon. “He’s also pretty damn cutthroat and I think he could take Julian down in a fight if need be. Anyway, you really should let my team handle this. Julian sent you this message because he wants you to attack him head-on and he wants you to play right into his strength.”

Cara was quiet for a moment as she contemplated this and then an idea came to her. “What if we got Julian to play right into my strength? The fact that he thinks that I don’t have one, I mean. And what if it doesn’t have to be my team or yours that takes him down? What if it was both?”

Sierra frowned in confusion. “How do you mean?”

“I have an idea, but it won’t work without your consent, John’s and another party’s. But you won’t like it and I’ll never ask again, I swear.” Cara then went on to explain her plan. As predicated, Sierra was highly against it and the argument escalated when John got involved. Voices were raised, punches were almost thrown, brains almost blasted by telepathic attacks, the usual—but in the end, Cara got all the consent she needed and the plan was agreed on.

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At Julian’s place, one of his goons walked to answer the knock on the door when the door and the goon was suddenly blasted by Cara’s telekinesis as she stormed into the house.

“JULIAN!” she roared. “WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?!

Julian teleported in front of Cara, smirking. “No need to shout, I can hear you. Though, I must say, you know how to make quite an entrance. I take it you received my message?”

“I brought my response,” said Cara, smirking back. She snapped her fingers and all of her people teleported into the room, ready for a fight.

Instead of being impressed or intimidated, Julian laughed patronizingly. “These losers? I see you had to bring your B-team. Unless, of course, you’ve got some kind of secret weapon? Like that blond loser, John Young? The Annex Project reject? Yeah, I know all about him. Pity you didn’t bring him. Otherwise, you might’ve actually had a shot at winning against me.”

Cara just glared darkly at Julian.

“Look at you, playing the warrior queen,” mocked Julian. “Although instead of fighting, you could always join me. Think about it. My strength and your…whatever. We could rule this city.”


Julian wiped his eyes clean. “I can’t say I’m surprised by your response. You may act all tough now, but I know who you really are: you’re the same, pathetic, weak little girl who dined on stolen junk food. You’re a sewer rat, Cara.”

“Think again. I’m not that same person anymore, Julian,” spat Cara. “I’m not scared of you.”

Julian glared darkly at Cara. “You should be. I’m not the same person either. Thanks to you. You gave me my first test of your secret drug. I’ve shared it with all my friends. Isn’t that right?”
All of Julian’s goons nodded their heads and murmured in agreement. “But you? You can’t appreciate it. You don’t know what you’re missing. I’ve never felt such a rush or so alive as when I was pounding your friend’s pathetic face in.” When Cara looked away, seemingly in tears, Julian sneered in smug contempt. “Same old Cara. You haven’t changed a bit.”

But a nasty surprise came Julian’s way when Cara telekinetically blasted Julian up into the ceiling and onto the floor of the upper hallway with tremendous force. A fight then ensued between Julian’s goons and Cara’s people. At first, Cara’s people seemed to be able to hold their own against Julian’s goons, but then one-by-one, each and every one of Cara’s people seemingly left her alone to fight against Julian on the upper level of the building.

“NO!” cried Cara, distraught.

“Oh, yes! Your so-called loyal dogs are scared and they abandoned you!” Julian grabbed Cara by the throat and then tossed her onto the floor. Yet when Cara stood up, she looked unafraid as she stood her ground against Julian, who wanted to take her down himself. “Looks like you’re right back where you started, Cara. Alone.”

Cara smirked smugly. “I’m not alone.” She then teleported away, revealing her secret weapon, which had been hiding behind her. But it wasn’t a what, it was a who—Charlotte. After a discussion with her parents, Charlotte had decided that she wanted to stop being afraid and wanted to help take Julian down. With the help of her telepathic connection to Robbie, Charlotte was now bursting with powerful psychic energy which she then proceeded to unleash upon Julian and all his goons.

Within moments, every single one of the paranormals there was crumbling on the ground, unable to move or even teleport away. When Charlotte finished her attack and teleported away, Julian found that not only were all his goons out cold, his powers had been temporarily disrupted in the process. And it was bad luck on Julian’s part, for it was right then and there that Sierra and her team burst in through the front door. Officially, an anonymous tip had come over the police scanner regarding Julian’s whereabouts, which led Sierra’s team right to the scumbag. Unofficially, Sierra was acting on a tip from Cara’s people.

“Backup’s on the way with a wagon. In the meantime, get the cuffs on them and tranq any who wake up at once,” ordered Sierra. “Find Julian!”

“Sierra, up there!” yelled Hilton, when he spotted Julian attempting to escape up the stairs.

“Hilton, grab him!” ordered Sierra.

Hilton nodded and teleported upstairs to Julian. He then proceeded to telekinetically break Julian’s left leg in two, sending Julian crumbling to the ground in sheer agony and Hilton was about to tranq and cuff Julian so Julian could be taken into custody, when Julian’s powers suddenly returned. Hilton was thrown into the wall and then Julian teleported away.

“Damn it!” cursed Hilton, as Sierra teleported to Hilton’s position. “He got away. I’m sorry.”

Sierra looked disappointed but she still held out her hand for Hilton to take. “You disabled him for now and we got his goons. That’s a win. Next time, Julian won’t escape.”

Of that, Sierra was going to make certain, come what may.
When Sierra and her team dropped Julian’s goons off at Ultra to be depowered, they were met by Jedikiah, who was actually applauding them.

“Very impressive work, Sierra. Very impressive. It’d be better if you’d gotten Julian, but I’ll take this for today. Well done,” said Jedikiah, smiling.

“Thank you sir. But you should know that Julian may have escaped but he won’t be causing trouble for at least a month or more. Hilton was able to break one of Julian’s legs before he escaped,” reported Sierra.

Hilton actually blushed just a little under Sierra’s praise.

“Glad to hear it. But on the note of the team’s effort, now’s as good a time as any to get your final decision regarding these two new recruits, Sierra,” said Jedikiah. “So, what do you say? Do they make the cut or do they get cut?”

Mark looked nervous and there was the smallest hint of fear in Hilton’s eyes as they awaited Sierra’s decision. This was it. This was the moment that decided their futures.

Sierra took a deep breath and hoped she wasn’t going to regret this. “Though they are still rough around the edge, after watching their prowess both in training and out in the field, after going over their psyche evaluations and seeing how they take to commands on the fields, I’ve decided to recommend both trainees to full agent status.”

Mark sighed in relief and even Hilton was smiling just a little.

Jedikiah was unsurprised yet also pleased. “A two-way win. Congratulations. But know this, you may have a future at Ultra, only the best of the best can move forward like Miss Jameson here. You’d both do well to follow her example. Now, go rest up. You both have a full day ahead of you tomorrow. Also, don’t make Sierra regret this decision and do well to remember that one word from her and your asses are back on the line.”

And with that, Jedikiah departed from the parking garage and Mark followed suit, not wishing to linger any longer than need be. Hilton, however, stayed behind while Sierra took a moment to answer a text from her mother on her cell phone.

Hilton cleared his throat to get her attention. “Hey, uh, I owe you an apology.”

Sierra raised an eyebrow as she pocketed her cell phone. “For what? Assuming that Jedikiah was exaggerating about me and that I was just a privileged agent because I’m his niece? For being such a jerk when we were dating? Or for going behind my back and messing up the first attempt to capture Julian Masters?”

Hilton winced and sighed. “All of the above. I messed up with us because I was a hardheaded jerk and there’s no fixing the past. But I can make amends for the rest of it. I was wrong about everything and I’m sorry about all that. After you showed me what you’re capable of, I…I read your personnel file. All of it. It was very detailed about your service here at Ultra and what you’re capable of and I’ve heard a lot about your relationship with the boss.”

Sierra sighed as she folded her arms across her chest. “Then you know that I didn’t exactly join up voluntarily or that my time here’s been easy. Since I’ve come to work for Ultra, I’ve had my loyalties questioned multiple times by the Founder himself and my uncle, I had to face a homicidal maniac who hurt and traumatized me in ways I can’t begin to describe, I’ve had the crap kicked out
of me and I’ve been shot. I’ve also lost the man I once loved and a daughter I’ve never known to the enemy. I’ve had to go extraordinary lengths just to stay alive and keep my son safe,” she murmured. “I may be Jedikiah’s blood, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t wish he could get rid of me sometimes.”

Hilton looked horrified and then sympathetic, if not apologetic. “I…I’m so sorry. I didn’t realize…”

“Well, how could you? I didn’t exactly tell you and you weren’t up for listening,” said Sierra, not unkindly. There was a lot of history and tension between the two of them. It was only to be expected that it would cause such big issues between them in the work place. Sierra sighed again. “Look, Hilton, regardless of what’s happened between us, you should know that I wouldn’t have made my decision if I hadn’t meant it. You’ve been a big pain in my ass but there’s no denying that I could use someone like you watching my back.”

Hilton was rough around the edges and he had a lot of work to do before he and Sierra became friends, but she couldn’t deny that Hilton had the makings of a good agent when he wanted to be. He had tenacity, a good work ethic, he could be loyal to his friends and he was a force to be reckoned with. Having a partner would make things a little harder with her double-agent work but at the same time, having a partner verifying Sierra’s work would help further cement her place at Ultra.

Hilton looked surprised if not hopeful. “You serious? You’d let me be your partner?”

“If Jedikiah wanted it, I wouldn’t protest so long as I know I can trust you to watch my back,” said Sierra. “Because at the end of the day, all I want is to go home to my son. So, what do you say?” She held out her hand.

Hilton didn’t hesitate to take it. “I’d be honored.”

Sierra smiled. “Glad to hear it.”

“So, now that we’ve made up, care to get a drink? As colleagues if not friends, of course,” he added, quickly. “I mean, you’re amazing and all, but I don’t know if you want to rekindle what we had.”

Sierra chuckled. “I’m actually seeing someone right now, so no on that.” Plus, even if she hadn’t been seeing John, Sierra had no desire to renew her romantic relationship with Hilton. They were better off as colleagues, if not friends. “As for that drink, can you take a raincheck? I promised my son I’d spend the evening with him.”


Sierra smiled again. “Thanks, Hilton. See you tomorrow.” She waved good-bye and the teleported away from Ultra.

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When Sierra arrived at the Lair, she immediately found herself being hugged by her daughter, who was being applauded and celebrated by everyone there for her work in taking down Julian.
“Mommy!”

“Charlotte!” Sierra wrapped her arms around Charlotte and held her close. Though Sierra had heard from Cara that Charlotte was safe, it was still a relief to have her safe in Sierra’s arms as a confirmation. “Sweetie, I am so, so proud of you. You did a really good job today. You and your brother.”

Charlotte beamed. “Thanks, Mom.”

Sierra held up a finger. “But I never want you doing that again. Understand?”

Robbie and Charlotte’s actions had been heroic and selflessly noble and they’d been a tremendous help for Sierra, but nevertheless, she never wanted either of her children in the line of fire ever again, whether they were there in person or telepathically.

Charlotte didn’t even hesitate to nod. “Yes, Mom.”

Sierra smiled in relief and hugged Charlotte again before holding Robbie, who’d run straight to the pair in a loving embrace and then she found herself being swept into John’s arms before he kissed her soundly on the lips.

“I love you so much. Man, I’ve missed this,” murmured John, as they broke apart. He acted as though it’d been weeks since their last kiss rather than a few hours, which made Sierra laugh before she snaked her arms around John’s neck returned the loving kiss.

Sierra’s place at Ultra was concrete, she had a new partner, dangerous breakouts had been dealt with, Charlotte had finally started healing from her time at the Citadel and Sierra’s family was safe and happy. Maybe things were looking up after all.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son and daughter, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

It was late one night in Paris, France and though everything was peaceful in the City of Love, Sierra was not sleeping quite so peacefully. Earlier that week, Sierra had announced to her family that she was taking a week off from Ultra as a reward for all the extra hard work and the long hours she’d recently been putting in. She’d devoted five of those days to some much-needed time with her two children, Astrid and then Luca in turn before spending the sixth day with John in Paris. Paris had always been the one place Sierra longed to visit ever since she’d first seen Anastasia as a little girl and John had decided to surprise Sierra with a romantic getaway there.

The trip had been a surprise but a very welcome one as it gave Sierra and John some much needed time together and a chance to further strengthen their relationship. They’d visited all the fantastic sights such the Eiffel Tower, the Champs-Élysées, Notre Dame and even the opera house that had inspired The Phantom of the Opera. They’d even tried various French dishes and found some more delectable than others. All in all, it had been a wonderful trip and Sierra was going to be sad when it was over.

But such was not the case now as Sierra was currently writhing in bed as she slept. She was not dreaming as one might’ve guessed, rather she was sensing a paranormal a powerful as Sierra herself and not only that, the girl was far away in New York and Sierra had seen everything through the girl’s very own eyes.

The girl had just robbed one of the most prestigious banks in New York before teleporting to her bike which she’d parked outside. When the police arrived to apprehend her, the girl dropped her duffle bag full of cash and held up her hands before clenching them into fists, causing the police cars to up and vanish. She then proceeded to teleport the bullets out of the policemen’s guns before she telekinetically shoved the cops across the street without the slightest hint of strain. In the snow pile behind her, the girl telekinetically wrote, ‘Hi Dad’ before taking off on her motorcycle.

Sierra then shot up in bed, breathing hard and sweating. Feeling the need for some fresh air, Sierra carefully slid out of bed so as not to awaken John, slipped on her robe and then went out onto the balcony of her hotel room. It was early winter but temperature resembled that of fall, which made it just to Sierra’s liking as she breathed in the brisk air to clear her head. Somehow she’d not only sensed a breakout, which was a major first, but the breakout had also been thousands of miles away in New York and Sierra had seen everything through the girl’s eyes. How was that even remotely possible?
Sierra’s thoughts were then interrupted by the arrival of her sleepy boyfriend, who’d clearly noticed Sierra’s absence from their warm bed.

“Come back to bed,” said John. His arms snaked around her waist as he tenderly kissed the back of Sierra’s neck, causing goosebumps to breakout on Sierra’s skin. “What’re you doing, wandering around in the middle of the night anyway? It’s not even daylight yet.”

Sierra smiled as she leaned into John’s loving touch and tenderly kissed him before rejoining him in their bed. “This is going to sound crazy, but I think I just sensed a breakout back home. Like I was in her head telepathically.”

John’s brow wrinkled in surprise. “What? You sensed a female breakout all the way back in New York and you could tell the breakout’s a she?”

Sierra nodded. “Yeah, for some reason I could feel that she was a girl and back in New York.”

John was baffled by this. “So, you felt her? Like the way you felt me when we first met? Or like how you felt Robbie when you were pregnant?”

Sierra made a face at John’s words and he made one in return as he realized what he had just unintentionally implied.

“Not what I meant,” he said, quickly.

Sierra chuckled. “I know, I was just teasing. But John, this girl wasn’t just a breakout. She was at least as powerful as I am and somehow I was seeing the world through this girl’s eyes while I was sleeping. How is that even possible?”

“I don’t know,” admitted John. He yawned as his exhaustion began to reclaim him. “But you’re not going to figure it out at this unholy hour. Go back to sleep. We’ll talk to Cara about it when we get back, see if she’s sensed the breakout too.”

Unable to refute this, Sierra just tiredly nodded and snuggled up close with her boyfriend before drifting back off to sleep.

When Sierra returned home to the Lair the following morning with John, she was thrilled to see her kids again, but she was less than thrilled on Robbie and Charlotte’s behalf to learn that they’d both come down with the flu the previous night despite getting their flu shots and they were also enduring painful migraines. After promising to get some medicine, migraine ice patches and comfort food, Sierra left the kids in John’s care and went to fetch her purse from her apartment so she could run the necessary errands.

Sierra had just locked the front door behind her when an unexpected voice startled her.

“Heading out, Sierra?”

Sierra jumped a foot and clutched her chest as she glared daggers at her mother. “Damnit, Mom! Don’t do that! You just about gave me a heart attack,” she scolded. “What’re you doing here? I thought I made it clear you needed to call first before showing up at my apartment.” If
someone from Ultra popped down to Sierra’s apartment at the same time as Marla, bas questions would be asked and there would probably be serious consequences Sierra might not be able to prevent. “And yes, I am heading out and I’m kind of in a rush. So, talk to me on the way.”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra began to walk briskly down the flight of stairs and out of her apartment complex, with Marla following closely behind.

“I know, I know, I should’ve called. It won’t happen again, I promise. But I was worried about you. I’ve barely seen or heard from you or Robbie in days. What’s been going on?” asked Marla.

“Nothing,” insisted Sierra. “Okay? I had to put in some extra hours at work for a bit and then Jedikiah gave me a week off as a reward, so I’ve been spending it with Robbie and John. We were out of town and I forgot to bring my cell. That’s all. I appreciate the concern, but there’s no need to worry, I promise. If it makes you feel any better, I’ll come by for dinner tonight.”

Sierra hoped that would be the end of the discussion but Marla wasn’t through yet.

“Just you? Why not Robbie and John?”

Sierra sighed as she pinched the bridge of her nose. “Robbie’s sick, that’s why. He’s caught a bug and I need to pick up some medicine for him. John’s watching him at his place.”

Marla looked surprised. “At his place?” she echoed. “Don’t you and John live together? I thought you two were dating again.”

“We are, but John doesn’t live with me,” said Sierra, impatiently. She appreciated Marla’s concern but couldn’t deny that it was also somewhat irritating. Would it kill Marla to stop being so nosy and go away? Sierra didn’t need or want Marla’s questions into her personal life and she really needed to finish her errands so she could return to the Lair to take care of her kids. She couldn’t do that with Marla watching her like a hawk. “We’re still figuring some things out.”

“Well, where does John live? Maybe I could stop by to check on Robbie,” offered Marla.

Sierra shook her head. “You can’t. John doesn’t live nearby and if I’m not mistaken, you’re due for a double-shift at the hospital in…” Sierra checked her watch. “…forty-five minutes. You can visit Robbie when I pick him up from Robbie’s in a couple of days.”

Marla frowned in clear disapproval. “So that’s it? You’re not even going to give me John’s address so I can check on my grandson?”

Sierra’s eyes narrowed as she stopped walking and faced her mother. Were they really going to do this again? Sierra thought they were past this. “No, I’m not going to give you John’s address.”

John didn’t even technically have a proper mailing address but Marla couldn’t know that. “John and I are still in the early stages of rekindling our relationship right and to be honest, John likes to have his privacy and I want Robbie to be undisturbed while he’s sick. An unexpected visit from you won’t help that. So, please, Mom, just let me take care of my family. Okay?”

Judging by the look on Marla’s face, she didn’t like this one bit but she ceased arguing and then became concerned. “Sierra, is there something else going on here? Something you’re not telling me? You know if you need my help at all, you can come to me.”

“I know, Mom, and I would,” said Sierra, truthfully. If Robbie’s sickness was your run-of-the-mill flu bug and if Charlotte wasn’t in the picture, Sierra wouldn’t have had an issue with Marla looking in on the boy. But Charlotte was in the picture and in Robbie’s case, his illness was also
causing him to lose control of his powers by accidentally TK-ing objects, teleporting while sneezing and unintentionally telepathically projecting his fever-crazed dreams into people’s heads. Marla couldn’t witness that. “But I’ve got this handled, I promise. Just trust me, okay?”

Marla bit her lip in sheer reluctance but in the end, she nodded and agreed to Sierra’s terms before having Sierra promise to come by for dinner at six o’clock that night. With that done, Sierra and Marla parted ways and went about their business.

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Meanwhile, the actions of the breakout that Sierra had detected hadn’t gone unnoticed by Ultra. At that moment, Jedikiah was in his office going over the breakout’s file when the Founder walked in with a clear look of agitation on his face.

“I’m glad you’re here,” said Jedikiah. He ignored the look on the Founder’s face as he showed the Founder the report on his laptop. “Take a look at this. Massive tele-signature spiked on Wall Street last night. Robbery at the Fed, as per usual. But the readings for this breakout were astounding. I haven’t seen a breakout this powerful since Sierra got onto our radar.”

“If I were you, Jedikiah, I’d be less concerned about the supposed breakout and more concerned about the absence of your niece,” said the Founder, in brisk irritation. “I just checked the log. Miss Jameson hasn’t clocked into Ultra for the past six days. Where the hell is she?”

Jedikiah sighed as he leaned back into the soft leather of his reclining chair. The Founder wasn’t going to like this. “She’s taken a week off from work as per her request. She’ll be back into work the day after tomorrow.”

The Founder laughed incredulously. “I beg your pardon? Since when do we grant people leave at their own request rather than for medical reasons?” It was simply unheard of. An agent of Ultra had to be at the ready at all times while they were in good health.

Jedikiah held up a hand to try and quell the Founder’s bad mood. Jedikiah had his reasons for granting Sierra the time off she’d requested. “I know, it’s not standard protocol, but Sierra’s bent over backwards for the agency the last few weeks with the capturing of Julian Master’s gang as well as the trainee program.” Sierra had yet to send anyone to the needle but Jedikiah couldn’t deny that she’d done an excellent job whipping all the potential agents under her charge into true Ultra agents. “Not to mention, she’s only just recovered from the bullet wound she sustained a while back. She was getting burnt out and a burnt out agent is of no use to us. So, when Sierra asked for time off, it seemed only reasonable to grant it. The better health she’s in both physically and mentally, the better use she’ll be to Ultra. Besides, we both know that Sierra can be as hardheaded as her father when she wants to be. I made the best call for all parties involved.”

Though the Founder disliked being kept out of the loop or having an agent as powerful as Sierra away without his consent, he couldn’t deny that Jedikiah’s reasons for granted Sierra leave were fully justified. Sierra was of more use to the Founder when she was cooperating and in good health on all counts. So, the Founder decided to let it slide.

“Fair enough. But all the same, I think I’m going to have a little chat with Miss Jameson. I want Sierra to be the one to bring this new breakout in when she returns to work tomorrow morning,” said the Founder, after a moment’s consideration.
Jedikiah raised a questioning eyebrow. “May I ask why? I’m not denying Sierra’s capabilities but there are other agents with more experience who could bring this breakout in.”

“Yes, but none quite as powerful as Miss Jameson and she does have a knack for catching those our other agents can’t,” said the Founder, firmly. “Sierra will lead this mission, alone if need be. End of discussion.”

The Founder knew all too well who the breakout bank robbery was and it was because he knew that he wanted Sierra to head up the mission. Sierra not only had the talent for capturing agents the others couldn’t, she was also as powerful as the breakout if not more, which meant if it came down to a fight, Sierra could take the breakout down. It

The brisk early winter blew fiercely, causing Sierra to zip her coat up further before she took a sip of her favorite beverage she’d just purchased from her favorite café. A steaming cup of raspberry hot chocolate with just the right amount of whipped cream. It was simply delightful and made Sierra sigh in utter contentment as she headed for the nearest isolated area so she could teleport back to the Lair. After running herself ragged taking care of her kids for a few hours, John had insisted Sierra take a short break by getting herself a treat of her own.

Now that her break was over, Sierra was about to head back, only to stop in tracks when the Founder entered her line of sight. His eyes seemed to light up when he saw Sierra and it took all she had not to teleport away right then and there. With great reluctance, Sierra took a seat on the nearest bench and gestured for the Founder to join her.

“What the hell do you want?” she asked, bluntly. Though he was her boss, she had no desire to spend any time with the man, especially not after she found out that he’d created Charlotte at the Citadel behind Sierra’s back. “I’m not due back at Ultra until tomorrow so this better be damned important for you to seek me out like this.”

“My apologies for disrupting your day off, Miss Jameson, but this is urgent and I won’t take but a minute of your time,” said the Founder, politely. “I can assure you of that.”

Sierra sighed and resisted the urge to punch the Founder’s lights out. “Then make it quick. I have a sick son waiting for me at home.” The sooner this was over with, the better. Robbie and Charlotte needed their mother.

The Founder reached into his pocket and pulled out a special memory stick. “When you come in tomorrow, I want you to track down a rogue breakout for me, Cassandra Smythe. She doesn’t have all your powers but she’s just as powerful as you are and she’s extremely dangerous. She robbed a bank on Wall Street and left a message just last night.”

Sierra narrowed her eyes in suspicion. This sounded too good to be true. “Why me? There are other agents with more experience.”

The Founder smiled. “That’s just what your uncle said. You two are more alike than you realize. But that’s not why I want you to handle this mission. You’re powerful enough to handle this breakout if it comes down to a fight and you also have a talent for catching rogues the others can’t. I need this rogue brought in within forty-eighty hours, starting tomorrow when you come
Sierra didn’t take the offered memory stick. There was something else, she could tell. “What else aren’t you telling me? I’m not going into this blind.”

The Founder sighed. “Remember what I told you when we first spoke? That I understood your concerns as a parent because I am one myself?” When Sierra nodded, the Founder dropped a bombshell onto her. “The breakout you’re going after is Cassandra Smythe, my daughter.”

Sierra was stunned, to say the least. The breakout she was going after was the Founder’s own child? That was the last thing she’d expected to hear from the Founder.

“I know. Quite a shock, isn’t it? My own daughter being a defiant, if not unhinged little rogue. But it’s the truth. I need her brought in as soon as possible and you’re the only one I can count on, Miss Jameson. So, what do you say? Will you accept or not?” asked Founder.

Sierra hesitated. She was tempted to accept the offer but something was still amiss. “What happens if I don’t bring her in after forty-eight hours? You call off the deal I made with Jedikiah?”

So help her, if the Founder planned to attack her family, Sierra would risk exposure itself and break the Founder’s neck if need be to protect them.

The Founder looked appalled at such a suggestion. “No, of course not. If there’s one thing I do pride myself on, Miss Jameson, is that I’m a man of my word. If you fail me, there will be consequences, yes. But they’ll be a mere slap on the wrist compared to what I’d do to anyone else. You, on the other hand, are invaluable to Ultra. I would never jeopardize your position at Ultra, dear girl. Now, will you accept it or not?”

Sierra sighed and with great reluctance, she took the memory stick. “I’ll look it over tonight and start working on it in the morning.”

The Founder smiled. “Thank you, Miss Jameson. You can’t know what this means to me.”

Sierra just feigned a smile before excusing herself to get away from the Founder.

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When Sierra returned to the Lair, she was relieved to find that her children’s migraines were over and the worst of their sickness had passed, allowing them to sleep off the rest of it, which was quite a load off Sierra’s mind. She then proceeded to upload the memory stick’s files into TIM before explaining about Cassandra. Unsurprisingly, the footage showed the exact scenario Sierra had seen in her dreams the previous night, clarifying that it was the Founder’s daughter Sierra had detected.

“Meet Cassandra Smythe, the Founder’s daughter and bank robber extraordinaire. She’s also the girl I saw last night,” said Sierra, softly so as not to awaken the two slumbering children.

Cara frowned in stunned disbelief. “Who robs a bank and doesn’t make off with the cash? She must’ve known Ultra would be tracking her.”

Sierra nodded and then froze the footage on Cassandra’s message. “She doesn’t just know. She’s taunting Daddy Dearest about it. I don’t know, it’s like she wants to be caught.” Why someone would want that, Sierra didn’t understand. Being caught by Ultra was the worst thing that
could happen to a paranormal, than and having one’s powers stripped.

Russell whistled low and looked admiringly at Cassandra. “A hot paranormal mess. Damn. Must’ve gotten her looks from her momma.”

Sierra rolled her eyes. “Will you focus? Starting tomorrow, I only have forty-eight hours to bring in this idiot. After that, for all I know, the Founder will go back on his word. I can’t risk that. We need to find her and bring her in as soon as possible.”

Cara grimaced. “That’s easier said than done. The way she teleported those cars without even touching them? I’ve only ever seen you do that and you’re the most powerful of our kind that I know of besides Charlotte and Robbie. How the hell is she so powerful?”

“She’s a synergist,” said John.


“That would explain why I couldn’t get a read on her,” said Cara, in agreement to John. “After all, a synergist is a breakout born to two paranormal parents. Theory is, they have heightened powers, just like Robbie and Charlotte. And it makes sense that if the Founder is Cassandra’s father, maybe her mom was one of us too.” Her brow wrinkled as she gazed at Sierra. “Come to think of it, that would explain a lot about you. Like why I had such a hard time reaching you when we first met and why your powers are so strong and evolved. And how you’re able to sense her when the rest of us can’t.”

Sierra looked at Cara incredulously. “Me? A synergist?” she scoffed, as she shook her head. Granted, it would make sense, given how Sierra was able to do all the things Cassandra had done in the footage and more. But just wasn’t possible. “No way. If my mom was one of us or if she knew anything about our species, she would’ve told me when I started breaking out.” Sierra was confident that if Marla been a paranormal or if Marla had known about them, things would’ve gone differently between all those years ago.

“Are you sure about that?” asked John, hesitantly. “No offense, but you and Marla didn’t exactly communicate well back then.”

“Yes, I’m sure, John. Now, can we please just focus on Cassandra? I only have forty-eight hours to find her before the Founder comes after me. So, Russell—” Russell sat up a little straight at hearing his name. “—get this to Irene, see if she can figure out a way to track down Cassandra with it.”

Russell nodded and took off with the offered memory stick in search of Irene.

Sierra sighed and ran her fingers through her hair as she looked over the footage again. This mission was so messed up. Tracking down the Founder’s seemingly rogue and unhinged daughter and turning her into Ultra to get her powers stripped was wrong in so many ways. But Sierra didn’t have a choice. She couldn’t let Cassandra just slip away like she had with other breakouts who’d fallen onto Ultra’s radar. This time, she had to bring the breakout in.

“Are you okay with this?” asked John, quietly.

“No, John, I’m not okay with it. Frankly, I wonder if I’m in over my head,” she admitted. “But I don’t have a choice this time. I can’t let Cassandra walk free. I don’t trust the Founder not to go back on his word if I fail, which means I can’t fail. I have to protect our family.”

Sierra had to do this, she knew that. But was she doing the right thing?
Later that evening, Sierra groaned and rubbed her face as she sank into a chair at her mother’s dining room table.

“You okay, sis?” asked Luca.

“Fine. I’m just tired and I’m so not looking forward to going back into work tomorrow,” said Sierra. She’d been spoiled by all the free time she’d had over the last seven days but leisure time didn’t pay the bills and if Sierra wanted to keep her family fed, she had to return to work the next day. Sierra smiled when she saw the levitating fork trick Luca was doing. “Nice trick. How’re you doing that?”

Luca grinned. “A magician never reveals his tricks. And when I get a little better at this, I’m going to show Robbie. Speaking of which, how’s my little nephew doing? Mom said he was sick.”

Sierra nodded. “He is, but he’s doing a little better. He should be up and running again in a day or two. He just needs a little more rest.”

Just then, the doorbell rang and Marla went to answer it. She returned a moment later looking far from pleased.

“Sierra, your uncle’s here to see you,” she said. “He says it’s important.”

Sierra inwardly groaned as she rose up from the table. Oh, good grief, what now? It was her evening off and she’d already been hounded by the Founder. Did she really have to be badgered by Jedikiah too or was she just that unlucky?

“I’ll deal with him. Just give me a sec,” she said.

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra went out onto the front porch and closed the door behind her, giving her and Jedikiah some privacy.

“What do you want? I’m kind of busy here,” said Sierra.

“I know, so I’ll make this brief. I just came to warn you about the Founder,” said Jedikiah.

Sierra frowned as she folded her arms across her chest. “Warn me? Why?” Why would Jedikiah warn her about the Founder? He was the one who’d happily signed up to work with that lunatic, last time Sierra checked.

Jedikiah sighed. “Look, Sierra, regardless of what you may think of me, I have never lied to you. So, believe me when I say that you need to exercise extreme caution when it comes to the Founder. Whatever he wants you to do, whatever promises he makes, make no mistake—they are to serve his purposes alone. He is nobody to be trifled with. So, for the sake of your family, especially your son, be careful. Or else you’ll—”

“Or else I’ll what?” interrupted Sierra, fiercely. She didn’t need her telepathy to know what Jedikiah was going to say next and it infuriated her to no end that he would dare so such a thing,
considering his role in the whole mess. “End up like my dad? Is that what you were going to tell
me?”

Jedikiah nodded and then cautiously glanced around to make sure no one was listening. “Has
your father contacted you in anyway? If he has, you need to tell me.”

Sierra scoffed and gave her uncle an incredulous look. “Contacted me? You’re out of your
mind. My father is dead, as you keep reminding me. And need I remind you that you ordered his
corpse to be cremated. So, even if there was a chance that my dad could return, he can’t because
there’s nothing for him to come back to,” she spat, angrily. “Look, I appreciate the concern but I
don’t need to be reminded of what happened to my father or what the Founder’s capable of. And in
case you haven’t noticed, I can take care of myself. So, please, for your own sake, leave before you
get caught warning me and the Founder has us both killed.”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra went inside and shut the door behind her, leaving Jedikiah
alone on her mother’s porch.

Marla was waiting for Sierra in the entryway of the house, looking concerned if not
disapproving.

“What was that all about? Why didn’t your uncle come in?” asked Marla.

“He didn’t come in because I didn’t invite him in. We were just discussing work stuff,” said
Sierra, briskly as she plunked herself down. She began serving herself a large helping of pasta and
salad and hoped that would be the end of the discussion, but no such luck.

“You know, you never told us what exactly it is that you do at Ultra,” said Marla.

“And I’m not going to. I can’t. It’s classified and I can’t afford to lose my job if I want to keep
bread on the table for Robbie. So, can we please just drop it?” asked Sierra, in exasperation.
Really, did they have to start badgering her about her work at Ultra? What part of classified didn’t
Marla understand? Marla and Luca were human and therefore, they could never know the truth
about Sierra’s life or her work at Ultra, not if they wanted to be safe.

Marla stubbornly shook her head. “No, I won’t. Sierra, look, I was against you working with
Jedikiah from the beginning and then you persuaded me that I was mistaken. I thought maybe
working with your uncle might give you some peace about your dad’s disappearance but now, I’m
wondering if that was an error on my part.”

Sierra lost control of her temper at that point and angrily slammed her fork into her meatball. Why was Marla acting
this way? Sierra thought they were past this. And regardless of Marla’s misgivings about Jedikiah,
Roger or Ultra or Sierra’s choices, none of it was any of Marla’s business. Sierra was a grown
woman who hadn’t lived under mother’s roof in years and Sierra’s decisions were her own.

“Well, that’s your opinion and you have a right to it. Unfortunately, you don’t have a say in
what I do anymore. So, let it go,” said Sierra.

“No, I won’t. Look, Sierra, I am worried about you. I’m scared that working for your uncle has
turned you into your father. You are living a secret life apart from your family just like Roger did
before he left us,” said Marla. “Just like before.”

Sierra lost control of her temper at that point and angrily slammed her glass onto the table,
making a loud noise that caused Marla to jump a foot. She opened her mouth to give Marla an
angry retort that Sierra hadn’t made the choice to leave before, Marla had kicked Sierra out of their
lives, but Luca beat her to it.

“Mom, that isn’t fair. Sierra didn’t leave us before, you kicked her out!” snapped Luca.

Both Marla and Sierra looked surprised and taken aback by this. Luca had always been protective of his sister and defended her sometimes, but generally he’d kept out of Marla and Sierra’s arguments up until now.

“Luca, you don’t need to—” began Sierra.

“No!” interrupted Luca. Angry tears were glistening in his eyes. “No, I always stay out of it. Let you get kicked while you’re down. But enough! I’m tired of this. I don’t want to lose you again.” He glared darkly at his mother. “Sierra is a grown woman with a life outside of us. You can’t change that and you need to quit giving Sierra grief over the choices she’s made. She’s a good person who deserves respect, not your judgmental crap. So, leave her the hell alone! Please! Or I’m leaving to move in with Sierra.”

Sierra felt visibly touched by her brother’s devotion and gently squeezed his hand under the table, reassuring him that it was okay.

Realizing she was at an impasse, Marla relaxed and ceased her interrogation. “You’re right. I’m out of line and I’m sorry. It won’t happen again, honey, I promise.”

Luca looked relieved at this and then dinner resumed its course, albeit with some tension that didn’t seem to fade away for quite a while.

XXX

The following day, after chasing down a number of fruitless leads, Sierra had another telepathic glimpse of Cassandra at the Gosford Hotel in the high end of town. It was then decided that Sierra would go undercover as a newly wealthy divorcee looking for a night on the town and she would ‘accidentally’ bump into Cassandra at the hotel. That led to Sierra wearing an expensive red dress John “borrowed” for her and getting her hair and makeup professionally done.

Sierra resisted the urge to bite her lip in anxiety as she glanced around for any sign of Cassandra at the hotel’s bar.

Guys, are we sure this plan’s going to work? I feel like a sore thumb here, said Sierra. She wished they could have sent John but if they had and then Cassandra was turned in and her mind probed, it would lead to a great deal too many questions Sierra couldn’t afford to have asked.

Just relax, I’m right here with you, assured John. All you have to do is get her to let her guard down so you can get the suppression cuff on her so you can bring her in. We need to find out what the hell’s going on and then give her to the Founder before your head goes on the chopping block.

You don’t need to tell me twice, said Sierra. She sighed in frustration when she still didn’t see Cassandra. Maybe I was wrong, John. I don’t see her anywhere.

Right on cue, Sierra took a step backwards and in doing so, literally bumped into Cassandra and causing the girl’s martini to spill.
“I am so sorry. I didn’t see you,” said Sierra, apologetically. She grabbed a few napkins from behind the bar and handed them to Cassandra. Luckily, the girl’s dress had avoided being stained from the spilled martini.

Cassandra smiled. “It’s all right. After two of these, I suppose I had it coming.”

Sierra chuckled. “Well, uh, let me buy you another drink as an apology. Then maybe we could chat a little, if that’s not too bold. I, uh, just got divorced and I could use a friend right about now.” She signaled the bartender. “Another martini and a fizzy water, please.”

Cassandra looked sympathetic as she nodded. “That sounds lovely. I’d like that. I’m Cassandra, by the way. Cassandra Smythe. But everyone calls me Cassie. And you are—?”

“Sierra Jameson,” said Sierra, as she sipped her drink. “So, Cassie, what brings you downtown?”

“I’m looking for fun and I think I just found it,” said Cassandra, as she looking knowingly at Sierra.

Sierra smiled a little nervously and took a bigger gulp of her drink. This was going to be a long day.

For the next half hour, Sierra chatted with Cassandra and was surprised to find how easy it was to talk to her. Cassandra—Cassie—as Sierra reminded herself to call her, was charming, friendly, sweet and carried the conversation easily. Aside from some minor similar physical features, Cassie seemed to be nothing like the coldhearted bastard Sierra knew the Founder to be. Which made Sierra wonder how on earth Cassie got to be related to someone like the Founder.

“…so, high school in England and then Brown. I’m very impressed,” said Sierra.

Cassie shook her head. “Don’t be. My dad was an alum. He got me in, made me go. It was typical. If anything, I’m more impressed by your son.” Cassie smiled adoringly at the photo of Robbie that Sierra had taken out of her wallet to show Cassie. “He’s beautiful and clearly very talented by what you’ve been telling me. You must be very proud of him.”

“I am, thank you,” said Sierra, as she returned the photo to the safety of her wallet. “But if I can ask, what’s the deal between you and your father? You don’t sound like you’re too fond of him.”

Cassie shook her head as she scowled. “Understatement but you wouldn’t understand. My dad’s very powerful. Opinionated. He’s a man who doesn’t care about anything or anyone. He just wants to win at all costs, no matter what the consequences. In fact, I’m pretty sure he was involved in my mother’s death when I was eleven.”

Sierra wasn’t surprised by this but she feigned it for Cassie. “Really? That’s horrible. Why didn’t you go to the police?”

Cassie sighed. “Oh, believe me. I wanted to, but I have no proof and even if I did, I’m sure my dad would’ve just made it disappear. He has a talent for that sort of thing, if you get my meaning.”

Sierra did get it but she couldn’t let Cassandra know this. “I’m so sorry. If it’s any consolation, I know a thing or two about lousy parents.”

Cassie shook her head. “I seriously doubt that. You see, my dad takes ruthlessness to a whole new level and he wants me to follow him in the family business, which is the one thing I don’t
want to do. At all. I want out but my dad’s not the kind of man who likes to take ‘no’ for an answer.”

Sierra nodded understandingly and then checked the time. “Hey, do you want to get out of here? The view from the roof’s incredible and then afterwards, I could take you to meet my son if you’re interested.”

Cassie smiled as she nodded. “Sure. Lead the way.”

Sierra nodded and then began leading Cassandra up the stairs to the hotel roof. *John, I have her alone now. Are you guys ready in the Lair?* They had a plan to disguise part of the Lair as an offsite Ultra facility so that they could talk to Cassie properly and find out more about her and her agenda before taking her into the Founder.

*Yeah, we’re all good,* said John. *As soon as you get the suppression cuff on her, teleport her down here ASAP.*

*Got it,* said Sierra.

She held out her arm for Cassie to take and the blond woman did so with a friendly smile on her face. Sierra then led Cassie up a flight of stairs and into an empty hallway. When she was sure they were alone, Sierra slapped the power suppression cuff onto Cassie’s wrist and then teleported her into the disguised area of the Lair. But shockingly, Cassie didn’t seem the least bit surprised by this turn of events or at all bothered by it.

“It’s about time. I was wondering when you were going to do this,” said Cassie.

Unable to disguise her shock this time, Sierra’s jaw dropped. She hadn’t fooled Cassie in the slightest, Sierra could understand that but Cassie’s reaction was not at all what Sierra had expected. “Excuse me? You were expecting this?”

Cassie nodded as though it were obvious. “Why do you think I let myself get caught by you? I knew you were conning me right from the start. Little tip? Next time you’re playing the role of a divorced woman, you should make a tan line on your ring finger. It makes it more believable. Now, can we please get on with this? This doesn’t look like any part of Ultra that I remember. So, where are we?”

Sierra struggled with a reply for a few moments. “This is an offsite Ultra safe house. We’re holding you here until we get further instructions.”

Cassie groaned in irritation and looked exhausted. “Can’t we just get it over with, already? I’m a rogue paranormal using my powers in public. I know the drill. Give me the bloody shot and take my powers away already.”

Now Sierra was really shocked. Cassie wanted her powers taken away? No breakout that Sierra met had ever wanted that. “Why the hell do you want that to happen?”

Cassie gave Sierra a very bored look. “If you really have to ask, then you’ve obviously drunk the Ultra Kool-Aid.”

Obviously. Sierra took a seat across from Cassie and gestured for her to do the same. “Then why don’t you explain it to me? We’ve already established I’m down with oversharing.”

Cassie sighed as she sat down. “How much do you know about my dad? The great Founder? Or about Ultra, for that matter?”
Sierra shrugged. “I know enough but a lot of it’s classified, to tell you the truth.”

Cassie scoffed. “Obviously, you don’t know enough. When I was a kid, my dad used to levitate me around the house like I was Supergirl. Both my parents had powers, so when I developed them, it seemed all so normal. I never really understood what we were, other than special. It’s what my dad called us. And I never really understood what he did, either. Until last month.”

Sierra’s curiosity was piqued. “What happened last month?”

“I was coming home from Providence as a surprise. He didn’t know I was coming so he wasn’t blocking me telepathically like he normally did. But this time I saw inside him. I saw that my mother wanted to get me away from him so he arranged for her death. And that wasn’t all. I saw who he really is. My father is the devil himself and he wants me to be the same. But I won’t do it. I won’t work with him,” said Cassie. She dabbed at the tears that had fallen down her tanned cheeks and sniffled. “I won’t become him. But the only way to make sure he leaves me alone is to become human.”

Sierra sighed as she realized why Cassie had been acting so damn recklessly, taunting her father and why the Founder wanted Cassie brought in swiftly and silently. The Founder wanted Cassie’s rebellion dealt with properly so he wouldn’t lose face in front of the rest of Ultra and Cassie wanted to force her father’s hand so she could get what she wanted and be left alone.

“But he would never take your powers himself, so now that I’ve captured you as I have, the Founder doesn’t have a choice,” said Sierra. She gave Cassie a sorrowful, sympathetic look. What must it be like to suddenly learn that your own father, the man who was supposed to love and protect you, was really a homicidal, power-hungry maniac? It was bad enough that Sierra was related to Jedikiah but it would’ve been so different had Jedikiah and Roger’s roles been reversed. “God, Cassie, I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t be. It’s better to die free than to live as a slave,” said Cassie.

On that, Sierra could agree.

XXX

Meanwhile, back at Ultra, Jedikiah was just finishing his lunchbreak when someone barged into his office, uninvited and without knocking. As he had his back turned, he didn’t know who it was and just assumed it was Sierra in one of her moods again.

“How many times have I told you? I don’t like people barging into…” Jedikiah’s voice wandered off when he saw that it was Marla, escorted by two security guards and not Sierra as he’d guessed, and Marla looked to be in a foul mood. “Marla, what a surprise.” To his security guards, he said, “It’s okay. She’s family. Shoo.”

As ordered, the security guards left Jedikiah’s office. Marla scoffed at the look of Jedikiah’s office. “So this is Ultra. I must say, I’m not impressed.”

Jedikiah shrugged as he took a seat. “That’s not my problem. But I can assure you, had I known you were coming, I would’ve prepared a warmer welcome for you, Marla. But I digress. I assume
you’re here to talk about Sierra?” He didn’t need telepathy to guess what it was that finally brought Marla to his office after staying away from Ultra for so many years.

“You assume right. What kind of work do you have my daughter doing here?” demanded Marla.

Jedikiah sipped his water and considered his words carefully before replying. “What did she tell you she did here?”

“Lies,” replied Marla. “Lies that she learned from you. Matter of fact, she’s claiming it’s classified and refused to tell me a damn thing.”

*Good girl,* thought Jedikiah. He was pleased to know that Sierra hadn’t been so foolish as to tell her mother and brother anything about her secret life or the work she did at Ultra. It meant one less loose end for Jedikiah to have to tie up at the Founder’s command.

Aloud, Jedikiah chuckled. “Well, I hate to disappoint you, Marla, but the only thing Sierra’s learned from me is a good work ethic. She’s been an exemplary employee here at Ultra and as she said, her work is classified. And I won’t declassify it for you just because your feathers are ruffled. So, I would suggest you calm down before you have a stroke.”

Marla’s face turned red with anger. “Don’t give me that crap, Jed. I’ve seen the injuries Sierra’s sustained. She didn’t get them at the gym or falling onto the sidewalk. And she sure as hell didn’t just come to work for you out of the blue. You never gave a damn about Roger’s kids before. So, why the hell did you seek her out? If you’re exploiting her somehow—”

“Exploiting?” laughed Jedikiah. Though technically, Jedikiah *had* made it clear what would happen if Sierra didn’t join Ultra, he wouldn’t call their arrangement ‘exploiting.’ It was more like a beneficial arrangement for both parties. “Oh, that’s rich. Me, exploiting a single mother who’s trying to make ends’ meet. Very funny, Marla. But for your information, I did nothing of the kind and the fact that Sierra’s my niece has nothing to do with why I offered her a place of employment. Matter of fact, her résumé caught my eye when it got sent out a few months back. Ultra needed some new blood and Sierra fit the bill. Everything she’s done here has been voluntary and I never laid a finger on her. And if I may say so, I’m not the one who put her in such a position that she needed to take a job here.”

Jedikiah wasn’t stupid. He’d researched Sierra thoroughly after she’d first escaped Ultra with the help of John and his band of rogues. He knew all about how Sierra’s life had gone south after she’d broken out. He knew that Marla had drugged Sierra and taken her to a number of shrinks and that Marla had kicked Sierra out, even though she was near-penniless and pregnant at the time, which had led to Sierra becoming dependent on Astrid’s generosity. In Jedikiah’s mind, he wasn’t the villain here. In fact, he was the one who’d saved Sierra when Marla had done nothing of the very kind.

Upon hearing this, Marla flinched and had the decency to look ashamed before she fixed a cold hard glare on Jedikiah.

“Regardless, I’m here now to protect her. And I am warning you, if anything happens to my daughter, her son or anyone else that she loves, I will burn this place to the ground,” threatened Marla. “I will go to the police, the newspapers and I will use every resource at my disposal to drag you and Ultra down to hell myself. Is that clear?”

Jedikiah could’ve laughed. Was that supposed to impress him? He’d heard better threats from far more powerful people and they hadn’t fazed him. So, why should Marla’s pathetic little
warnings bother him? They didn’t. She was a weak civilian with no real proof of anything whereas Jedikiah was second in command of an extremely powerful organization. Marla was no threat.

“Perfectly, now do me a favor and get out of my office. I have an appointment,” said Jedikiah.

Marla looked furious at Jedikiah’s dismissal but didn’t argue as she then left Jedikiah’s office.

Jedikiah whistled low in Marla’s direction as she left. He’d seen a lot of Sierra in Marla just now. Clearly he’d been mistaken in thinking that Sierra took solely after Roger. Clearly, Sierra had inherited some of her mother’s finer traits as well.

XXX

Back in the Lair, Sierra had informed Cara and John of what she’d learned from Cassie. Needless to say, they were both quite shocked to hear that not only was Cassie nothing like her father and wanted nothing to do with him, but that she also wanted her powers taken away—which was completely unheard of for one of their kind. Cara wasn’t just shocked, she was also suspicious about all of it.

“I know it seems hard to believe but it’s true. Cassie wants out of the life. She wants to get away from Ultra and the Founder. That’s why she’s been robbing banks and taunting the bastard. She’s trying to force him to give her the needle,” said Sierra, as she ran her fingers through her hair. “That must be why the Founder chose me to bring her in.”

“Something isn’t right here. The Founder has all of Ultra at his fingertips and he asks you to bring in one of the most powerful breakouts we’ve ever seen. Alone. This is wrong on so many levels,” said Cara, frowning.

Sierra shrugged. She didn’t understand it either but she was on the clock and didn’t have time to go looking into Cassie and the Founder’s squabbles.

“Well, it doesn’t matter. I have twenty-four hours to turn Cassie into Ultra and I’m going to do it before the Founder decides to go back on his word,” said Sierra.

Cara frowned again and shook her head. “No, we can’t. Not just yet. I mean, aren’t you the least bit curious about all this? Seriously, what could’ve happened to this girl that she would want her powers stripped? Something tells me that this about more than a wild child being reined in by Daddy.”

Sierra sighed in exasperation and threw up her hands. She hated it when Cara got like this. “Cassie knows the truth about her father being a scumbag and wants to get away from him. What more could there possibly be to the story, Cara?”

The way Sierra saw it, it was all black-and-white. What further investigation did there have to be into this sordid mess?

Cara didn’t share in Sierra’s feelings. “What the Founder has something more planned for his daughter that will come back to haunt us?”

“Oh, for Pete’s sake! No! You are pulling this out of nowhere,” said Sierra, firmly. “Like it or not, the Founder is expecting me to hand in his daughter in twenty-four hours and I have to deliver
Cara gave Sierra an incredulous look. “What? No! Cassie stays here until we figure out what’s going on. And since when do you care about Ultra’s orders? You defy Jedikiah all the time!”

“The Founder isn’t Jedikiah!” said Sierra, in frustration. For hell’s sake, couldn’t Cara see that? Her uncle was monster, that was true, but the Founder made Jedikiah look like Ghandi with his ruthless methods. Sierra couldn’t take the risk, not this time. “Cassie’s right, he is the devil and he will unleash all manner of hell onto me and my family if I don’t do what he wants. So, I’m sorry, Cara, but I can’t look the other way this time. I’m handing Cassie over in twenty-four hours whether you like it or not. And so help me, if you try and fight me on this, you will lose.”

For what seemed like an eternity, the two women glared darkly at one another in a silent contest of wills until finally, Cara conceded defeat and looked away in anger. “Fine! But she’s not going anywhere until I verify some details and talk with her. Fair enough?”

Sierra gestured towards the door. “Then go right ahead. Just do it fast because the clock’s ticking. In the meantime, TIM, pull up Cassie’s files. All of it, please.”


TIM’s audience all frowned in confusion at this. That didn’t make a lick of sense.

“Wait, that can’t be. We know she graduated from Brown. There has to be some kind of record of her there,” said Sierra, baffled. How the hell could this be?

John looked grim as he shook his head. “TIM doesn’t make that kind of mistake. If he can’t find any record of Cassie being at Brown, then she’s never been to Brown. I think the Founder’s daughter isn’t who she thinks she is. Cara?”

Cara didn’t need to be told twice before going to check on Cassie.

XXX

At the sound of the gate opening, a very bored and tired Cassie lifted her head up from where it’d been pillowed in her arms. Was salvation finally coming at last? Was she finally going to be out of this forsaken mess and get her freedom at long last?

“Is it time for my shot?” But much to Cassie’s surprise and confusion, it wasn’t Sierra who entered the room at all. “Who’re you? Where’s Sierra?”

“I’m Cara. Sierra’s partner at Ultra. I just need to ask you a few more questions before we process you. Do you mind if I ask you about your time at Brown?” When Cassie shook her head in boredom, Cara asked, “Where’d you live? What’d you study? Who’s your advisor?”

Cassie opened her mouth to speak but as soon as she tried to recall the answer to Cara’s questions, she found that she couldn’t remember a single thing. “That’s so…that’s so strange. It
just slipped my mind. What dorm…but I can picture it so clearly?”

Cara’s brow wrinkled with worry. “Are you sure about that?”

Cassie shot Cara an irritated look. Why was any of this important? Why wouldn’t they just her give her the damn shot already? “If you don’t believe me, call Doctor Albert Lehrman. He’s the professor who guided me through my thesis.”

“Which was what, exactly?” pressed Cara.

“I was helping him build a device that would…that would…” Cassie’s voice wandered off as she found that once again, she couldn’t recall anything from her time at Brown. But this made no sense at all. She knew she’d been at Brown, she knew she’d graduated from there. So, why couldn’t she recall a single tidbit of information? Her head was foggier than a cold day in England. “God, I don’t understand. Why is my head so cloudy all of a sudden?”

Cara seemed unfazed by this, which Cassie couldn’t understand. “It’s okay, Cassie.” She held out her hands for Cassie to take. “You can just show me.”

Hoping for some clarity as to what was going on, Cassie did as told and a few moments later, Cara pulled back looking sickened.

“Oh my God,” whispered Cara, shocked.

Cassie frowned in worry. “What is it? What did you see?”

Cara looked alarmed as she rose up. “Exactly what you said. Dr. Lehrman and the lab where you two worked. Excuse me for a sec.”

Without waiting for a reply, Cara disappeared, leaving a very baffled Cassie alone in the room.

XXX

Both Sierra and John were disgusted when Cara reported her findings back to them. As parents, they couldn’t comprehend how someone could hurt their own child and to learn that the Founder had not only placed poorly made false memories into Cassie’s head but had also tortured and experimented on his own daughter sickened them to the core.

“I can’t believe this. I knew the Founder was a heartless bastard, but this? There is no limits as to how far that scumbag will go for power,” said Sierra, shaking her head. It made her decision that much harder to go through with, but there was no choice. “But I can’t do anything about it. The Founder wants Cassie and maybe getting her powers stripped will be what saves her life from this guy.”

Cara scoffed. “Come on, do you really think the Founder’s going to let his all-powerful synergist daughter just walk away from him? He won’t care about protocol. He’s going to pick up where he left off. But maybe we can stop him.”

John’s eyes narrowed at Cara’s tone, not liking what he was hearing. “How?”

“By sending Sierra to investigate room thirty-eight at Ultra. Cassie was strapped to some kind
of device in that room. That could be the key to all of this,” said Cara. “It’s the only way we can find out what they were using her for.”

John immediately shook his head. “No. Absolutely not! What happens if Sierra gets caught in that room? The Founder will know how Sierra got her information and he’ll kill her or worse!”

“John,” said Sierra, placing a hand on his shoulder. “It’s okay. I’ll do it.” She didn’t like this plan one bit but if it got Cara to back off and allow Sierra to carry out her orders, Sierra would do what had to be done for all their sakes. “I’ll find out what I can about Lehrman but as soon as I get back, Cassie will be handed over to her father. We clear, Cara?”

Cara’s hand clenched into a fist as she nodded. “Crystal.”

XXX

When Sierra returned to Ultra, it didn’t take long for her to track down room thirty-eight and nor was it difficult to slip past the guards, the Founder or Jedikiah unnoticed. When she found the door she was looking for, Sierra quietly snuck inside and looked around.

It was dimly lit inside and at first glance, it seemed like any other kind of experimentation room at Ultra—spotlessly clean with the finest medical and science equipment money could buy and it was all in a setting that would make Dr. Frakenstein proud. But what was off, however, was the giant machine covered in a thick tarp in the back of the room. The machine also glowed bright red when Sierra neared it, as though it were sensing her presence, which gave Sierra the willies.

Before Sierra could yank off the tarp and investigate further, the door burst open and the Founder entered the room looking far from pleased.

“It seems someone’s gotten too clever for their own boots. What’re you doing here, Sierra? And more importantly, where’s my daughter? Or should I even ask?” The Founder held up a hand to silence her when Sierra opened her mouth to speak. “Please, Sierra, don’t bother lying to me. The only way you could’ve known about this lab is if you already found Cassandra. So, why don’t we take this little chat somewhere more private?”

Before Sierra had a chance to react, the Founder plunged a sedative into Sierra’s neck, rendering her unconscious.

XXX

Down in the Lair, John was going frantic with worry. He’d lost contact with Sierra and couldn’t reach her at all. Something had gone seriously wrong. He could feel it.

“Sierra’s been gone too long. She should’ve checked in by now, contacted one of us telepathically,” said John, worriedly as he paced the room. “TIM, can you get a lock on Sierra?”

“Unfortunately, Sierra’s signal has gone cold since she entered the building,” reported TIM.
This did nothing to quell John’s fears and there was a growing knot of dread in his stomach.

“John, calm down. Maybe she’s just in a secure part of Ultra and she’s busy,” said Cara. But she sounded more like she was trying to convince herself than anyone else.

John shot Cara a glare. “Or she could be in trouble and we wouldn’t even know! God, I never should’ve let her go through with your crazy plan!” This was all Cara’s fault. Thanks to Cara, Sierra was now in danger and his kids were in danger of losing their mother.

“I’m with John. If this Founder guy’s willing to mess with his own daughter, God knows what he’ll do to Sierra regardless of how invaluable she is to him,” said Russell, worriedly.

“I already know. He’ll have her killed. That’s after he’s tortured Sierra to know where his daughter is and then he’ll send a kill squad right to us before he takes Robbie and Charlotte to use for his own sick plans,” said John, bluntly.

When Cara looked away, John decided that enough was enough. He’d lost Sierra once before and it almost killed him. He wasn’t going to endure that again and nor was he going to force Robbie and Charlotte to endure that grief either, which left but one option. John grabbed the key to the suppression cuff and stormed out of the room with Cara close behind him.

“John, what are you doing?” demanded Cara.

John fixed Cara with an icy glare. “Saving Sierra! The remaining twenty-four hours are almost up and I’m not going to take any chances with her life! So, I’m going to make good on her promise to the Founder!”

“I want Sierra to be safe too, but the fact is, we don’t know that she’s even in danger. And if Sierra is in trouble and we hand over Cassie, we have nothing! No leverage. We do not do anything until we know what the hell we are up against!” hissed Cara.

Russell tried to get in between them and made silencing gestures with his hands. “Guys? Ixnay on the ightfay. You’re upsetting the children.” Russell was right. A small crowd of their people had come to watch the unfolding argument and among them was Charlotte and Robbie, who looked scared at seeing John and Cara argue in such a manner.

Without taking his eyes off Cara, John gave Russell an order. “Take my kids to my room, Russell. Please.” When Russell did as asked and took John’s children away from the ensuing argument, John resumed his business, much to Cara’s frustration.

“John, this is NOT your call to make! Stand down!” ordered Cara.

John gave Cara a cold, unrepentant look. “I know you’re in charge now, Cara, but I am taking Cassie back to her father. You do what you have to do. But I will not let Sierra die.” Without waiting for a reply, John swung open the gate and went into Cassie’s room where he then unlocked her cuff.

“Who’re you?” asked Cassie.

John grabbed Cassie’s arm. “You and I are taking a little trip.”

“JOHN, NO!” yelled Cara.

But was too late, John had already teleported with Cassie and they were now just around the corner from Ultra, much to Cassie’s confusion.
“What’s going on? Where are we?” she demanded.

“We’re just around the corner from Ultra. It’s where you wanted us to bring you,” said John.

Cassie’s eyes narrowed. “Then why aren’t you bringing me in?”

John shook his head. “I can’t walk into that building, Cassie. Only you can. And if you can sense Sierra like she sensed you—” Cassie’s eyes widened in surprise at this. “—then you’ll know why.”

Cassie closed her eyes for a moment and then her hands flew to her mouth in horror. “Oh, my God. Sierra. My dad’s inside with Sierra and Dr. Lehrman. They’re going to torture her. But why…?”

“Because Lehrman was not your college advisor, he was an Ultra scientist who experimented on you, tortured you, and he’s going to do worse to Sierra. Once he’s done, your father will go after my children next,” said John, gravely. “Sierra’s children. I’m telling you this because you’re like us, because you hate what your father stands for and because you know how it felt when the Founder killed your mother. You want to keep him from hurting anyone else? Sierra is our best chance at stopping him.”

“How? Why’s she so important?” asked Cassie, curiously.

John sighed. “Sierra doesn’t really work for Ultra. She’s a double-agent, working for us on the inside to bring Ultra and your father down. But she’s about to be exposed and tortured and the only way to save her is to give your father what he wants…you. Now, I can’t force you to go back to him, Cassie, but if you truly want to stop your father, if you want our children to not end up like you, you’ll save Sierra. Then maybe she’ll save us all.”

Tears glistened in Cassie’s eyes and she trembled for a moment before she took a deep breath to steady herself. Then she made her choice, which wasn’t really a choice at all.

XXX

As Sierra slowly came to, she found that not only was her head very foggy and heavy, but her vision was blurry it was amazing she could even make out what she was seeing. To make matters worse, she was tightly strapped into a chair in one of Ultra’s empty rooms and a smaller scaled version of the device used to locate Jedikiah when he’d gone missing was in the room as well. Sierra knew at once what was happening and she tried to get free, only to find that the drugs in her system were making her too weak to do so.

“What the hell did you do to me?” slurred Sierra.

“The only thing I could. Since Ultra’s serum, power suppression cuffs and D-chips don’t affect you, I had to resort to other methods to get you to cooperate,” said the Founder, smirking. “The drugs in your system are keeping you compliant. I can easily change all that, I have the antidote, but I won’t use it until I get what I want. Through force or cooperation. It is a shame, I must admit. You had your chance, Sierra. You could’ve brought my daughter to me, but instead you chose to complicate our arrangement by investigating things that don’t concern you.”

Sierra glared weakly at the Founder. “When we first spoke, you said you understood my
concerns as parent but you lied to me, you bastard. You experimented on your own child! What the hell did you do to Cassie? Why does she think you’re the devil?” she rasped. “And what was in that room?”

Anyone else might’ve had the decency to look ashamed or at least a smidge regretful but the Founder was unrepentant.

“As I said, that’s none of your concern. But don’t worry, Sierra, your position here at Ultra is still in place. You’re not the first of Ultra to succumb to my daughter’s charms, but you will be the last if I have my way about it. So, I’m going to give you one last chance. Tell me where the hell my daughter is while you’re still coherent or I’ll plug us both into this machine and extract the information from your mind myself. It’ll be a challenge, I’m sure. I do remember how difficult it was just to speak to you telepathically the last time, but I do enjoy a challenge. So, what’ll it be, dear girl?”

Sierra’s heart pounded so hard with fear, she was amazed it didn’t beat out of her chest. She was caught like a deer in the headlights. She couldn’t tell the Founder where Cassie was and now that she’d seen what she’d seen, Sierra couldn’t bring herself to force Cassie to come to Ultra either.

Suddenly, the alarms went off and a guard entered the room. “Sir, a breakout just teleported into the operations room.”

Just then, Cassie entered the room with a large smile on her face. “Hi, Dad! You looking for me?”

The Founder rose up, baffled by this unexpected arrival. “Cassandra!”

Cassandra ignored her father and turned to Sierra, who was finding it difficult to stay awake. “So, this is how you thank the agent who tracked me down? If anything she deserves a promotion. After all, it’s not her fault, I’m late. After all, I did beg her not to spoil the surprise. So, are you going to let this amazing young woman go home to her son or not? After all, I thought you prided yourself on being a man of your word.”

For the first time in his life, the Founder was speechless and for a good long moment, he couldn’t make out any kind of reply. Finally, he said, “Release Miss Jameson. Give her the antidote.”

Within moments, Sierra was freed and the antidote was plunged into Sierra’s system through a syringe injected into her arm. Sierra immediately rolled onto the floor and clutched her stomach as she vomited up the drugs, purging them from her system and clearing her head. After she caught her breath, she glared darkly at the Founder.

“I did as you asked. I brought your daughter to you,” she rasped. “I kept my word. Now, you keep your word.”

The Founder nodded quickly. “Of course. Nothing’s changed. As I said, your position at Ultra’s still in place and the terms of your agreement with Jedikiah are iron-clad. You needn’t fear me, Miss Jameson. Now, feel free to leave for the day. You’ve earned it.”

Sierra nodded and then shakily rose up with Cassie’s help.

“Wait a moment, let me say good-bye to her first,” said Cassie. “Can I, Dad?”

The Founder nodded and allowed Cassie to say her good-byes to Sierra. Immediately, Cassie
wrapped her arms tight around Sierra and whispered into her ear, “Don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine. Just take care of your children. Give them the life I never had. Promise me.”

Tears stung Sierra’s eyes as she returned the embrace and nodded. “I promise,” she whispered. God, she wished this didn’t have to happen but what choice was there? The Founder was too powerful at the moment and Sierra couldn’t bring him down. Not now, not like this. “Just don’t forget me.”

Cassie nodded and then with a heavy heart, Sierra left the room and departed from Ultra, all the while she wondered if she would ever see Cassie again and wondering what it was that the Founder had planned for his daughter. Whatever it was, it couldn’t be good.

XXX

After John received word that Sierra was safe and that Cassie had turned herself into the Founder, he knew that Hurricane Cara was going to hit fairly quickly and he wasn’t wrong. He understood why Cara was going to be upset—John had saved Sierra’s life but at the expense of blatantly defying Cara’s orders in front of half of their people. But John refused to regret his actions. Sierra was safe and with her safety came everyone else’s. He’d made the right call and he stood by it.

“John, we need to talk,” said Cara, sternly.

John sighed as he shoved his hands into his pocket. “I know what you’re going to say. I shouldn’t have done what I did.”

“No, your gambit paid off. We got Sierra back safe and sound. But the problem is, you took Cassie and traded her to her father without my authority,” growled Cara.

John stared at Cara. Was she more upset that he’d defied her or that he’d done the right thing when she’d been too stubborn to see reason? After all, Cara had done the same thing she was accusing John of more times than he cared to count. “But I made the right call.”

“Wasn’t your call to make,” snapped Cara. “You overrode my leadership in front of everyone!”

John bit back an annoyed laugh. So that’s what it was all about. Cara’s supposed humiliation and her inflated ego. “I am sorry if I humiliated you.”

Cara glared. “This is not about me or my feelings. This is about you and your inability to follow orders. How’re they supposed to respect my decisions if you don’t?”

“Respect or obey?” he challenged.

Cara’s glare deepened. “This attitude of yours is dangerous for all of us.”

John scoffed. His attitude was the dangerous one? John wasn’t the one who’d almost gotten their mole exposed and therefore, all of their people captured and killed. That was all Cara’s doing. But she was so caught up in all the drama of being in charge that she couldn’t see what was right before her very own eyes.

“So, this is my first warning? Defy you again and you’ll have me scrubbing the floors with a
toothbrush? Is that it?” said John, in a bored if not defiant tone.

Cara didn’t take kindly to this. “This is your last warning. Do it again and you are gone.”

John rolled his eyes and resisted the urge to throw up his hands in exasperation as he then began to walk away, much to Cara’s fury.

“Do not walk away from me, John! We are not through!” growled Cara.

John spun around and gave Cara a defiant look. “I will not be chastised for making the right damn decision!” He ignored Cara’s hiss to keep his voice down as a crowd gathered to watch their fight. “Let me save you the suspense, Cara. I am going to do what I think is best for our people no matter who’s in charge down here. And if you’re going to threaten to kick me out every time I step out of line, you should just do it already!”

John hoped against hope that his gamble had paid off, that he’d gotten through to Cara or called her bluff but instead, John’s plan backfired as Cara looked at him with a stony face.

“Finally, some leadership advice I can actually use. Pack your stuff,” said Cara, coldly. “You can say your good-byes and then you need to go. Good-bye, John, and good luck.”

John couldn’t believe what was happening. After all he’d done for their people, sacrificing himself time and time again to protect and provide for them, he was being kicked out like yesterday’s garbage and all because of a difference in opinion in what was right. What was even more heartbreaking was that no one, not even Russell, had stood up for him. But in spite of the pain John felt, he refused to let it deter him. Cara wanted him gone? Fine. John would leave but he wouldn’t go alone.

Without so much as word, John went to his room where Robbie and Charlotte huddled together, whispering and there was worry on their faces when John came in.

“Daddy, what’s going on? We heard yelling,” said Robbie.

“Are you leaving us?” asked Charlotte, tearfully.

John sighed as he knelt down in front of them. “No, I am not leaving you. Cara and I…we’ve had a disagreement. I have to leave the Lair for a little while but you’re going to come with me.”

Privately, John knew that he was never going to come back. Cara was never going to allow it any time soon. But he didn’t dare tell the kids just yet. He didn’t want to upset them further. He also knew it was a risk to live in Sierra’s apartment long-term but there was no other choice and John refused to leave his children alone in the Lair. If John couldn’t stay there, then neither could Robbie or Charlotte. He wouldn’t risk the chance that they would be hurt or killed under Cara’s leadership as he no longer trusted Cara’s judgment. John didn’t dare trust Cara to keep them safe if it didn’t suit her and John was sure that once he told Sierra about all this, Sierra would agree with him.

“I’m sorry about this, kiddos, but it’s for the best. So, pack up your things and say your good-byes. We’re leaving in ten,” said John, gently.

Robbie was clearly distraught by this turn of events but he put on a brave face about it. Charlotte looked heartbroken at the thought of leaving the Lair but nevertheless, she obeyed her father’s wishes as it wasn’t a choice between her family and the Lair. Once the three of them had packed up their few belongings and said their good-byes, John took his children’s hands and teleported them directly to Sierra’s apartment without looking back.
Meanwhile, Sierra was walking down to a local diner to meet Marla and Luca for dinner before she would head home. She was really looking forward to it as after the day she’d had, she needed some kind of normalcy, even if it was temporary.

“Sierra, honey, glad you could make it. I preordered for you, hope that’s okay. How was work?” asked Marla, when she sat down.

Sierra sighed. “I’d rather not talk about it.” She didn’t want to keep thinking about Cassie and the Founder, much less talk about it. It was too upsetting. “So, why don’t we talk about you for a change? How’re things between you and your boyfriend…” What was the guy’s name again? Sierra racked her brains to recall the guy’s name. “Peter?”

“Uh…” Marla’s face fell and she sighed. “We broke up.”

Sierra’s eyes widened in surprise. They’d broken up? That was a shock considering how well the relationship seemed to be blossoming between them. “What? Why? What happened?”

“Mom caught the silver fox cheating on her,” said Luca, disgustedly, before Marla could speak. “I wanted to go after him with my baseball bat but Mom confiscated it.”

Sierra winced and squeezed her mother’s hand. “Jeez. Mom, I am so sorry. I know what he meant to you. Maybe I could arrange for him to be dropped off south of the border if it’d cheer you up?”

Marla chuckled as she shook her head. “No, sweetie. But I appreciate it. Anyway, enough about my love life. Did you hear…?”

And for the next ten minutes or so while they waited for their orders to come, the Jameson family talked endlessly about everything and nothing until Sierra excused herself to the powder room. She hadn’t been gone more than two minutes when she heard the all-too-familiar sound of gunfire emitting from the restaurant.

Panicking, Sierra teleported out of the bathroom without thinking twice and what she saw shocked her to the core. She saw the taillight of a black car as it sped away, Luca and the diner’s staff were hiding, there was glass and destroyed furniture everywhere, but nobody had been hurt and that was due to the last person Sierra had ever expected. Standing before her, using telekinesis to stop the shower of bullets was Marla. Sierra’s own mother.

“I’m sorry, Sierra,” said Marla, regretfully, as she let the bullets clatter to the floor. “I should’ve told you sooner.”

Words could not describe the level of heartbreak and shock that swept over Sierra and threatened to swallow her whole. Marla had just used telekinesis to stop the bullets. She wasn’t human. She was one of the Tomorrow People, making Sierra a synergist just like the Founder’s daughter and Sierra’s two children.

Marla had lied.
Brother's Keeper

My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

After Marla dropped the bullets, police sirens hit their ears, forcing Sierra to delay her much-needed conversation with her mother.

Sierra wasted no time in helping Luca out of his hiding place and after checking him over to make sure he was uninjured, placed him in the back of Marla’s car as she requested. The ride back to Marla’s house was a silent, tense affair and once they arrived at the house, Marla ordered Luca to go upstairs and wait for further instructions. Once Luca obeyed, Sierra followed her mother into the kitchen, intending to get some answers from Marla whether the older woman liked it or not.

“Mom! I need to talk to you. Mom!” Sierra froze in her tracks when Marla grabbed a butcher knife and used it to pry open a hidden cabinet. Inside was at least a few hundred thousand dollars in cash along with several faked passports all designed for Marla, Sierra, Luca and even Robbie. Judging by the amount of dust covering the items, they’d been there for quite some time which meant not only had Marla been prepared to flee at a moment’s notice all these years, but she’d also lied about the state of their finances.

Sierra’s mind flashed back to all the times Marla had seemed so stressed about their money and how much of a financial burden she’d made Sierra out to be, which made Sierra’s blood boil with intense rage. “Mom, how long have you had that?”

“Long enough,” said Marla, shortly. “Listen, I need you to pack a bag for you and Luca. Just the essentials and then do the same for Robbie and John. We need to leave as soon as possible.”

Sierra stubbornly shook her head. “Like hell we do! We need to talk!”

“No, we need to pack!” insisted Marla, as she quickly counted up the cash on the kitchen island. “As many questions as you have for me, I have for you but now is not the time!”

“MOM, STOP!” yelled Sierra. She grabbed Marla’s arm, making Marla stop in her tracks. “Does Jedikiah know about you? About what you are?” If this had been an attack ordered by Ultra because Jedikiah had somehow found out that Marla was secretly a breakout, then Sierra needed to know then and there so she could have a little ‘chat’ with her uncle and the Founder.

Marla looked at Sierra as though Sierra had lost her mind before shaking her head. “What? No, your father kept me away from Ultra. Don’t be ridiculous.”

Ridiculous? So, apparently it was ridiculous to worry that her mother might’ve gotten herself
onto Ultra’s radar and become a target? That was it. Sierra lost her temper and for the first time since she’d faked taking away Cara’s powers, Sierra thrust out her hand and created temporal stasis field around them, making time itself stop in its tracks, much to Marla’s shock.

“Sierra, what…? How’re you doing this?” gasped Marla. She looked as though she was seeing her daughter as someone she didn’t recognize at all and the feeling was mutual.

“It’s call temporal manipulation, which means time has stopped.” Sierra couldn’t prevent the angry smirk on her face. “Remember all those times you worried I was going to turn out like Dad? Well, it turns out you were right. I am my father’s daughter in more ways than one. I have all his powers and then some. And just so you know, this—” she gestured to their unmoving surroundings, “—won’t return to normal until you answer my questions and tell me the damn truth for once in your damned life!”

Sierra was done playing games and she was done trying to pacify her mother. All her life, Marla had lied to Sierra and then she’d drugged Sierra for a year and made Sierra not only feel like she was also but also a terrible burden on their family despite all Marla’s talk of the three of them being an ‘iron triangle’ that couldn’t be broken. Sierra wanted the truth and she wanted it then and there.

Realizing that she was trapped, Marla took a step back and threw up her hands in defeat. “All right. What do you want to know?”

“What the hell do you think I want to know? When I started hearing voices in my head, when I woke up in different places than where I’d gone to sleep…you knew I was breaking out, that I was a synergist. You knew what was happening to me! Didn’t you? Didn’t you?!” demanded Sierra, furiously. Part of her didn’t want to believe it, she didn’t want to believe that Marla had known the entire time and lied about it. Sierra wanted Marla to deny it but she doubted that was the case. “And you drugged me and took me to all those shrinks so my powers would be suppressed, didn’t you? Please, tell me I’m wrong!”

Sierra’s heart sank when Marla regretfully nodded. “I’m sorry, honey, but it was the only way I knew how to help you.”

“Help me?” yelled Sierra, incredulously. “Drugging me? Lying to me? Making me think I was going crazy and making me feel like a damned burden when you knew the truth was your way of trying to help me? You should’ve just talked to me, told me the truth from the beginning! You knew I wasn’t crazy or that I was all alone, you knew I was breaking out and that I was just like you and Dad! HOW COULD YOU NOT TELL ME THE TRUTH?!!”

It was one thing for Sierra to keep the true nature of her work at Ultra and her status as a TP from Marla and Luca when she feared their rejection and also thought they were human and would be safer without that knowledge. But what Marla had done was beyond that. When Sierra had started breaking out, instead of telling Sierra the truth of what was happening to her and protecting her, Marla had done the opposite. She’d drugged Sierra, lied to her and made Sierra feel like a burden before kicking Sierra out onto the streets despite knowing Sierra was pregnant with a possible third-generation breakout and that Sierra would be easy pickings for Ultra.

Marla had the decency to look ashamed as tears glistened in her eyes. “I know, I messed up. But I was trying to protect you, you have to realize that.”

“Protect me?” scoffed Sierra, as her rage further boiled inside of her. Did Marla even hear herself? Her tone was a mixture of furious yet dangerously calm sarcasm as she spoke. “Protect me. Yeah, right. I can’t imagine how I didn’t realize that when instead of telling me the damned
truth about what was happening to me, you sent me to multiple shrinks and drugged me for a year! Or when I became pregnant, you had the gall to ask me to give up Robbie, knowing perfectly well there was every chance he’d inherit my abilities, Dad’s abilities, your abilities! Or how when I refused to do that or tell you Robbie’s father’s identity, you threw me out onto the streets with nothing! Knowing damn well that we’d be easy pickings for Ultra! No, I can’t see how I didn’t realize you were trying to ‘protect me’ by throwing me to the damned wolves! How could you do such a thing?”

Feeling somewhat tired, Sierra then stopped using her temporal manipulation ability as angry tears slid down her cheeks as she glared at her mother, whose face was unreadable.

“How could, Marla?” Sierra ignored how her mother flinched when Sierra used her real name. “How could you do that to me? I didn’t need your twisted idea of ‘protection’! I needed you, I need my mom to tell me the truth! I was so damned scared of what was happening to me, of going crazy. And instead of helping me or at least holding me and telling me everything was going to be okay, you tried to suppress my powers and lied to me about them. I needed you and you abandoned me.”

Sierra’s voice broke with immense pain. “And you know what the worst part is? All this time, I thought that if I’d told you what I was capable of, what I’d become all those years ago when I had the chance, things would’ve been so different between us. But now I see that I was wrong. You knew and you still did what you did! What kind of horrible mother does that kind of thing to their own daughter and grandchild?”

Sierra was heartbroken in a way she never thought possible and her trust was shattered beyond repair by Marla’s deceit. How could she? How could Marla do such horrible things and not feel guilty for it? What kind of a heartless person was she? For the first time in a long time, Sierra was glad that Roger wasn’t around to see what had become of his family as knowing what Marla had done, what she’d become would only break his heart.

“And you want to know what else? You have never protected anyone in this family! Dad did and so I have! We have been protecting us for longer than you know!” spat Sierra.

“Sierra, I—” began Marla, but she was cut off when Jedikiah suddenly arrived, armed and with a small army of Ultra agents behind him.

Upon seeing that Marla and Sierra were unharmed, he lowered his gun. “Marla, I’m sorry for barging in like this. I just thought you were all in trouble.” He turned to his men. “Wait for me in the car. Gun down. Wait for me in the car.”

Marla glared at Jedikiah after his men left. “Armed men just shot up the diner my family was at.”

“Yes, I know. We were in the area on patrol and saw it all. That’s why we’re here,” said Jedikiah. “Now, please, let me have a moment alone with Sierra.”

Marla laughed incredulously. “Do you think I’m stupid, Jed? I’m not leaving you alone with my daughter after this! You’re crazy!”

“Marla!” said Sierra, sharply. “Shut up and do what he says! I can handle Jedikiah. Just go wait for me in the kitchen. Now!”

Marla flinched at the sharpness and volume of Sierra’s commanding tone but she didn’t argue. She went into the kitchen, giving Sierra and Jedikiah the privacy they needed.

As soon as they were alone, Sierra grabbed Jedikiah and pressed him up against the wall by his throat. Now, it was time for her to get answers from her uncle. “Armed men just shot up the diner...
my family was at and now you show up to ‘rescue’ us. That’s one hell of a coincidence you need to explain because so help me, if this was Ultra’s doing, if our deal was broken, I swear to God—”

“It wasn’t Ultra!” interrupted Jedikiah, firmly. “Sierra, I swear. This wasn’t me or even the Founder. Your family wasn’t the target. That diner you were at? It’s been the victim of several shootouts the past few months as well as breakout brawls. You were just caught in the crossfire, I swear on Roger’s soul. Please, believe me. This wasn’t anyone at Ultra.”

Sierra narrowed her eyes at Jedikiah for a good long while before she decided she believed him. She then released him and took a step back, allowing him to breathe. “Okay, fine. I believe you. But that doesn’t mean I’m not feeling the whiplash here.”

Jedikiah’s brow wrinkled in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“It means I can’t figure you out and that right now, I’m having a hard time seeing why I shouldn’t just leave town and Ultra for good,” spat Sierra. After everything she’d just endured over the last few days, Sierra was finally at the end of her rope and she was about to lose it. More to the point, she meant every last word she’d just said. She was now seriously considering leaving New York and Ultra forever without thinking twice. “You practically blackmailed me into working for you, you used me to try and kill my ex-boyfriend, and you made me watch as you gunned down defenseless breakouts. I have been beaten and shot all on your watch. But then you tell me about the daughter I never knew I had being the Founder’s guinea pig, you warn me against any kind of alliance with the Founder and you just swooped in to save the day. I can’t decide if you’re going to watch my back or stab me from behind. So, maybe I should leave.”

Jedikiah actually looked alarmed to hear this. “What? No, Sierra. You can’t do that.”

“Why not?” hissed Sierra. “Are you going to threaten me into staying?”

“I know we’ve had our differences, Sierra, but I am not your enemy here. The Founder is,” insisted Jedikiah. “I am dangerous and my methods don’t always work with you, fine. But the Founder is the real evil here. You have to believe me.”

“And why the hell should I believe you? You ordered my father’s death!” spat Sierra. That was one of the biggest issues Sierra had with Jedikiah. The man had ordered the death of his own brother and tried to make John be the one to do it.

Jedikiah sighed in resignation as he held out his hand. “I think it’s time you finally knew the truth about what I did and why.”

After some hesitation, Sierra took Jedikiah’s hand and entered his memory.

_It was late one night at Ultra. Everyone was gone except for the night guards who were currently doing a sweep on the lower levels. Jedikiah was alone in his office and was pouring a glass of scotch with a look of apprehension on his face. He was expecting his brother to arrive at any minute but given what had occurred of late, Jedikiah couldn’t be certain that Roger would show._

_Roger then teleported in and looked relieved as he accepted the offered glass. “Wasn’t sure you’d be alone.”_

_Jedikiah just smiled and extended his arms before pulling Roger into a tight embrace. “I don’t want to hurt you, Roger. I’ve done everything in my power to prevent that.” He pulled back and gave Roger an impressed look. “Wow, you look good, little brother.”_
Roger smiled back. “So do you.” He declined Jedikiah’s offer to sit as the older man plunked down into a chair. Nervously, Roger clinked his fingers against the glass he was holding. “You ever think our two species could live in peace?”

Jedikiah sighed as he looked down at his hands. Roger’s dream was one that Jedikiah secretly hoped for himself but it was a pipe dream at best and this was also a chat they’d had more times than Jedikiah could count. “You evolved to replace us. We have no choice but to fight.”

Roger shook his head at Jedikiah. “And how’re you going to do that? By aligning yourself with a paranormal lunatic like Hugh Bathory? Come on, Jed. You’re smarter than that. You know he can’t be trusted!”

Jedikiah groaned as he stood up. “Oh, damn it. Come on! Do we really need to have this conversation again? How many times do I have to tell you? The Founder is committed to my species. Humanity!”

Roger scoffed and his voice raised in volume as he spoke. “Oh, come on! Don’t be naïve! The Founder’s after power. Period!”

Jedikiah scowled. “And what’re you going to do about that? Hmm? How’re you going to beat him? The Founder’s too powerful even for a paranormal of your strength, Roger, and you know it!”

Roger sighed as he admitted defeat on that point. Currently, the Founder was far too powerful for even Roger to take on head-to-head. But that didn’t mean that Roger couldn’t find another way to take the bastard down before the Founder enacted his sick agenda for power. “Yeah, fine. You’re right. But that doesn’t mean I can’t try or find another way. And I will.”

Jedikiah’s heart sank with worry. He knew that look and it wasn’t good. Roger was going to do something stupid and reckless and as much as it pained him, Jedikiah was going to have to be the one to take Roger down for good for it. “What about Marla?” he challenged. “What about the kids? Your daughter? Your son? What happens to Sierra and Luca if they inherit your powers or worse, the Founder decides to punish them to get at you? Hmm? You know if you do this, the Founder will make me come after you and I can’t stop him!”

Jedikiah hoped against hope that Roger had finally listened and that Jedikiah had gotten through to him but his stomach knotted when Roger quickly down the rest of his drink and a dangerous look flickered across Roger’s face. “I’ve ensured my family’s protection. They should be safe from the Founder. As for you...you do whatever you have to do.”

“Oh, Roger, come on! Please, I am begging you!” pleaded Jedikiah.

Roger just hugged Jedikiah tightly one last time. “Good to see you, big bro. Thanks for the drink.”

Before Jedikiah could stop him, Roger teleported away.

“I tried to warn him, Sierra,” said Jedikiah, as they left the memory. He sounded truly remorseful, which was a first. “But your dad...God, he was so stubborn. Once he got something into his head, he never let it go, especially when he thought it was the right thing to do. Just like you.”

Tears stung Sierra’s eyes as she pulled away. “You’re right,” she said. Much as she hated to admit it, Jedikiah was right. She couldn’t leave. Not now. The Founder was never going to let her
or Robbie go and nor could she bear to force Robbie to live a fugitive’s life underground in the Lair. He deserved better than that. “But my mom thinks Ultra ordered the drive-by. She wants to us to run,”

Jedikiah quickly shook his head in alarm. “No, she can’t. None of you can. If you take off, you’ll just anger the Founder and there’s nowhere you can hide that he won’t find you. Here, I can help protect you all, as can you. And if you all stay, then I swear that you, your family, everyone you love, and even your apartment and Marla’s house will be completely off-limits. No one from Ultra will ever set foot there. Period. All I ask is that you stay and that you trust me.”

Sierra considered this very carefully for several minutes before replying, “It’s a deal. I accept your terms. I’ll stay and I’ll try to convince my mom to stay put too. But know this: if our deal’s broken or if I so much as suspect that my loved ones are in danger, not only will I take my son and disappear for good, I’ll do worse to your goons than I did to you when we first met. Are we clear?”

Jedikiah nodded. “You have my word. And if it’s not too soon to ask, are you going to be in work tomorrow or do you need a day off after this?”

Sierra shook her head. Time off was the last thing she wanted at the moment. For the first time in her life, she was actually glad she had a shift at Ultra to do. She needed something to take her mind off Marla’s betrayal. Tracking down breakouts and training the new potential agents for Ultra actually sounded appealing, much to Sierra’s chagrin.

“I’ll be in tomorrow. Bright and early,” she promised. “I’ll see you out.”

After escorting Jedikiah out of the house, Sierra rejoined her mother in the kitchen. “You can put all this away. There’s no need to leave. The drive-by wasn’t Ultra’s doing. It was a gang’s. Jedikiah swore up and down on it.”

“How do you know he’s not lying?” asked Marla.

Sierra scowled. Was Marla just plain stupid or had she truly forgotten what Sierra was? “I read his mind. Trust me, Jedikiah is telling the truth. We weren’t targeted and no one at Ultra is ever going to come near us. I made sure of that.”

Marla made a face before sighing. “Well be that as it may, I still think leaving would be best.”

“Mom, no. If you leave, I can’t protect you,” argued Sierra. “You and Luca need to stay here.” If Marla and Luca left town, the Founder would go after them and use them against Sierra. She couldn’t allow that to happen.

Marla raised a skeptical eyebrow. “How? How have you been protecting us?”

“Oh, if you only knew,” said Sierra. If Marla had a freaking clue as to the lengths that Sierra had gone through to keep her family safe, Marla wouldn’t be arguing so stubbornly about leaving. “Look, I can’t go into it right now, but the point is, you and Luca are safest here where I can keep an eye on you. And honestly, Mom, you lost the right to make decisions for your children after the stunts you’ve pulled.” If Marla left and then Luca miraculously broke out, Sierra would bet dollars to doughnuts that she would do to Luca what she did to Sierra, something Sierra couldn’t allow. “So, please, for all our sakes and for my sanity, don’t leave town. I am begging you.”

Marla frowned at being ordered around but after Sierra gave her a long, hard stare, she conceded. “Fine. We’ll stay here for tonight. But I can’t promise I won’t change my mind.”

Sierra gritted her teeth. She hadn’t gotten through to Marla at all but she didn’t have anymore...
time to argue as Sierra’s watch then beeped, reminding Sierra of the time.

“Fine. Now, I have to go. Robbie’s waiting for me. But don’t think this is over. There are going to be repercussions for what you’ve done and I don’t know if they can be fixed.” If Marla couldn’t see the damage she’d just done to their relationship, then Marla was a bigger fool than Sierra thought.

But Marla caught onto Sierra’s implication and she looked visibly hurt if not distraught. Before Marla could even attempt to reply, Sierra teleported away.

***

When Sierra returned to her apartment, she was surprised to see John sitting on her couch with two bags on the floor in front of him. What’s more, when Sierra peered down the hall, she could see both Robbie and Charlotte playing together in Robbie’s bedroom.

“Hey,” he said, softly. “Glad you’re home. We need to talk.”

“I should say so,” said Sierra, as she sat down beside him. “John, what happened? Why’re you and Charlotte here?” They didn’t know of the deal Sierra had just made and Sierra knew they wouldn’t have left the Lair in favor of Sierra’s apartment without a damn good reason.

John took a long, deep breath before replying. “Cara kicked me out today. I couldn’t leave Charlotte behind so I brought her with me. I know coming here is a risk but I didn’t know where else to go. I hope it’s okay if we crash here for a while.”

Sierra’s jaw dropped in shock. Of all the explanations Sierra had envisioned, John being kicked out of the Lair was certainly not one of them.

“No, no, of course it’s okay. You did the right thing. Matter of fact, I had a little chat with my uncle today and no one from Ultra is allowed anywhere near this place without my permission. You’re safe here,” assured Sierra. She was quite relieved that they were safe in her apartment and not off God knew where, worrying Sierra sick. “You can stay as long as you want to. Both of you. I’ll fix up the spare room for Charlotte and you can bunk with me, no problem. But I still don’t understand…why did Cara kick you out of the Lair?”

John sighed as he looked down at his fingers, which he was twisting together. “Cassie didn’t walk into Ultra to save you because of Cara. When we lost touch, I got scared for you and for the rest of us in the Lair. So, I defied Cara’s orders in front of everyone and persuaded Cassie to trade herself for you. Cara didn’t like that, we argued about it and then she gave me the boot.”

Sierra was appalled and furious. “I’ll kill her,” she hissed. How could Cara do this? John had bent over backwards to protect and provide for the Tomorrow People. Most of them wouldn’t even be alive if it wasn’t for John and yet Cara had decided to make an example of John because of her damaged ego. How could Cara be so shortsighted? If it wasn’t for John, Sierra would be dead or worse, her mind probed until the Lair’s location had been discovered and everyone down there killed or worse. It was outrage and it was also majorly hypocritical. “John, I am so sorry.”

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John took her hands into his and squeezed them. “Hey, don’t worry about it. I made my choice and I don’t regret it. We’ll figure this out, I promise. For now, why don’t you tell me what’s wrong? I haven’t felt this much pain through our link in years. What happened?”
Sierra sighed and then told John everything that happened when she went to the diner. How they’d been caught in the crossfire of a shooting, how Marla saved them by using her powers as she was secretly a breakout, how Sierra actually was a synergist, hers and Marla’s shouting match over Marla’s lies, what Sierra had learned from Jedikiah and how Sierra was now in a pickle to persuade Marla to stay in town for all their sakes. When she finished, Sierra’s body was shaking with rage and her eyes were burning with tears she refused to shed as the events of that day fully settled onto her.

“…was this how it felt, John? The first time my uncle betrayed you? Like your whole world had been shattered and nothing was everything going to be all right again?” asked Sierra, as her throat tightened with sobs.

John pulled Sierra close to him until they were both laying on the couch with Sierra’s head pillowed onto his chest.

“Yeah,” he murmured, as she began to properly cry into his torso, soaking his shirt but John took no notice of it. “This is how it felt.”

“How did you get past it?” asked Sierra, her voice choked with emotion. John still cared for her crazy uncle on some level and even after the first time Jedikiah had betrayed him, John had still loyally served Jedikiah like a good son for quite some time.

“Your dad helped me. Want me to show you?” asked John.

Sierra nodded and closed her eyes as John placed his hand on her temple and entered her mind.

_Fourteen years ago_

_It was a beautiful crisp fall day with clear skies, but John took no notice of it for he’d shut out every last ounce of light in his bedroom at Ultra and was even hiding underneath a pillow and blanket fort he’d made in his closet. His body was shaking with uncontrollable sobs as he buried his faces in his knees, which were pulled tightly up against his chest. Earlier that day, he’d been forced to watch as his best and only friend outside of Ultra—a sweet old man, Mister Lee, who ran a comic book shop downtown and always gave John the first pick of the new shipment for free—had been gunned down by the very institution who’d taken John in from foster care. And it was all John’s fault._

_The previous day, John had used his powers to save his friend from an attempted robbery. Though he and his friend hadn’t said a word about it, Ultra had still found out and they’d enforced the punishment for humans who knew too much by shooting the poor man dead in the heart. John had initially blamed Jedikiah but the older man insisted that the kill order hadn’t been Jedikiah’s call, that the order had come from a higher authority at Ultra who’d wanted John killed but instead killed the comic book vendor at Jedikiah’s pleading. Jedikiah later held John close and assured John that everything would be okay and John would recover from it, but John hadn’t believed him. How could anything possibly be okay after this?_

_Suddenly, John’s closet door opened and he squinted against the sudden light that entered the small space which was followed by the sudden appearance of a man John didn’t recognize. He was taller than Jedikiah with short dark hair, a graying goatee, kind brown eyes and a gentle smile. He was also carrying two small cups of chocolate and vanilla ice-cream, John’s favorite._
“Hi there,” he said, softly, as he sat down cross-legged in front of John. “You must be John Young. My name’s Roger. Want some ice-cream? I heard it’s your favorite.”

John wanted to refuse but his stomach rumbled, reminding him of how long it’d been since he’d eaten. So, with some hesitation, John emerged from his hiding place and accepted the offered frozen treat.

“I’ve never seen you here before. Are you new here?” asked John, hesitantly. Silently, he prayed Roger worked for Ultra, because if he wasn’t, he was surely going to be killed just like Mister Lee and John’s foster face.

Roger shook his head. “No, I’ve worked with Ultra for a very long time. My schedule’s kept me from meeting you before now, which is a shame because you seem like a good kid.”

John shook his head as he painfully swallowed his next bite of ice-cream. A good kid? Him? If he was a good kid, people wouldn’t keep dying around him in front his eyes. “You wouldn’t say that if you really knew about me. You shouldn’t even be talking to me. The people I talk to end up dead. You should stay away from me if you know what’s best for you.”

“That is not true. Not in the least. And I do know about you, John. More than you know. And I also know about what happened today. I’m sorry you had to see that happen and I’m even sorrier that I couldn’t stop it from happening,” said Roger, sympathetically as he gently squeezed John’s shoulder. “Sometimes when we try to protect the people we love, we wind up putting them in even more danger. You couldn’t have known what would happen to your friend. But, buddy, you need to know that what you did to save that man’s life was the right thing to do. It’s just hard that even people like us can’t always control how things turn out. But that that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t keep trying.”

John looked up hesitantly. Roger’s words sounded so wonderful and promising. But what if John was wrong? What if he couldn’t confide in Roger like he wanted to?

As if he was reading John’s mind, which he probably was, Roger leaned in closer to John with an encouraging smile on his face. “I know what you’re thinking, John, and you’re wrong. I would never betray you, not to Jedikiah or anyone. It’s okay to have secrets, you know. You just have to be careful who you share them with. You can tell me anything and I mean anything, you want. I have a feeling that you and I are destined to be great friends, John. If you’d accept, that is.”

John liked the sound of that and he was already feeling a little cheered up and it showed by the small smile that flickered across his face. He wanted to accept Roger’s offer badly but there was one last thing he needed to know first. “Why are you being so nice to me?”

“I have two kids, a girl and a little boy. My daughter’s not much younger than you and one day, she might need you to be nice to her too because I might not be around,” said Roger, cryptically. “So, what do you say, kiddo? Do you want to be family with an old geezer like me?”

Family. Something John had always longed for in his life but never thought he could have until now. Unable to resist any longer, John put down his now empty bowl of ice-cream and all but leapt into Roger’s open arms, burying his face in the older man’s chest as Roger gently wrapped his arms around John’s tiny frame. “Yes, yes, I do.”

Roger tenderly stroked John’s hair as a father might do for his own son. “Just remember, it’s always darkest just before you turn on the light.”
Sierra smiled through her tears as she left John’s memory. “He used to say that to me too, all the time. Especially after I had a bad day.”

John smiled, as he tenderly stroked Sierra’s silky brown locks. “Your dad always knew the right thing to say. After that, anytime I was having a really bad day or if things looked dismal, I’d recall that and somehow, the storm that is our life seemed a little easier to endure. I did forget for a time but then I was reminded of that when you came back into my life. So, I know that somehow, we will figure a way out of this. I promise.”

Sierra could only hope that John was right. There had to be a way out of the darkness they were trapped in. Believing that was one of the few things giving Sierra hope anymore.

XXX

The next morning a seemingly impossible professional hit had occurred at a hotel downtown.

A witness set to testify against the owner for racketeering charges had been whacked off by someone working for the Bratva, the Russian mob. The witness’s guards had been knocked out but the hallway had been empty and the witness’s handler had seemingly been locked in the bathroom while the unlucky witness was garroted to death. There had been no sign of the killer. No weapons, no fingerprints or DNA and what’s more, the hotel room where the victim had been killed was locked from the inside, which meant a breakout had somehow taken a life which did not bode well for anyone.

Cara had attempted to investigate the hotel room herself, hoping to pick up some kind of psychic trail but to her frustration, Ultra had gotten there first. To make matters worse, Jedikiah himself was there and he was leading a team consisting of two guards, Sierra and her newly instated partner Hilton Cole. With them lurking about, Cara didn’t dare poke her nose in and she was forced to return to the Lair in disappointment.

“Talk to me, Mama. What’s happening?” asked Russell, when Cara teleported in.

Cara sighed in frustration. “I don’t know. I couldn’t get close. Sierra and her new Ultra guy friend were crowding the scene.”

“But what do you think? Did a breakout actually bump someone off?” asked Russell, concerned. If a breakout suddenly had the ability to kill, that was bad news for the Tomorrow People as well as Ultra and that had to be dealt with as soon as possible.

Cara shrugged. “Clearly Jedikiah thinks so.”

Russell frowned in confusion. “But that doesn’t make any sense. How?” With the exceptions of Sierra, John and Killian McCrane, the Tomorrow People were incapable of taking a life.

Cara sighed again as she slid her hands into her coat pockets. “We can’t rule out the possibility of an evolutionary mutation.”
Russell’s eyes widened in surprise. “Whoa. You think Mother Nature created a Tomorrow Person 2.0?” Russell’s face lit up as the perfect name came to him in a sheer stroke of genius. “A Day-After-Tomorrow Person.”

Cara chuckled before shaking her head at Russell’s enthusiasm. “There’s nothing new and improved about killing, Russell.” People had been killing each other off since time began. It wasn’t new and nor was it anything good in the slightest.

“Well, even Mother Nature can brain-fart,” reminded Russell. “But anyway, you said Sierra was there looking into it. I know things aren’t good between you two but did you at least ask her about the hit at the hotel?”

Cara shook her head. She hadn’t even attempted to speak with Sierra at all and for good reason. “I couldn’t risk it with her partner there and even so, I didn’t feel like getting my head bitten off. She’s still mad at me about John, I can tell.”

Earlier that morning, before she went into work, Sierra had dropped into the Lair and gotten into a shouting match with Cara over the latter’s decision to kick John out of the Lair and she’d accused Cara of betraying John. Cara had lashed out in kind to Sierra’s accusations, causing one hell of a cat fight. The fight had not ended well and it seemed as though it was the end of Cara and Sierra’s friendship, at least for the time being.

“I don’t blame her for that,” said Russell. Though John didn’t know it, Russell had argued against Cara kicking John out but to no avail and Russell wasn’t the only one down there who felt that way. “But anyway, back on point. Do you think it’s possible that maybe someone found about the serum Roger used that enables Sierra to kill without him knowing?”

“Oh, God, I hope not,” said Cara, grimacing. That was the last thing any of them needed. “But maybe…” Cara was quiet for a moment as she considered another possible explanation for the hit. “Maybe it wasn’t Roger’s serum or even nature at all. What if the breakout’s someone out of the Annex Project like…”

“Like that other guy who used to hang around here?” teased Russell, grinning. “Blond hair, grey-blue eyes, about oh-so tall? Father of a very powerful set of kids who used to camp out here?”

Cara gave Russell a withering look. “John’s gone, Russell,” she said, firmly. “And so are Robbie and Charlotte. They’re not coming back. I know you miss them and so do I, but this is for the best. The sooner you accept that, the better.”

Without waiting for a reply, Cara left Russell alone in the overhang and headed off to TIM’s room to try and conduct more research into the breakout.

XXX

Later that day during Sierra’s lunch hour, she teleported into the apartment with a bag from Arby’s containing four Loaded Italian sandwiches and a carrier holding four lemon-lime sodas. As it was Sunday, there was no school which meant Robbie would be home for the weekend.

She smiled to herself when she heard the sounds of her family’s laughter coming from Charlotte’s room and her smile widened when she peeked in and saw that all three of them had started painting Charlotte’s new room a lovely shade of lavender and were now having a minor
paint fight. Moments like this brought immense joy to Sierra’s heart and gave her another reason to keep fighting and hope that one day, the four of them would be able to live like this in peace.

“Hate to break up the party, but I brought lunch if anyone’s hungry,” said Sierra.

Everyone was thrilled to see Sierra and they were even happier to have lunch. Soon enough, everyone got cleaned up and then they were munching down on the sandwiches and soda. For John, who’d never had a Loaded Italian before, it was new and delightful experience. While the kids ate in the kitchen, Sierra and John ate in the living room so they could have a little time together.

“Wow. Damn, that is delicious,” said John, as he licked his lips. “I need to learn how to make these so I can have them more often.”

Sierra smiled. “Glad you like it. It’s my favorite from Arby’s. Well, mine and Robbie’s. During the third trimester, it was just about the only thing I craved at practically all hours of the day and night.”

John chuckled. “So, how’s it going at Ultra today? Trainee program or new breakout?”

Sierra groaned. “Breakout. Bad one. One I need to talk to you about. I’m tracking a breakout who apparently can kill but I don’t know how. I checked everywhere. There’s no trace of my dad’s research for the serum that allows me to kill or the serum itself, which means Roger covered his tracks perfectly. But that leaves me with only other possibility besides some kind of evolutionary mutation. The Annex Project…you said there were no survivors?”

John nodded. “Other than me and Killian.”

Sierra grimaced. She’d been afraid of that. “Is it possible that there were people after you? Maybe Ultra rebooted the project?”

John shrugged and then looked concerned. “What does your boss say?”

“Jedikiah denies knowing anything about it. What else?” If Jedikiah weren’t such a pathological liar ninety-nine percent of the time and if Sierra had been allowed access to his head at time she’d asked, she might’ve believed Jedikiah’s denial about the Annex Project.

John nodded in agreement. “Which he would in any event.”

“Exactly,” said Sierra. “So, I’m not going to know what the hell I’m up against until this guy tries to slit my throat.” And what’s worse, if it came down to a shootout between Sierra and the breakout, there was a very real chance that Sierra’s secret ability to kill would be exposed in the process.

“Which is why your uncle’s so hell-bent on weaponizing our species. Like it or not, we are the ultimate species,” said John.

“Yeah, I know,” said Sierra, sighing. She’d just put her sandwich box into the bag when her phone buzzed with a text from Marla. After checking it over, Sierra deleted it and pocketed her phone. Marla had been trying to persuade Sierra to talk all day about their fight and Sierra refused to consider it as she was still too upset. She didn’t want to talk to Marla unless it involved Marla’s decision to see sense and stay in town.

John’s brow wrinkled with curiosity. “Marla?”
“Who else?” said Sierra, bitterly. She was so furious with Marla, it was a miracle she hadn’t lashed out with her powers and broken everything in the room. “She wants to talk about her decisions and her damned lies that drove us apart. But I don’t want to talk to her until I’m sure I can be in the same room with her without tossing her out a window. The woman lied to me all of my life, drugged me when I started breaking out and kicked me out when I was pregnant with Robbie! And now she’s trying to drag us all out of town even though I made it damned clear we’re safer where we are. But no, she’s too stubborn to listen.”

“Like mother, like daughter.” John held up his hands to protect his face when Sierra attempted to half-heartedly smack him. “Hey, hey, okay! Calm down. I’m just kidding.” When Sierra pulled back, John snaked his arm around her shoulders and then gently kissed her head. “But seriously though, I do think you should talk to her when you’ve calmed down. I’m not saying you forgive and forget what she’s done, but maybe you should try and find some closure. For Luca’s sake if nothing else.”

Sierra sighed and made a face. John was right and she knew it, even if she didn’t want to admit it. Sooner or later, Sierra was going to have to talk to Marla about their relationship and how they were going to move forward.

“I hate you,” she said.

John just laughed before tenderly kissing her.

XXX

When Sierra returned to Ultra, she found Hilton bent over his computer in the ops center, searching, rather fruitlessly for any trace of their breakout judging by the look of sheer frustration on his face. But he wasn’t giving up. He didn’t even look up when Sierra came in.

“Where are we on tracking the breakout?” asked Sierra.

“Nowhere,” said Hilton, without looking up from his computer. “No tele-signatures matching our killer and no teleports in the last twelve hours. The guy’s hiding under a rock.”

Sierra frowned as she leaned over Hilton and then an idea came to her. “That might because you’re using the wrong search parameters. This bastard used an insane amount of energy to teleport the last time, so he’ll likely do it again. And…bingo!” After punching in the data, a tele-signature matching their breakout’s popped up on the screen at Brighton Beach. “Got him.”

Hilton paled. “Damn it. That was five minutes ago. We need to go. Now.”

Sierra nodded and then followed Hilton out of Ultra.

They tracked down the psychic trail to an expensive yet tacky club owned by some scumbag that the dead man was testifying against in some kind of mob trial. The club was lit with glaring red light, ear-drum shattering music pounded throughout the club and it was packed full of people talking, dancing and drinking too much alcohol.

Sierra made a face as she struggled not to cover up her ears. The club was so tacky and unbearably noisy. “Blech. This place is giving me a headache.”
“I’m more concerned about our breakout. With his lethal gene unlocked, he’s going to have a leg up on us, even with your evolved abilities,” said Hilton. For the first time since Sierra had met him, Hilton actually seemed somewhat afraid. “He’s probably here to collect his money.”

“Well, thankfully there’s only one of him and two of us,” said Sierra, as she glanced around for anyone who seemed out of the ordinary. She froze in her tracks, as did Hilton, when they both sensed a powerful teleportation. “Did you feel that?”

Hilton nodded and then armed his tranquilizer gun. “Yeah, he’s here. We should split up, but stay on channel, let me know if you find him.”

Sierra nodded and then readied her own gun before splitting up from Hilton. She hadn’t gone far as she made her way through the crowd when she suddenly felt a hand on her shoulder. Thinking the worst, Sierra instinctively grabbed the hand on her shoulder and twisted it behind the back of the person who touched her, which turned out to be Roger and Cara was close behind him.

“OW! Uncle, uncle!” moaned Roger. “Damn girl, you got strong. And you should see your face!”

An exasperated sigh escaped Sierra’s throat as she released Roger and then glared at them both. “What the hell are you two doing here?”

“Same as you, tracking a breakout,” said Cara, coolly.

“Like hell you are!” spat Sierra, furiously. There was no way in hell she was going to look the other way this time and let the Tomorrow People take a killer paranormal into the Lair. It was too dangerous and Sierra refused to let him go unpunished for his crimes. This time, she was going to ensure the breakout got the needle as there was no one who deserved it more. “I have a deal with my uncle. I stay in line, my family stays safe. I’m bringing this guy in and he’s getting his powers stripped whether you two like it or not. You will not jeopardize this for me.”

Cara glared. “You have a family to protect, I have a species.”

“Cara, don’t fight me on this or so help me—” Sierra began but she was cut off when she heard her partner’s telepathic call.

*It’s all clear. Should I come back or are you going to meet me?* asked Hilton.

*I’ll come to you,* said Sierra, quickly. As angry as she was with Cara, Sierra didn’t dare risk letting Hilton seeing Sierra consorting with a known Ultra fugitive that Sierra had supposedly depowered as far as the records stated.

Wait just a second.

Sierra rushed to meet up with her partner only to stop when she saw Cara and Russell in private room in the club. They were fighting with a tall, skinny man dressed in dark clothes with a big nose, oil-slick dark blond hair and carrying a briefcase obviously full of money. Quickly, Sierra ran to the room only to arrive too late as the hitman took off without his cash while Cara and Russell disappeared with the briefcase to use it as bait.

Furious by the turn of events, Sierra slammed her fist into the wall behind her. “Damn it!” A breakout with his killer gene unlocked was on the loose and her supposed friends were now working against her. Could the situation possibly be any worse?

_Hilton, bad news. The breakout got away with his cash,* reported Sierra. *We lost him.*

_Damn it,* cursed Hilton. *Now, what do we do?*
Sierra was quiet for a moment and then an idea came to her. *Do you remember all those interrogating classes you studied when we were dating?*

*Yeah, why? What does…oh. You want me to have a little chat with the owner about the hitman he hired?* guessed Hilton. He sounded rather eager, if not somewhat excited, which Sierra ignored.

*It’s our only lead left to try and we need to bring this guy in. Work your magic, see what you can come up with,* said Sierra. As much as she disliked bringing a human into Ultra’s affairs or letting Hilton loose anyone, even a scumbag like the one who’d ordered the hit, Sierra knew they were running out options. They had a killer breakout on the loose and if they didn’t stop him and soon, he was just going to keep on killing. Sierra couldn’t allow that.

*Will do. I’ll get right on it. Care to join me?* asked Hilton. *Your powers might come in handy for this.*

Although she knew he couldn’t see it as she wasn’t allowing it, Sierra made a face and shook her head. *Thanks, but no thanks. I’ll pass. I’m going to pick up my son from his babysitter. I’ll see you in the morning. Let me know what you find.*

*Will do,* said Hilton. *Good night.*

Sierra sighed as she departed from the club to pick up her kids from Astrid’s. She could only hope that everyone else in her life was having a more fruitful time than she was.

XXX

While Sierra was dealing with the club fiasco, Marla was returning home with a couple of cardboard boxes in the trunk of her car. She hadn’t yet decided if she and Luca were going to leave town but she wanted to be prepared if she did make that choice. When she entered the house, a mouth-watering smell hit her nose, which was a surprise as Luca didn’t cook.

“What smells so good in here?” asked Marla.

Luca, who was sitting on the couch eating a delicious-looking beef stir-fry dish while he watched TV, looked up at the sound of his mother’s voice and smiled. “Oh, hey, Mom. Dinner’s all good to go. John set us up.”

Marla blinked in surprise. “John?”

“Yeah, Sierra’s boyfriend. Robbie’s dad, remember?” said Luca. “He dropped by, said he wanted to talk to you and offered to make dinner. You should have some. He’s a really good cook, Mom.”

Marla was greatly puzzled by all of this and it showed on her face as she entered her dining room. Half the remains of a beef stir-fry dish sat on the kitchen island along with some additional vegetable side dishes and a pink pudding. John was standing by the sink, drying off his dishes and he gave Marla a polite smile.

“What’s all this?” asked Marla. Not that she wasn’t grateful but she hadn’t expected her daughter’s boyfriend to just pop in and cook for them.
John handed her a dish. “Dig in. Luca already half a cow and then some. I’m guessing you
don’t have a lot of proper family dinners.”

Marla chuckled as she sat down and dished up her food. “I try, but I barely get a glimpse of my
family these days. Sometimes, it seems like Luca only comes home to shower after football
practice and change his clothes while Sierra’s grown and living in her own apartment now. So, no,
family dinners aren’t exactly commonplace here, so this is a welcome change of pace. Thank you.”

John smiled. *My pleasure,* he said, telepathically.

As it had been a long time since she’d last spoken to anyone telepathically, Marla nearly
jumped a foot before she relaxed. *You’re one of us?*

John nodded as he leaned against the island. “It’s how Sierra and I met. When she broke out, I
felt her. Turns out we had a telepathic link and didn’t know it yet. I’d never experienced that before
or sensed anyone like Sierra, so we started talking. I told her everything about our kind and when
she trusted me enough to meet in person, I taught her how to control her powers. That’s why she
stopped taking the drugs and seeing the shrinks. She didn’t need them anymore.”

Marla sighed and felt her heart sink. “Is that what you wanted to talk about? What I did to
Sierra? Because if you’re here to chastise me, Sierra already did so and I can promise you, you
can’t make me hate myself for what I did anymore than I already do.” Marla had been almost
drowning in guilt ever since her fight with Sierra and not for the first time, Marla wished she hadn’t
done what she did back then and wanted to take it back but she couldn’t.

John made placating gesture with his hands. “No, that’s not why I’m here at all. I promise.
Look, I can’t begin to imagine how hard it’s been for you and Luca. And I know how much you
hate the fact that Sierra’s working for her uncle but what you need to understand is that Sierra is
working for Ultra to protect paranormals and keep you and Luca from Jedikiah and his lunatic
boss.”

Marla’s blood ran cold and her heart skipped a beat. “What’re you talking about?” she
whispered. That couldn’t be true, could it? Her daughter couldn’t be risking herself like that. Could
she? Ultra was dangerous but they weren’t monsters. They were scientists, researchers. Weren’t
they? “I thought Ultra *studied* the Tomorrow People.”

John looked grave as he shook his head. “Ultra *hunts* the Tomorrow People.” He sighed when
Marla looked at John in horror. “Sierra didn’t just accept Jedikiah’s offer because of her finances.
She joined Ultra so she could act as a double-agent to help us stay two steps ahead of Jedikiah and
the Founder and to keep our son from being their prey.”

Marla wanted to puke at the idea of her precious grandson being in Jedikiah’s clutches,
studied and experimented on like a lab rat. “Robbie’s one of us?”

John nodded grimly. “His powers are third generation and he’s a synergist just like Sierra, the
perfect specimen for Ultra. And the fact the Tomorrow People are even surviving is pretty much
thanks to Sierra. She’s a hero, just like her father. But it hasn’t been easy, I won’t lie. Sierra has
been badly injured and almost died more than once to keep not only our people but also her family
safe and to give no doubt as to her loyalties. She’s a hero.”

Tears stung Marla’s eyes and she felt both sickened and proud. Sickened to know that her only
daughter had been fighting in a shadow war to keep those she loved safe, and proud to know that
Sierra was such a hero.
“Just like her father,” murmured Marla. Sierra was truly Roger’s daughter in every way possible. Same powers, same stubbornness, same selflessness. What had Marla ever done to deserve a daughter like Sierra? She didn’t.

John ducked his head down for a moment and rubbed the back of his neck rather nervously before he looked up again. “Roger, your husband…he was very important to me and I know how much he loved his family, which is why he had to leave, so you would be safe. And it’s because I knew him that I know how much Sierra takes after Roger. Carrying the weight on her shoulders, doing the right thing no matter what the cost like Roger did.”

Marla narrowed her eyes. “I pay the cost. Right here. Every day.”

“So does Sierra,” retorted John. “Family is everything to her. Which is why you need to understand that if you leave, if you force Sierra to go with you, she’ll be leaving her other family. And we need her as much as you do. More importantly, if you go, the Founder will be angry, he’ll hunt you down when he finds you, he won’t hesitate to use you as leverage against Sierra or he will have you killed. So, please, Marla, I’m begging you, don’t leave town. Stay here where Sierra can better protect you.”

Marla hesitated and then she sighed as she realized that John was right. If Marla left with Luca now, if she forced Sierra to do the same, everything that Sierra had done to protect them would be for nothing and the rest of their kind, Robbie included, would be in terrible danger. As much as Marla wanted to just take off without looking back, she couldn’t. So, they would stay.

“All right, we’ll stay. But how do I tell Sierra this? She won’t take my calls or answer my texts,” said Marla, regretfully. “I messed up badly with her.”

John made a smile of relief before replying. “I know what that’s like. I hurt Sierra pretty bad once too, with our breakup. I thought I was protecting her from Ultra but I was wrong. I didn’t think she’d ever forgive me or trust me again, but in time, she did and now things are better between us.” Leaving Sierra had been the biggest mistake of John’s life and while he still wished he could take it back or change things, he didn’t let it rule him. He put his energy into the present and worked towards a better future with the woman he loved. “Regardless of what you’ve done, you’re still Sierra’s mom and she loves you. Just give her some time and some space. Eventually, she will come to see you.”

“And then?”

“And then, whatever happens next is up to you both. I can’t promise she’ll forgive you but she won’t stop caring about you,” said John, truthfully. “Just tell her you love her and don’t give up on her. It’s all you can do.”

John hoped he wasn’t doing more harm than good by telling Marla all this. But he’d had to do something to try and persuade Marla to stay and to help fix Sierra’s estrangement with her mother. He knew how much Sierra’s relationship with Marla had meant to Sierra and while he didn’t know if they would ever be what they were, John hoped they could make some kind of reconciliation. He’d done his part, now it was up to Sierra and Marla to take the next step.

XXX
Early the next morning, Sierra was rudely awakened by her cell phone buzzing.

She groaned and blinked to clear her vision as she checked the time. She was less than pleased to see that it was four-thirty in the morning and that Hilton was the one calling her. While an Ultra agent was supposed to always be prepared to dispatch at a moment’s notice, Sierra had limits as to when that moment’s notice was supposed to be.

“Hilton, I swear the world had better be on fire,” she growled, when she answered her cell. It wasn’t even time to wake up Robbie for school yet for crying out loud!

“Close enough. I talked to sap who ordered the hit and with a little persuasion, he gave up the number of the hitman he hired to whack the witness who was set to testify against him on racketeering charges,” said Hilton. “I’ve also been studying this scumbag’s handy work and guess what kind of client he likes best? Beautiful wealthy young ladies, which means—”

“You need me to hire him to kill a guy,” finished Sierra, yawning. Great. Time for her to play dress-up so she could order a hit. Just perfect. “Okay, text me the number and I’ll arrange a meeting at eight o’clock. The rendezvous spot I have in mind should be open by then. And Hilton, do not do this to me again unless there is a serious emergency. Understood?”

“Perfectly. See you then,” said Hilton, quickly before hanging up.

Sierra groaned before sinking back into the pillows and snuggling back into John’s arms and falling back into a deep slumber. In a few hour, she was going to pretend to be a wealthy heiress and hire a paranormal hitman. How the hell had this become her life?

A few hours later, Sierra walked into the Noodle Shop dressed in an expensive, slick red dress and black overcoat. Her hair had been done up in an elegant bun, her nails manicured and she was also wearing diamond jewelry that John had “borrowed” for her to complete the look. To anyone who looked at her, Sierra truly did resemble the hitman’s favored clientele. As ordered, Hilton sat nearby, concealed by a screening as backup.

Within a few minutes, Sierra spotted the hitman she’d seen at the club the previous night. He was sitting not too far from Hilton and he gazed at Sierra like she was his next meal.

“Are you the guy?” she asked. “Nathan?”

Nathan nodded. “I am, indeed. Enchanté mademoiselle. Please, allow me.” He then rose up from his seat and pulled Sierra’s chair out for her before sitting back down. “So, you must be my client. I must say, you are far more than what I imagined when we spoke on the phone.”

“Well, you’re not exactly what I was expecting either,” said Sierra, coolly. “You know, you come highly recommended from a friend but maybe he was wrong. After all, for what I have in mind, I’d prefer to get my money’s worth.”

Nathan chuckled before he reached across the table. “Look, I got to ask, are you affiliated with any kind of a law enforcement agency? Reminding you that it would be entrapment to lie about said affiliation.”


Nathan grinned. “You mean…murder?” When Sierra nodded, Nathan leaned back and his grin widened. “The murder you had in mind’s going to cost you a million dollars.”
Sierra raised an eyebrow. “Seems a little steep,” she remarked. “How can I be sure I’ll get my money’s worth?”

“Plenty of guys could do it for less, but I’m the best. I can get in anytime, anywhere, anyhow,” said Nathan, smugly. “If you don’t believe me, check my record. I’m sure you’ll find that it’s nothing but perfectly exemplary.”

Sierra grinned as she leaned across the table. That exactly what she’d wanted to hear. “Oh, I know.” Before Nathan could react, Sierra slammed her hand onto Nathan’s and within moments, the hitman was groaning in pain as Sierra’s power wreaked horrible havoc onto his body. When Nathan pulled out his gun, Hilton swooped in and dropped a vase onto his head, knocking him out and allowing Hilton to slap the suppression cuff onto his wrist.

“Nice work, partner,” said Sierra, approvingly.

Hilton smiled. “You too, partner.”

After calming the panicked patrons, assuring them that this had been a sting operation, Hilton and Sierra dragged Nathan out of the Noodle Shop and took him to Ultra to be examined and then have his powers stripped. While they were doing so, Sierra made a telepathic call to Cara, who was attempting to lure the hitman onto a subway car using his money as bait.

_Sorry, Cara, but it’s over_, said Sierra.

Cara’s smug reply surprised Sierra._That’s funny. I was just about to tell you the same thing._

Sierra fought back to urge to frown, as she helped strap Nathan into his chair before allowing Jedikiah and the scientists to examine._What the hell are you talking about? Hilton and I just brought the breakout into Ultra and he’s being examined as we speak._

_Oh, yeah? Then how come he just walked onto my subway car?_ Cara asked, sounding even smugger than before._Hate to break it to you, Sierra, but you’ve got the wrong guy._

Sierra mentally scoffed._Yeah, nice try, Cara. You want to see what I’m seeing? Be my guest._

Sierra blinked and then she and Cara saw through each other’s eyes. What they saw shocked them both. The hitman that Sierra had taken into custody was at Ultra, but a man of his exact resemblance was sitting on the subway car across from Cara and a seemingly asleep Russell.

_There’s two of them_, said Cara, shocked and baffled. _How…?_

Sierra’s heart sank as she realized the truth of the situation._Oh, hell’s bells! They’re twins, one human and one paranormal. Damn it!_ They weren’t tracking a breakout who could kill, they were tracking the gunman and his getaway car. Sierra was willing to bet dollars to doughnuts that the twin she and Hilton captured was the human one and therefore of no use to Ultra. And to make it that much worse, Sierra could only watch as Cara and Russell quickly slapped a suppression cuff on the paranormal twin and teleported to the Lair.

Great. They hadn’t caught the real target and he’d just escaped. Jedikiah was going to have a _fit._

XXX
Sierra waited apprehensively as Jedikiah emerged from the lab where they’d been examining Cyrus. His brow was wrinkled with deep concentration and concern, which was not a good sign.

“How is he able to kill?” asked Hilton.

Jedikiah’s frown deepened. “He’s human.”

Hilton looked aghast and disbelieving. “That’s impossible. I checked this guy’s record twice. Only a paranormal could’ve pulled off those hits! We both felt him teleport.”

“The large tele-signatures,” said Sierra, in realization. “He has a partner teleporting him.”

“Where are you pulling this out of?” asked Hilton, almost suspiciously.

Jedikiah held out a hand, silencing Hilton before turning to Sierra with a confused look on his face. “Wait. Who?”

Sierra pulled out the hitman’s wallet, which she’d been lucky enough to swipe in all the commotion of Nathan’s capture. While it was clean of any identification or credit cards in the event of capture, there was a large amount of cash inside along with a photo of Nathan and his twin brother, Cyrus, or so the inscription on the back of the photo said.

“Meet Cyrus, our hitman’s twin,” she said, as she handed Jedikiah the photo. “If he’s the twin with powers, I’ll bet you my next paycheck that’s how the hits have been pulled off. Cyrus teleports in and Nathan does the dirty work. It’s the only explanation that fits.”

An excited look flickered across Jedikiah’s face. “A paranormal twin. I’ll be damned. We need to capture him as soon as possible. Come with me. Our prisoner might not be so useless to us after all.”

Sierra didn’t like the sound of that but said nothing about it as she followed her uncle into the lab where they began to interrogate Nathan.

“So, Nathan, nice little setup you’ve got with your paranormal twin brother,” said Sierra, taking the lead. She smirked when a look of alarm briefly flashed in Nathan’s eyes. “Yeah, we know about Cyrus. We know that you’re the executioner while your twin’s the getaway car. That’s how you pulled off all those impossible hits.”

Nathan’s brief flicker of fear was quickly replaced with his usual arrogant confidence. “What can I say? We make a good team. Besides, we’re just trying to make a living. There’s nothing wrong with that, is there?”

Sierra scoffed and rolled her eyes. She was finding it difficult not to punch this guy’s lights out. “Right, because professional killing is such a noble practice,” she said, her voice dripping with sarcasm. “And besides, I’m finding it hard to believe that a part of you doesn’t resent your brother just a little. After all, without Cyrus’s abilities, what good are you in your profession?”

Jedikiah nodded in agreement as he grinned. “She’s right. You’re as powerless as a mewing kitten.”

Nathan glared darkly at them both. “For your information, I love my brother more than anything. There is no resentment. And also, you wouldn’t be speaking to me like that if I had a wire around your pale throat.”
Jedikiah laughed. “Really? Take a note of this, you two. This is classic textbook overcompensation. The fact of the matter is, your brother was born with powers that would make the gods jealous. But by some horrible twist of fate, you were born with nothing.”

Sierra gave Jedikiah a questioning look which he ignored. Was Jedikiah talking about the twins or himself and Roger?

Nathan scoffed and shook his head. “You’re wrong. Who do you think arranges the hits? Manages the money? Huh? My brother needs me.”

“Because you’re shrewder than he is and he can’t kill,” said Jedikiah, flatly, making Nathan fall silent. “Nature’s pathetic attempt at balancing the scales. But let me tell you something, mister, one day your brother’s going to realize he doesn’t need you. You’re weak, you’re a burden to him. An albatross around his neck. He doesn’t need you. But what if I could help you? What if I could help you get the powers that are your birthright? Make you your brother’s equal and yet still be able to kill?”

This time both Sierra and Hilton looked up at Jedikiah in surprise. The way he was talking sounded like Jedikiah had figured out some kind of way to transfer powers from a paranormal into a regular human being. If it were possible and not some kind of ploy to get Cyrus into Ultra’s hands, it would be a revolutionary scientific breakthrough on paper but also possibly a horrific process knowing Ultra’s preferred methods.

Nathan’s curiosity was piqued. “How?”

Jedikiah grinned, knowing that the fish had just taken the bait from the hook. “Well, I would need a donor. Namely your twin. Now, I understand it’s a lot to take in at once, so why don’t we leave you alone for a bit think it over. It’s your choice, after all. But ask yourself this: what wouldn’t you give to be your brother’s shoes?”

Without another word, Sierra and Hilton followed Jedikiah out of the lab to give Nathan alone time to consider Jedikiah’s offer. As it was clearly a trap to get Cyrus into Ultra so his powers could be stripped, Sierra wasn’t that concerned but nevertheless, she still had a job to do. As soon as she had the chance, she slipped away from Ultra.

XXX

When Sierra went to the Lair to pick up Cyrus so she could turn him into Ultra and get his powers stripped, unsurprisingly given Cara’s new stubborn state of mind, Cara refused to hand Cyrus over and they got into an argument about it.

“The answer’s no, Sierra,” said Cara, firmly as her voice raised in volume. “I’m not going to hand Cyrus over to you and that’s final!”

Sierra growled in anger. “Cara, just because Cyrus can’t kill doesn’t mean he’s innocent! He’s an accessory to countless first-degree murders! He’s as guilty as Nathan! Let me take him in!”

Cara stubbornly shook her head. “It’s my duty to protect the Tomorrow People. All of them.”

Sierra folded her arms across her chest. “What about all the other criminal breakouts we’ve turned into Ultra? Don’t they deserve your ‘protection’?”
“That is not the same. Cyrus was being manipulated by his brother. If you want to punish someone, it should be the brother you’ve got. But no, you and Jedikiah are too busy scheming to make Nathan sell out his own twin!” snapped Cara.

Sierra scoffed and shook her head, unable to believe what she was hearing. “Okay, first of all, you bought that crap? Cara, I read Nathan’s mind. There was no manipulation of any kind.” As heartless and sick as Cyrus and Nathan were, there was no doubt in Sierra’s mind that the twins cared deeply for one another. Everything that they’d done for each other was completely voluntary with no strings attached. “Second of all, how the hell do you know about what happened at Ultra? Have you been spying on me?”

To Sierra’s ire, Cara was unrepentant as she nodded. “I didn’t have to. It wasn’t hard to guess. But yes, I have been trying to keep an eye on you since you’ve become your uncle’s lackey. And it seems I was right to do so. You’re supposed to be our inside woman.”

“And you’re supposed to be helping me protect my cover!” Sierra shot back. Sierra’s position at Ultra was only secure if her cover was maintained with the help of the Tomorrow People or had Cara forgotten that oh-so important little detail?

Cara sighed and then she looked worn out. “I don’t want to argue with you, Sierra. I’m sorry, I just don’t have it in me.”

Sierra shook her head in disgust at Cara. It was like their first argument when Sierra joined Ultra all over again. Only this time, it was worse because Sierra didn’t recognize the woman in front of her. “I don’t know what’s gotten into you or who you are anymore. But you’re not the same person who first asked me to join you. And you know what else? This place is going to hell without John.”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra teleported back to her apartment and sank down into the couch with a frustrated groan.

“Bad day?” John poked his head out of the kitchen with a look of concern on his face. “And can I also safely assume Cara was involved?”

Sierra nodded and then proceeded to tell John everything that had happened involving Nathan, Cyrus and her argument with Cara. By the time she was finished, Sierra wanted to scream. “Oh, this is ridiculous. Cara is freaking—!”

“Stubborn? Fearless? Stupid?” suggested John, as he sat down beside her.

“All of the above and then some. She’s in over her head, John!” said Sierra, in frustration. “First, she nearly gets me killed over that mess with Cassie, then she kicks you out of the Lair and now she’s refusing to let go of Cyrus! She’s making one mistake after another!”

“She does have a point,” said John, softly.

Sierra gaped at John incredulously. “Are you seriously defending Cara after all the crap’s she pulled?”

John shook his head. “Not exactly. Jedikiah is going to use those twins as guinea pigs. He’s going to try and give Cyrus’s powers to Nathan.”

“Wait, what? I thought that was just a ploy,” said Sierra, as her heart sank. All her uncle’s talk of somehow donating Cyrus’s powers to Nathan…that was all real? It hadn’t just been a baited attempt to capture Cyrus for study?
John shook his head grimly. “No, it’s very real. Trust me. Power transplants are the Holy Grail for Jedikiah.”

Sierra’s breath caught in her throat. Power transplants seemed like the kind of thing Jedikiah would want to do, but she’d never actually considered the possibility that such a thing could actually happen. “Has he ever succeeded?”

John shook his head again. “No. But I saw one once myself.” John looked shaken as though he was recalling a horrific memory. “Sometimes the process is voluntary on both sides, sometimes it isn’t. But it doesn’t matter. The end result’s always the same. The human is forced to watch as the paranormal is strapped into this medieval-looking chair that harvest their stem cells. Every single time, the paranormal dies in more pain than you can dream of and the human doesn’t get the powers, so they’re silenced. But Jedikiah’s never performed it on twins before, so he’s got the perfect specimens for the process. So, all I’m saying is, maybe Cara’s right to want to hold on to Cyrus.”

Sierra felt sick to her stomach at the thought of such a horrific thing happening. But what could she do to prevent it? Jedikiah wasn’t going to stop until Nathan sold out his own twin brother if they were lucky. If they weren’t, Jedikiah or even the Founder if the situation soured might burn the world down to the ground in search of Cyrus so they could attempt the insane procedure. What the hell was she supposed to do?

XXX

Back at the Lair, Russell was having a little chat with Cyrus, who was currently strapped into a chair with a cuff suppressing his telekinesis and teleportation. He was curious about their prisoner, their line of work and he wanted to know what it was they were doing with all those millions they’d earned.

“So, obviously murder’s wrong, but I got to know…how do you guys spend all that money?” asked Russell. All that money…they had to do something really cool with it. “Are we talking models and bottles in Dubai? Saville Row tailors? Holidays on the Riviera? Paint me a picture.”

Cyrus laughed and for the first time since his capture, smiled brightly. “Uh, well, we bought this really fancy house in Connecticut. It’s got two washer-dryers, a pool and the coolest entertainment system. Oh, and the view from the balcony at sunrise is to die for.”

Russell’s face fell and then he burst out laughing. The twins’ idea of a good time was not his own and it was a bit of disappointment. “Buzzkill! Oh, dude, that’s not bad but you really need someone to show you a better way of spending all that moolah and have a great time.”

Cyrus laughed as well but then his smile vanished when he received a frantic telepathic call from Nathan and felt his pain.

Cy? Where are you? I need you! cried Nathan, in agony. Cy, please, they’re hurting me!

“Oh, God!” whimpered Cyrus, as he began fighting his bindings.

Russell frowned in concern. “Dude, are you okay?”

“Nathan’s in trouble. They’re hurting him!” said Cyrus.
Russell rose up from his seat in a panic and called for Cara, who quickly ran into the room.

Cyrus was almost hyperventilating and crying at this point. “Please! You have to let me go! You have to take off the cuffs! I have to help my brother!”

Cara knelt down in front of Cyrus and tried to calm him down. “Cyrus, no. Listen to me. It is a trap. Your brother’s been captured and he’s trying to manipulate you into turning yourself in.” Though she had seen what Sierra had seen in the twins’ mind and knew that their relationship wasn’t a bad one, Cara refused to let Cyrus slip away. It was too dangerous.

Cyrus shook his head and looked pleadingly at Cara. “No, I can feel him. He needs me!”

Cara bit her lip and her eyes were pleading. “Cyrus, your brother has been using you for years. This is your chance to finally be free of him! You—”

“No!” interrupted Cyrus, as tears pooled in his eyes. “No, I have to get to my brother! Please! He’s my family, the only family I have that ever cared about me! We’re all each other has! Please, let me go. There must be someone in your life you’d sacrifice everything for!”

Cara was silent as Cyrus’s words struck a chord in her. Suddenly, an idea, a rather brilliant one, if she did say so herself, came to Cara’s mind and she made her decision.

XXX

When Sierra returned to Ultra, the first thing she did was go straight to Jedikiah’s office. She wanted answers and she needed them from the only man who could provide them. Luckily, Jedikiah seemed to be in a sharing mood as he was eagerly anticipating the success of his trap.

“I thought your offer to give Nathan his powers was trick but the procedure’s real, only it’ll kill his brother, won’t it?” demanded Sierra. It was amazing that depths her uncle sank to still surprised her anymore, but they didn’t.

Jedikiah was unsurprised by Sierra’s question but nevertheless, he was quite curious about how she knew what she did. “Hmm. I wonder how you got a hold of that piece of information? Not many agents, even ones with your level of clearance know about our transference protocol.”

Sierra gave her uncle a hard look. “I have my sources,” she said, evasively. “Now, please, answer me.”

Jedikiah nodded. “Well, you’re right. In the past, the donor has typically…expired and then we dispose of the human receiver, for security reasons, you understand.” He made placating gesture when Sierra’s face twisted with disgust. “But that’s science, Sierra. It’s success built upon decades of failure. And besides, we’ve never tried the experiment on twins before.”

“And you never will,” retorted Sierra. “You weren’t in Nathan’s head. I was. I saw the depth of their relationship. Whatever envy Nathan has, it’s nothing compared to how much he loves his brother and the feeling’s mutual. They would never betray each other, not after all they’d been through.” Sierra had seen the kind of hell Nathan and Cyrus had endured together growing up in an abusive household before Cyrus broke out and they were able to get away and make real money for a better life. She pitied them but she didn’t excuse them. “Cyrus won’t fall for your little trap. He’s sitting on a million dollars and Nathan won’t let Cyrus die for him. Cyrus is probably out of
the country by now.”

But Sierra spoke too soon as she then received a call from Cara.

*I hope you’re happy, Sierra. Cyrus is turning himself in,* said Cara.

Jedikiah frowned in concern at the look Sierra’s face. “You okay? You look a little dyspeptic.”

Sierra didn’t answer. She just turned around and watched in horror as Cyrus teleported into the ops room and surrendered himself to Ultra, much to Jedikiah’s immense pleasure.

“Well, well, well, looks like you were misinformed, Sierra. My little trap’s paid off,” said Jedikiah, almost gleefully. He poked his head out of his office door. “Take him to the lab. Prep him and his twin for the procedure.”

Sierra couldn’t believe what was happening and she bolted out of Jedikiah’s office and went to Nathan’s cell, hoping to talk some sense into him. It was one thing for Cyrus to have his powers removed before turning the twins over to the authorities for their crimes, but this was over the line. She couldn’t allow this to happen. She also couldn’t understand why Nathan would allow Cyrus to die when she’d seen for herself the depth of their brotherly devotion for one another. She had to get through to Nathan before it was too late.

“Nathan, don’t do this!” she said, as she burst into the room.

Hilton looked at Sierra as though she’d lost her mind. “What’re you doing?”

Sierra ignored Hilton as she fixed her gaze on Nathan. “If you try and take away his powers like this, Cyrus will die.”

To Sierra’s horror and disgust, Nathan didn’t seem bothered by this in the slightest. “I’ve seen my fair share of death.”

Sierra frowned in confusion. What the hell was going on in this guy’s head? How was he so twisted that he would willingly subject his only twin to this kind of torture after all they’d been through together? It didn’t make a lick of sense.

“He is your brother,” she stressed. “What are you doing? Even if this procedure works, which it never has before, Cyrus will die in more pain than even you can fathom!” Even Hilton looked sickened by this but he said nothing, not wishing to interrupt. “Are powers really worth that much to you?”

Sierra hoped that she’d gotten through to Nathan by some miracle but her heart sank as Nathan continued to look completely unbothered by this news. In fact, he looked quite smug and seemed to sneer at her as he spoke. “So easy for you to say, isn’t it, gorgeous? You don’t know what it’s like to be born without them.”

“No, I don’t,” she admitted. “But I’ve seen your memories and I do know what your brother means to you and you to him. So, why are you doing this?” She couldn’t understand how Nathan could be so cold to a brother that he supposedly loved as much as Sierra had seen.

Nathan clicked and patted Sierra’s shoulder before she took a step back. “Don’t worry that pretty little head of yours, girl. Everything’s going to be just fine. Now, step away.”

Realizing it was pointless to keep arguing, Sierra reluctantly stepped away and allowed Nathan to journey down to the transference lab. There was nothing more she could do now, not without
risking exposing herself to Ultra.

_Cara, how could you let him do this? My uncle’s going to kill him_, said Sierra.

_No, he’s not_, said Cara, smugly.

Sierra’s blood ran cold at this. Why was Cara so confident that Cyrus wouldn’t die? There was no reason to think otherwise. And Cara had been so adamant that Cyrus stay put in the Lair, so why had she suddenly changed her mind and let Cyrus walk free? There was no reason to. Unless…

_Oh, God, what did you do?_ asked Sierra, dreading the answer.

_What you never had the guts to do_, replied Cara. _I gave him John’s gun. Your uncle’s going down._

Sierra’s heart skipped a beat as she ran to the laboratory, praying she wasn’t too late. When she arrived, Nathan was pulling a gun out of Cyrus’s waistband. “GET DOWN!”

She didn’t speak a moment too soon, for as soon as she did, Nathan used the gun to kill two of the guards before turning the gun on Jedikiah. Sierra thrust out her hands and telekinetically blasted Nathan across the room, disarming him. Sierra and everyone else in the room were then tossed around like ragdolls by Cyrus’s own telekinetic blast, causing several painful injuries in the process. Some of them even had the wind knocked out of them and were temporarily unable to move.

“Forget about Jedikiah. Let’s go,” said Cyrus, as he reached for his brother.

But as Nathan’s ego demanded he finish the job, Nathan refused. He took off the garroting weapon he kept wrapped around his wrist like a bracelet and wrapped it around Jedikiah’s neck. It was lucky that Jedikiah had placed his hand at the level of his eyes or else the killing process would be going a lot quicker than it was.

“Hold your fire!” choked Jedikiah, as he struggled to get free.

The armed human security agent did as he was told but didn’t take his gun or his gaze off his boss and his attacker.

“What’re you doing? Nathan!” cried Cyrus.

“Finishing the job!” grunted Nathan. “Our client might as well get their money’s worth.”

Sierra, who lay on the floor, trying to catch her breath while clutching her probably cracked ribs, said, “Nathan, please. You don’t want to do this.” Having Jedikiah out of Sierra’s life would be a relief but it wouldn’t solve the problem of Ultra long-term, not with the Founder still out there. And more importantly, if Nathan succeeding in killing Jedikiah, both Nathan and Cyrus would be hunted down like rats until they were caught and killed.

Nathan disagreed. “I can think of one million reasons why I do, pretty girl.”

“Nathan, she’s right! We’ve got to jump. Let’s go!” begged Cyrus.

But again, Nathan refused. He even whispered into Jedikiah’s ear with a furious look in his eyes, “You really you could convince me to betray my own brother? What do you know of the bonds of blood? You know nothing about brotherhood, you bastard!”
Realizing that Jedikiah was going to die soon, Sierra glanced around and then spotted a tranq gun which was just tantalizingly out of Hilton’s reach. Without Nathan noticing, she telekinetically tossed it to Hilton’s hand and then Hilton quickly shot Nathan in the shoulder, causing Nathan to release Jedikiah by dropping him onto the floor.

With Jedikiah out of the line of fire, the security guard wasted no time putting half a dozen bullets into Nathan’s chest, killing him and devastating not only Cyrus but Jedikiah as well.

“No, no, no, no!” cried Jedikiah.

Tears slid down Cyrus’s cheeks as he cradled Nathan in his arms. “No. No, please, Nathan. Don’t leave me. Please!” he begged.

Nathan touched his brother’s face. “I love you, bro. Be safe.”

Cyrus then wailed in terrible grief as Nathan breathed his last and perished. Cyrus then teleported away with his brother’s body before Cyrus could be taken back into custody, further devastating Jedikiah, who appeared to be crying as he lay slumped on the floor.

“No,” he moaned, distraught. “You let him get away. Why did you let him get away?”

Sierra couldn’t help it. She gave her uncle a look of pitying sympathy before she forced herself to ignore her own pains and stand up. She then helped her uncle to stand before she healed Jedikiah of the injuries he’d sustained in all the commotion. Jedikiah didn’t make the slightest sound in response. He didn’t even make the smallest protest as Sierra tugged on his arm, then slowly and carefully led him to his office for a moment of peace and quiet. After seating Jedikiah into his chair, she poured him a glass of scotch to calm him down.

A few minutes after Jedikiah downed his drink, he took a deep shuddering breath and seemed much more his usual self.

“Thank you for that. Please, feel free to help yourself to a drink. You’ve more than earned it. Also, saving my life has earned you free entry in my office now. No knock required anymore, Sierra,” he said, with a small smile on his face.

In spite of all that had happened, Sierra couldn’t prevent the small smile that flickered across her face before picking out a drink from her uncle’s supply. She ignored the expensive decanters of scotch, whisky and bourbon in favor of a blackberry soda water, which she sipped after she sat down across from Jedikiah.

“I’ve saved your life a few times now,” she reminded him.

Jedikiah chuckled as he nodded in agreement. “Well, it goes both ways, right? I trust your family’s all well and happy?”

Sierra nodded before taking another sip of her drink. “Look, I got to ask. What was so important about those twins? I’ve…uh…never seen you like that.” In all the time she’d known her uncle, Jedikiah had never once lost it like that. It had been quite a sight to see. “

Jedikiah sighed as he looked down at his now-empty glass. “You must forgive me for losing my composure. It’s just the perfect case study. Two specimens, almost identical offers the chance to study the gene that makes you so special.” He smiled in spite of himself. “Pardon my poor choice of words, but any scientist would’ve killed at the chance to study them, Sierra.”

Sierra shook her head. “No, I understand perfectly.” As much as she hated to admit it, she
understood her uncle’s feelings. Scientifically speaking, Cyrus and Nathan had been the perfect specimens for research into her kind’s genetic abilities. Losing them was a devastating loss in that regard for all parties. But even so, she knew there was more of a reason to her uncle’s motivations than just scientific ones. “But if I may be so bold to say, perhaps your interest was more than that. Perhaps it was because you’re a human scientist who had a paranormal brother?”

Jedikiah couldn’t deny that and it showed by the look on his face. “Well, I’m sure my own personal history fueled my interest subconsciously,” he admitted. “But I know where you’re going with this, Sierra and let me assure you, that while I am quite excited about one day transferring powers from one of your kind to my own, I never would’ve considered using Roger as a test subject for myself.”

Sierra held up her hands in a placating gesture. “Never crossed my mind, I swear,” she lied. She found it hard to believe that man as excited as Jedikiah had been about transferring powers between siblings hadn’t even considered transferring Roger’s powers to himself but she didn’t say so.

Jedikiah seemed to believe her but he was no less firm with his next words. “I appreciate that. But know this: I value my humanity, Sierra. And your father was my brother, not a lab rat. I’m sure you can understand those feelings.”

Sierra nodded. She understood all too well. If Luca and her positions had been reversed, if they had been in Jedikiah and Roger’s shoes, she never would’ve considered using Luca like that.

Jedikiah sighed again before leaning forward in his chair. “Listen, I need to know. Your little trick you used to heal me…if we’d been able to keep Nathan’s body, could you have…?”

Knowing what he was referring to, Sierra shrugged and feigned innocence. “…I don’t know. I’ve never used that power on a corpse before.” Thankfully, it wasn’t entirely a lie as when Ultra had first tested Sierra’s ability of biological manipulation, they’d never tested Sierra’s power on corpses or even dead tissue. Sierra could have revived Nathan easily but it didn’t matter. Sierra never would’ve restored a monster like Nathan to life, even if it cost Sierra her position at Ultra. “And who knows if there would be any side-effects if I tried something on that scale right off the bat? I’m sorry.”

To Sierra’s relief, Jedikiah accepted this explanation without question but was still disappointed. “Well, I had to at least try.” He sighed and gave her a rare smile. “Thanks again for what you did. You should get checked out by medical and head home. I’m sure your son’s missing you.”

“Okay, I will. Good-night, sir,” she said, politely before leaving.

XXX

At the Noodle Shop that night, Cara was sitting at the bar, waiting for Cyrus to show up. In return for his freedom and his money, he was supposed to have taken out Jedikiah. Instead of a successful hit as Cara had expected given the twins’ record, she received word from Sierra that the hit had failed. Nathan had been killed and Jedikiah had survived.

Cyrus entered the Noodle Shop, sniffling as he rubbed at his red eyes. “You have something for
“I’m not sure you earned it,” said Cara, coolly. She didn’t so much as flinch when Cyrus looked incredulously at her. Cara hadn’t gotten her money’s worth as Sierra would say. So, why should she turn over the money? “You didn’t finish the job.”

Cyrus glared darkly at Cara. He’d had to bury his only brother, the only one he’d ever loved and who ever loved him. And Cara had the gall to say that the money hadn’t been earned? “Your girl, Sierra, got in the way. And now my brother’s dead. So, yeah, I’d say we earned it. Now, give me my money!”

Cara couldn’t argue with this and so, with some reluctance, slid the briefcase across the floor. Cyrus quickly scooped it up and then stormed out of the Noodle Shop without looking back.

“Has it really come to this? Hiring contract killers to do our dirty work?”

Cara nearly jumped a foot in surprise when John appeared and sat down beside her. He looked sad and disappointed, causing Cara to feel a twinge of guilt.

“Sierra told me what happened at Ultra. What did you do? Give him my gun from the Lair?” When Cara looked away in shame, John sighed and shook his head as he folded his hands together. “You know, I have always admired your resolve. But this time you’ve gone too far, Cara.”

Cara forced herself to meet John’s blue-grey gaze. “I had a chance to take out Jedikiah. I took it. I did what had to be done and what could’ve been done a lot sooner if Sierra had just had the guts to do what’s necessary.” In Cara’s mind, she’d done no wrong. Sierra could kill and if Sierra had just had the stomach to take out Jedikiah and the Founder as she was capable of, the shadow war would be over and everyone could return to their old lives.

John gave Cara a heartbroken, incredulous look. “Would you listen to yourself?” The Tomorrow People were survivors, fighters. They were not killers. And if Cara had any idea what kind of a toll that killing took on one’s soul, she wouldn’t speak about Sierra in such a way. Cara had well and truly lost it and the woman that they knew, the one who’d befriended Robbie and brought about John and Sierra’s reunion was all but dead now.

“You still care for Jedikiah,” said Cara. “Or else you’d see that I’m right.”

John didn’t reply. He just kept gazing at Cara with such a look of devastation in his eyes.

“Cyrus asked me something, if there was someone in my life that I would sacrifice everything for. It’s you, John,” said Cara, unable to keep the hope out of her voice. “I still love you.”

John looked away this time and didn’t reply. He knew that Cara had always harbored romantic feelings for him and maybe in another lifetime, if Sierra had never been in the picture, something could have happened between them but that wasn’t the case. John didn’t love Cara and he never would. His heart had always been and would always be Sierra’s.

“I know that you’ll never love me back and that’s okay,” said Cara, quickly. She loved John but she knew he was never going to return her feelings. “You’re still my best friend, my family.” She hesitantly placed her hand on John’s and her heart leapt when he didn’t pull away. “Come back with me, John. You can bring Charlotte with you. Everything will be what it used to be okay. Just, please come home with me.”

John pulled his hand away and shook his head. “Why? So you can have an assassin at your disposal? Because you can’t control Sierra and you hope I’ll just blindly obey you instead? No
thanks.”

Though the thought had crossed her mind, Cara frantically shook her head. “No, John, that’s not what I meant! I miss you. Please…”

But Cara’s pleas fell on deaf ears as John rose up and shook his head again. “I’m not coming back, Cara. I’m staying with my family. Good-bye.”

Realizing that she’d lost John for good, Cara could only try and fail to force back her tears as she watched John depart from the Noodle Shop without looking back.

XXX

Later that night while Luca was out a friend’s house, Marla was sitting alone in her living room as she pulled out her cell phone. She’d given Sierra some breathing space after John’s visit but now she was going to make one last attempt to contact her daughter before giving her a little more time. She was just about to dial Sierra’s number when there was a knock on the front door.

When Marla answered the door, she was both surprised and pleased to see that Sierra was standing on the front porch.

“Sierra, hi. Come on in,” said Marla. “I was just about to call you. We need to talk.”

“Yeah, we really do,” said Sierra, sighing. “But, uh, I can’t stay too long. Robbie’s waiting for me at home and I’ve had a really long day at work. You understand.”

Marla nodded and gestured for Sierra to join her in the living room. Marla took the armchair while Sierra sat as far from Marla as she could on the couch. The enforced distance didn’t go unnoticed and it caused Marla’s face to fall but she quickly regained her composure and took a deep breath before speaking.

“Sierra, honey, I am so, so sorry for what I did. You were right, I should’ve been honest with you from the beginning. If I had, maybe none of this would’ve happened. Maybe you and I wouldn’t be where we are now.” When Sierra just looked at her hands and didn’t reply, Marla continued, “You should know that Luca and I are staying in town. We’re not leaving. So, you don’t have to worry about your attention being divided.”

This time, Sierra looked up in surprise and relief. “What made you change your mind?”

“John did,” said Marla. “He came by the other day. He told me the truth about Ultra, what you do there, the war you’ve been fighting and the lengths you’ve been going through to protect not just our species but also our family. God, Sierra, I had no idea the weight you were carrying on your shoulders. If that’s what your father was carrying, then I am sorry for all those times I was upset with Roger when he chose the fight over us.”

Sierra stiffened with anger and took a long, deep breath before speaking. “Mom, Dad didn’t choose the fight. He chose us, his family. Everything that Dad ever did, everything that I have ever done and I’m still doing has been for our family and our species. Ultra is being run by a lunatic paranormal who only cares about power and who will kill us all if it suits him and I don’t find a way to stop him. Why is it still so hard for you to understand that?”
“I know, I know. I understand now, I promise,” said Marla, quickly as she made a placating gesture. “And I’m also very proud of you, Sierra. You are a born leader just like Roger. So, I won’t interfere anymore. I won’t just drop by your place without clearing it with you first. I won’t ask questions about your work at Ultra because I know it’s important and I know you’re trying to protect us. But I won’t stop being your mom. I won’t stop worrying about you or checking in on you and Robbie. I have to know that everyone in my family—you, Luca, and Robbie are safe. You may be grown and living on your own but I have to provide some semblance of a normal life to you and Luca.”

Sierra nodded in understanding “I know. Luca needs it and so do I. I appreciate it more than you realize.” Having some kind of normalcy to go back to after time at Ultra and the Lair gave Sierra a semblance of peace that she desperately needed.

Feeling hopeful by this, Marla smiled softly and continued. “But my days of burying my head in the sand are over. I know you’re in danger at Ultra. So, every night, I will be waiting for you to call me and tell me that you’re okay because I won’t be able to rest until I know that you and your son are safe. Can you promise me that?”

Sierra sighed and her eyes glistened with tears. “I can’t make that promise to call you, Mom. Not because I don’t want to make a promise I can’t keep but because I don’t know if I want to anymore. I know that you were trying to protect me in your own misguided way and I know I’ve kept my fair share of secrets from you, but the biggest difference between us is this: you knew the truth about our species from the beginning and I didn’t. I kept my secrets because at first, I was scared that you would turn me away for them and later it was because I couldn’t bear the thought of Ultra coming after you because of me. You don’t have that excuse and I don’t know if I can ever get past that.”

Marla’s throat tightened and her eyes burned with unshed tears. “Sweetie, I have no defense, no excuses for what I did. All I can do is say that I love, I’m sorry and ask for your forgiveness.”

“I have forgiven you and I love you too, Mom.” Crazy as it seemed, Sierra had found it in her heart to forgive her mother and she still loved her. But that didn’t mean that the trust they’d once shared wasn’t irreparably damaged or that Sierra was willing to go back to the way things were between them. She had reached the end of her rope and she was tired of trying to climb it. “But I don’t know if I can ever trust you again after what you’ve done.”

Against her better judgment, Sierra had poured her heart and soul into the amending of their relationship. She’d even bent over backwards for it as part of Sierra had wanted to have Marla back in her life and more importantly, Sierra had wanted to believe that she could have a mother again. For a time, that had seemed to be the case, but Marla’s recent revelations had been the straw that broke the camel’s back. Any trust they once shared was gone now and Sierra didn’t see how it could ever be repaired.

Marla’s eyes widened in alarm and she opened her mouth to speak, but she fell silent when Sierra rose up from the couch and held up a hand to silence her.

“I’ve given it a lot of thought and I’ve come to a decision,” said Sierra. Her voice was thick with raw pain but she was no less firm. “Because of Ultra’s policies, I won’t tell Luca the truth about what we are or your lies. I’ll still come down on occasion to visit Luca for dinner, but it’ll be a little less often and when I do it’ll be by myself because it’s going to be a very long time before I ever consider allowing you near my son again for any kind of reason. But I can’t and I won’t keep up appearances, not even for Luca. Publicly and privately, you and I are done, Mom. For good.”

Telling Luca the truth about his family members being Tomorrow People was too great a risk
thanks to Ultra’s policies, but Sierra wasn’t going to lie about her relationship status with her mother. Marla had destroyed any hopes of further reconciliation with her lies and the older woman was going to have to deal with that in both aspects of her life. Whatever excuse Marla wanted to tell Luca about why Sierra and Marla were estranged again was not Sierra’s concern. And now that Sierra knew the truth behind Marla’s actions, she couldn’t bear the thought of subjecting Robbie to that.

“And you should also know that I took legal steps to ensure that should anything happen to me, you will not become Robbie’s legal guardian. I won’t let you hurt Robbie like you hurt me,” she continued. “You may be Robbie’s blood, but you are not his family, not anymore.”

Before being reunited with John, Sierra had scraped up the money for a family lawyer and she’d taken the necessary legal steps to ensure that should the worst happen to her, Astrid would become Robbie’s legal guardian. It was an iron-clad deal and while those legal documents were still in place, now that John was back in Sierra’s life, he had instructions to take Robbie to the Lair and keep him hidden away from Ultra along with Charlotte. Marla would never take custody of Robbie, not now, not ever.

While Marla had hoped for reconciliation with Sierra, she had to admit that she was unsurprised by Sierra’s decision. Nevertheless, it hurt like hell to know that Marla had lost her daughter again and this time it was for good.

“I understand,” she said, sadly. “I’m sorry, Sierra.”

Sierra’s eyes glistened with unshed tears. “Yeah, so I am. I’ll see myself out. Good night, Mom.”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra teleported away to her apartment.

XXX

As soon as Sierra was in the bedroom of her apartment, she fell onto the bed and cried into her pillow. Her conscience was clear but her heart was also broken at the same time. She knew she’d made the right call for herself and her family but it didn’t make the pain any easier. Sierra was still devastated over what had become of her relationship with her mother and the dreams of what might’ve been had Marla just been honest with her from the start. But Sierra didn’t have a mother, not anymore. Marla had seen to that from the minute she lied to and drugged Sierra for over a year instead of being honest.

As Sierra continued crying, she felt the mattress sink with additional weight and then she felt many arms wrapping themselves around her. She blinked open her eyes to see that John and the kids had joined her in the bed and were hugging her tight to comfort her.

“What do you need from us?” asked John, gently.

Sierra sniffled. They didn’t realize it, but they were already doing more than enough. “I just need you three. Just hold me and don’t let go.”

Robbie tightened his grip on Sierra, as did Charlotte.

“We’re here, Mom. We won’t let go,” promised Robbie.
“Not ever,” added Charlotte. “We love you.”

Sierra found herself smiling through her tears. It’s always darkest before you turn on the light. Hadn’t those been her father’s words? Never before had they seemed truer than they did in that moment. Everything seemed difficult and hard at the moment but maybe it would all be okay in the end. “I love you too—all of you. So, so much.”

Sierra snuggled into her family’s embrace and let their loving touches wash away her pain.

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Meanwhile, hidden in a special dimly-lit underground room, Jedikiah was making his daily visit before he headed home for the night as he always did.

“I was so close. So close,” he said. “I had the perfect two candidates and somehow I just let them slip through my fingers.” Jedikiah made an exaggerated sigh and hand gesture as he spoke before putting his hands on his hips. “Well, you know what that means. It means I have to put our plans on hold. Again. I’m so sorry.”

There was no reply from Jedikiah’s audience as he knelt down and took out a handkerchief from his pocket. He then proceeded to wipe down the fogged up glass of the cryogenics chamber which held none other than the body of his brother, Roger. Jedikiah had lied to Sierra. He hadn’t cremated Roger’s body, Jedikiah had stolen the corpse and frozen it before it was too late, all in the hopes of protecting Roger from the Founder and one day restoring him to life.

“Oh, and you know what? I forgot to tell you. Your daughter, Sierra? Sharp kid. She’s looking for you and she’s getting closer every day. You’d tell me if she tried to contact you in anyway, wouldn’t you? You know what happens when we keep secrets from each other.” There was no response from Roger but Jedikiah still smiled. “Also, I need to find out if her little biological manipulation trick works on the dead. If it does, then maybe I have a way to bring you back.” Jedikiah hadn’t entirely believed that Sierra couldn’t revive the dead as she claimed but he couldn’t test her, not quite yet. “Anyway…” Jedikiah kissed his fingertips before placing them onto Roger’s container. “Good night, little brother. I’ll see you tomorrow, usual time.”

Jedikiah smiled before rising up and leaving the room.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son and daughter, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

The sun had yet to rise and the hour was quite early but it made no difference to the people working at Ultra, who’d already started on the day’s shift. So far, it seemed quiet with no tele-signatures popping up onto their systems and hopefully it was going to stay that way. After the debacle with the professional hitman and his paranormal twin, everyone at Ultra was looking forward to a bit of a break from all the craziness.

But no such luck.

Much to everyone’s confusion and surprise, an unknown man dressed in dark clothes and with his face concealed by the hood of his jacket, walked into the ops center at Ultra and before anyone could stop him, he started telekinetically tossing around the agents in the room like ragdolls. It went on for several minutes until finally, one of the guards jabbed the intruder in the back with a stun gun, knocking him unconscious.

When the intruder’s hood was pulled back so he could be identified, everyone was stunned but no less pleased to see that the intruder was one Julian Masters.

Sunlight peeked in through the cream-colored curtains of Sierra’s bedroom, causing her to inhale deeply as she turned over in her bed away from the window, her eyes still shut tight. Her alarm had yet to go off which meant she still had time before she had to get up, it was still deliciously warm in her comfy bed and she’d just had a wonderful night’s sleep. She wasn’t quite ready to get up yet. She wanted just a little more time with John. But when she reached for him, his side of the bed was empty.

Sierra opened her eyes and her yawn quickly turned into a smile when John and the kids entered the room. John was carrying a tray with French toast sandwiches, apple juice and a small vase with Sierra’s favorite flower.

“Good morning,” said John, smiling.

“Morning,” said Sierra, smiling back. She giggled as the kids clambered onto the bed and
snuggled up next to her while John carefully placed the tray onto Sierra’s lap. “Not that I’m complaining, but what’s all this?”

“Our way of saying we love you and thanks,” said John. “It was all the kids’ doing. Robbie wanted to learn to cook so we could surprise you and then Charlie wanted to bring it to you in bed to say thanks for letting us stay here with you and Robbie.”

“Aww.” Sierra was very touched. She tenderly kissed Charlotte’s head as Charlotte beamed and then she did the same to Robbie. “That’s so sweet, guys. Thank you. But you don’t need to thank me. We’re family, so my home is your home too.”

“Well, we wanted to,” said Charlotte. “So, try some, Mom. You’ll love it.”

“I bet I will,” Sierra picked up her fork, broke off a piece of the French toast and moaned in delight as the flavors exploded on her taste buds. “Wow. That is the best French toast I’ve had. It’s delicious. Thank you so much.”

John smiled proudly. “It’s the bread. You got let it go stale to make French toast. I saw that on a TV show once. Besides, I figure I got to earn my keep around here somehow.”

Sierra sighed as she gave John a look. “John, please. You don’t need ‘earn your keep.’ Okay? But even if you did, I can safely assure you that you earn it a dozen times over every day. You help keep the apartment clean, you take care of the kids when I can’t be here, you help me relax after work and your cooking is amazing. Trust me, you do more than your fair share. It’s one of the many reasons I fell in love with you.”

Sierra knew that John was used to being a provider and caretaker and living in the apartment with Sierra limited his options on how to accomplish that. If there was anything John hated, it was not being useful or helping out. It wasn’t in his nature to be anything but. But he didn’t need to feel guilty for not being able to bring home a paycheck or pick up groceries, he was a huge source of support in so many other ways. Sierra didn’t know where she’d be without him.

John smiled softly before tenderly kissing Sierra. “I love you too.”

“Hey, Dad, can we visit Aunt Cara and Uncle Russell in the Lair today?” asked Robbie. “Charlie and I miss them.” The kids were in the dark as to the nature of John and Cara’s fight as well as the fact that John had been kicked out of the Lair, otherwise they wouldn’t have asked such a thing.

Sierra and John’s smiles faded as they both sighed. Though Sierra had started making amends with Cara and begun rebuilding their friendship, John had yet to take that step. True, Cara had asked John to come back and sometimes John missed the Lair and everyone down there but at the same time, John’s emotional wounds had yet to heal and he wasn’t quite ready to return to the Lair. Not to mention, John wasn’t yet sure if he dared trust the safety of his daughter to Cara yet, given how Cara had handled the Cyrus and Nathan fiasco. It was too soon.

“I don’t know, buddy. I’ll think about it,” said John, truthfully.

Robbie looked disappointed but didn’t say anything about it before he started a playful argument with Charlotte over which Harry Potter character was best.

Sierra’s face softened as she gently touched John’s face, making him smile just a little as he covered her hand with his own. She knew how much Cara had hurt him, so she understood why he was finding it difficult to return to the Lair. She also greatly loved having John and Charlotte living
with her and Robbie in the apartment but at the same time, Sierra knew how much their people needed John, even if he thought they were better off without him. But she didn’t say this to him, she just tenderly kissed him and returned to her breakfast.

Whatever happened, whatever decisions they would have to make in the coming days, they would do it together and when they did, they’d find a way to make it all okay. Sierra just knew it.

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Later that day after Sierra had taken Robbie to school and went into work, John found himself sitting alone in the living room reading a book while Charlotte took a shower. He was just at the climax of the novel when Russell called out to him telepathically.

Are you there, John? Are you busy?

John chuckled as he bookmarked his spot and closed his book. As exciting as it was, the novel could wait. He wasn’t going to pass up the chance to get caught up with one of his best friends. Not really. So, how is everything?

Good, I guess. Cara’s got this place running like a top but she’s not the same without you. Nothing here’s the same without you, dude, said Russell. When are you coming back?

John sighed as he rubbed his face. I miss you too, Russell. But honestly, I don’t know if I’m coming back yet.

Oh, dude, come on. I know that Cara asked you to come back and you said no. Why can’t you two stop being so damn stubborn and face each other? Deal with your issues, you know? whined Russell. John, please, everyone in this forsaken pits wants you back really bad. So, if you don’t come back, I will find some way to kick your ass.

John laughed. He saw through Russell’s little threat easily. I miss you too, Russell. Just keep your chin up, okay? I’ll figure something out soon, I promise.

You’d better, said Russell. Yikes, I’d better go. Mama Bear’s around the corner. Talk to you later, dude.

John said good-bye and then raised up his telepathic shields again before turning back to his book. It touched John to hear that everyone in the Lair missed him and wanted him back, including Cara, if he was as good at reading between the lines as he thought he was. The feeling was mutual, John did miss everyone in the Lair, including Cara and the close friendship they’d once shared but John wasn’t ready to come back yet. And if there was anything that Cara had taught John, it was that you couldn’t bring someone in unless they were ready.

Three years ago…

It was getting late one night as Cara rode the subway in New York City.
Cautiously, she glanced around at the other passengers, looking for something expensive she could easily swipe and pawn so she could afford her next meal rather than steal it. Inwardly, she smiled to herself as an expensive cell phone poking out of the pocket of the man sitting next to her on the bench caught her eye. Carefully, she moved her folded newspaper over her hand and then telekinetically called the phone to her. When it got into her hand, Cara carefully placed it into her pocket, not noticing that her little theft had been seen by the handsome young man with blond hair and stubble across from her. She did notice, however, his charming smile and the rather expensive watch he was wearing.

When the subway car came to a halt, Cara began to casually walk out of it just as the blond man went in the same direction. She attempted to swipe his watch off his wrist as the other passengers followed suit, only to stop in her tracks when the blond man grabbed her wrist and smirked as he produced the watch she’d just tried to steal.

“Nice try, but I think this belongs to me,” he said. “And what do you need a cell phone for, anyway? You’re telepathic, Cara.”

Cara’s eyes narrowed in suspicion. “How the hell do you know my name?”

“Easy, I read your mind,” he replied.

Cara began to panic as she shook her head in denial. “You’re crazy.” She tried to get away from him by going to the other end of the now-empty subway car, hoping to deter him but no such luck.

“You need to listen to me very carefully. There is a place for people like us where you’ll be safe. Off the streets and away from Ultra.” He looking knowingly at her when Cara’s face lit up in recognition at hearing Ultra’s name. “You’ve heard of them. Good. You’re one step closer to being safe then you were earlier.”

Cara frowned. This sounded too good to be true and reminded her too much of Julian and Nelly. How could she be sure she could trust this guy when she couldn’t even read his thoughts? And not for lack of trying, either. His telepathic shields were too strong for even her to get through.

“How do I know I can trust you? I don’t even know your name,” she pointed out.

He smiled kindly at her. “It’s John. John Young. That better?" When she nodded, he continued, “I take it you’ve been on your own for a while now?”

Cara nodded. She’d been on her own ever since the Julian and Nelly fiasco and while she was lonely, she was also far more hesitant to have history repeat itself. “I had a stint of living with others like us once. It didn’t exactly pan out so I figured I was better off on my own.”

John’s face softened. “I get that but you should know that going it alone will only work for so long and if I can find you, then Ultra can find you. And you don’t want that to happen, believe me.”

Cara gave John a skeptical look. “And you want to help me? Poor little damsel in distress out of the goodness of your heart?”

“Not just you,” said John. “You’re one of the most powerful telepaths I’ve ever met. Together, you and I can find more like us and bring them to safety. We stand a better chance of surviving together than we do apart. Trust me, I know.”

The level of grief in John’s eyes caused Cara’s heart to soften and her curiosity piqued. “What
happened? Who did you lose?” The kind of pain in John’s eyes could only be caused by a deep, personal loss.

John sighed as his eyes glistened with tears. “My girlfriend,” he confessed. “She was a powerful paranormal like you and the most special woman I’d ever met. She meant everything to me. Still does. But Ultra was getting too close and I thought she’d be better protected if we were apart, so I ended things and left her. It was the biggest regret of my life but before I could fix it, she was killed by one of Ultra’s former agents because I wasn’t there to protect her.”

Cara’s heart broke in sympathy for John’s grief. She couldn’t imagine the kind of pain John was going through. But at the same time, how could she trust someone who wouldn’t let her in? How could she be sure he wasn’t just putting on some kind act to gain her trust and then pull a fast one on her? She couldn’t.

“I’m sorry about your girlfriend, John,” said Cara, softly. “But if you won’t let me look inside your head, I can’t take the chance that this is a trap. So, good-bye, John. Oh, and next time you want to recruit a sweet young telepath, don’t corner her in an empty subway car.”

Before John could protest, Cara teleported out of the subway and into the streets above. She then made her way to the pawn shop where she pawned the cell phone for a couple of meals. She hadn’t gone further than two blocks when suddenly, a blacked-out SUV appeared and two armed men emerged from it. Ultra had found her and caught her just as John said.

“Two against one? How is that fair?” asked Cara, incredulously.

Before anyone could reply, John teleported in and took down the two agents before they could capture Cara. Suddenly, a third agent, a human one, emerged and aimed a gun at John’s head but before a bullet could be fired, Cara sent him flying over the top of the van, injuring him and knocking him out.

“We gotta get out of here,” said John, quickly, not wasting time thanking Cara. “Are you coming with me or not?”

Cara was flabbergasted. Even after their little encounter, John had still risked his neck to save her neck. Clearly, she was wrong about him. “I don’t understand. Why’re you doing this?”

John’s face softened. “I told you, we take care of each other. Now, come on, let’s go!”

Nothing further needed to be said as Cara and John ran off. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

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Meanwhile, back at Ultra, Julian was strapped down tight in a chair and Jedikiah was practically glowing with glee that one of Ultra’s most wanted fugitives was in such a position. Add to the fact that Julian, a supposed expert in staying two steps ahead of Ultra had been stupid enough to just waltz into the ops center and get himself caught…well, it was difficult not to laugh at the situation. All the same, he insisted it be kept on the quiet until further notice.

“Oh, Julian, Julian, Julian,” said Jedikiah, smirking as he prepped the syringe with the power stripping serum. After all the trouble Julian had given Ultra, Jedikiah had insisted on being the one
to take away Julian’s powers. “I wish I could say I was surprised but all roads lead to Ultra for your sort, don’t they?” For once, Jedikiah wasn’t talking about paranormals, he was referring to deranged loonies like Julian. “I have to tell you, when I heard you just popped in for a visit at one of the most paranormally secure places on the planet, I thought it was a little too good to be true.”

Jedikiah had been aghast when he’d been informed of Julian’s actions but still pleased by the end result as it meant one less psychopath with powers on the loose.

“But then again, here you are,” said Jedikiah, grinning. He placed the needle against Julian’s neck and was able to inject the serum when Julian stopped him.

Jedikiah didn’t move, he just gave Julian a questioning look. “Why?”

Julian gave Jedikiah an are-you-stupid? look before replying. “You must suspect I got caught for a reason, don’t you?”

“The thought had crossed my mind,” admitted Jedikiah. “But then I realized, I don’t give a damn and I don’t have time for games, so—”

“I got nothing!” said Julian, quickly as he jerked his head away again. He looked almost pleadingly at Jedikiah. “I lost my crew, I lost my girl…this is no way to live. Being hunted like animal.”

Jedikiah laughed. Did Julian really think his misfortunes were going to sway Jedikiah into letting him go? Julian was more deranged than Jedikiah first thought if that were true. “Good news. I take away your powers, Ultra leaves you alone.”

“You take away my powers, you’re giving up your white whale!” insisted Julian. “Cara Coburn? Her ragged group of runaways living right beneath your feet? I can deliver them to you. All I ask for in return is my powers stay and I get my life back. But if you’d rather put the needle into my neck, then let’s get it over with.”

Jedikiah paused and withdrew the needle for a moment as he considered this. Julian did make an enticing offer, he had to admit. If Julian was able to deliver the goods, capture Cara and the others and brought Charlotte into Sierra’s custody, it would be one hell of a victory for Ultra. The offer was too good to pass up but that didn’t mean that Jedikiah trusted Julian not to go off the rails by any means and nor did he dare risk Julian leaving the premises without some kind of a leash.

“You know you make a good deal. But just hold that thought a moment, Julian,” said Jedikiah. He put the syringe down on the table and left the room. When Jedikiah returned a short while later, he brought with him a guard and one of Ultra’s best scientists.

Julian narrowed his eyes. “What’re they doing here? I assume you’re not going to take my powers.”

Jedikiah smiled a rather frightening smile as he nodded. “Oh, you assume correctly. I am going to accept your little deal, Julian, make no mistake.”

“Then why am I still strapped down when I could be out there finding the Tomorrow People?” demanded Julian.

“Well, let’s just say that I don’t want you to leave Ultra’s custody until I have some kind of
assurance that you’re going to deliver on your promise.”

Julian blinked. “Give me four men and I’ll bring you the whole gang tied up in a neat little bow.”

“And why should you succeed when my best Ultra agents have failed?” asked Jedikiah, not buying a word of it. If Jedikiah’s best men couldn’t locate the Tomorrow People and bring them into custody, why should Julian? Jedikiah needed more proof than just Julian’s word.

Julian’s scowl returned. “Because of that shifty little minx who’s calling the shots, Cara. I taught her everything she knows about surviving in this city. How to hide in plain sight, where and when to find supplies. If anybody can find her, it’s me. How’s that for an assurance?”

Jedikiah shook his head as he smirked. “Hmm. Yeah, I’m not feeling it.” He snapped his fingers and then the guard pulled back Julian’s head, restraining him with the scientist used a special syringe to inject a small device a little bigger than a bean up Julian’s right nostril. “What I’ve just injected into your sinus is an explosive charge. It’s not huge but it’ll kill you.”

Julian was furious. “I thought we had a deal!”

“Oh, we do. I’m just making sure it works out in my favor.” Jedikiah wasn’t stupid. He never entered into any kind of deal without making sure he got what he wanted out of it. People never realized that when they made a deal with the devil, the devil always won. “So, that’s going to go off in eighteen hours unless I disarm it. What you do with that time is, of course, up to you, but if you don’t find Cara and her friends, well…let’s just say you won’t have to worry about that headache anymore. Oh, one other thing. One of Cara’s runaways is the missing daughter of one of my agents. Her name is Charlotte. Maybe you’ve met her. She’s about eight years old, yay-high, long blond hair, green eyes—does that sound familiar?”

Jedikiah grinned when Julian’s face lit up with recognition. “Yeah, I thought so. Anyway, if you find Cara and her friends, you’re to bring Charlotte back to Ultra safe and unharmed. If you don’t, well, I won’t have to set off the bomb because Charlotte’s mother, who happens to be my niece by the way, will make you wish for death. Are we clear?”

Jedikiah wanted the Tomorrow People brought in, dead or alive, it didn’t matter. What did matter was the safety and wellbeing of his own flesh-and-blood and ensuring that his deal with Sierra stood strong and that her trust in Jedikiah remained strong as well. Jedikiah wasn’t about to risk Charlotte’s wellbeing and Sierra’s ire by placing blind faith in Julian’s supposed “abilities.” She would go ballistic when she found out, yes, but with any luck, Jedikiah would be able to pacify that ire somewhat by giving Sierra permission to join Julian on the mission.

Julian glared as he nodded. He got the message loud and clear. He didn’t need Jedikiah to emphasize what would happen if Julian screwed this up. So, for the sake of his life, Julian would do as Jedikiah asked. He would bring in Charlotte alive and unharmed—he did value his head, after all—but that didn’t mean that Cara would granted the same mercy.

“Perfectly. Sir,” he spat.

Julian had eighteen hours and counting. He’d better make the most of them.

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Sometime later, Jedikiah called Sierra to his office and informed her of what had just occurred. As expected, Sierra was outraged that Jedikiah would stoop so low as to align himself with a deranged psychopath like Julian Masters. She was also less than pleased about the bomb in Julian’s head, worrying about the civilians it might hurt if it went off in the wrong area. But more than that, Sierra was worried about whether or not they could trust Julian to bring Charlotte back safe and unharmed.

“What about Charlotte? She’s hiding with Cara! If Julian finds out where that is, he will take a kill squad, he’ll kill her and our deal will be broken!” protested Sierra. “Regardless of how she came to be and who she’s been with, she’s my daughter! You swore to me that if we found her, she’d be turned into my custody! My loved ones are off-limits, Jedikiah. You swore that! So, don’t you dare go back on your word! Please, Jedikiah. I’m begging you.”

Though Sierra knew Charlotte was safe in the apartment with John, she needed to see for herself if Jedikiah was going to keep his word about Charlotte’s wellbeing.

To Sierra’s relief, Jedikiah didn’t disappoint. He made a placating gesture with his hand.

“Would you’d quit yelling at me and calm down?” said Jedikiah, sternly.

Sierra glared as she folded her arms across her chest.

Jedikiah rose up from the chair he’d been sitting in. “Look, whatever you may think, I didn’t enter into this bargain light and I would never go back on my word.”

“Yet you’re letting Julian just walk around freely,” said Sierra, coldly. “You’re trusting him over me!”

Jedikiah narrowed his eyes. “I am doing nothing of the sort. Julian isn’t walking around freely. I inserted an explosive device into his head that makes him inclined to do what I want. I never even considering doing anything of the kind to you. That fact alone should speak volumes about who I trust and who I don’t, don’t you think?”

Sierra didn’t reply. She knew Jedikiah was right. Jedikiah may have made threats to get her to join Ultra but he’d never actually hurt her or anyone close to her and nor had he ever gone back on their deal which kept her family away from Ultra’s grip.

Jedikiah ignored her silence and continued. “I swore to you that your loved ones would be kept safe and I also promised that Charlotte would go into your custody if we found her and I meant it. But I don’t trust Julian to keep his promises so I want you to make sure that he does, regardless of my little insurance policy. So, for the time being, I want you to shadow Julian, keep an eye on him and make sure he stays in line. Will he get to take charge on any interrogations if we’re lucky enough? Yes. If that person is Charlotte, that won’t be the case. Even so, if we find the Tomorrow People, I’m trusting you to go with him and take Charlotte into your custody as we agreed.”

Sierra sighed in relief and she relaxed considerably. Though she would not be able to prevent the interrogation of any of Cara’s people should they get caught, shadowing Julian would grant Sierra the opportunity to protect the other Tomorrow People and her bargain with Jedikiah would still stand. Her daughter would be kept safe and that was the best she could hope for.

“Thank you, boss,” she said, gratefully.

But Jedikiah wasn’t through yet. “Don’t thank me just yet. There’s one other thing. We know that the Tomorrow People are underground, we just don’t know where. If Julian gets too far
underground, I won’t be able to disarm the bomb if it reaches that point. Should that happen, I want you to get the hell out of dodge. Understood?”

Sierra nodded. She fully understood and she accepted the risks that the bomb in Julian’s head posed. Were they great? Yes. But she didn’t care. Peoples’ lives were at risk and she had to defend them. There was no other choice. She was also fully prepared to choose her own life over Julian’s should choice be forced upon her. She hated a loss of life but sometimes, she had to make choices.

Meanwhile, John was doing sit-ups in Sierra’s bedroom while Charlotte chattered endlessly to him about everything and nothing as she played a dress-up game on Sierra’s laptop. They were having a bit of fun with it all when suddenly, Sierra’s laptop chimed with a Skype notification, Astrid was trying to get in touch with Sierra.

John pressed the ‘accept’ option and then Astrid’s face blew up the screen. She looked surprised if not confused that Sierra wasn’t the one answering.

“Astrid. Hi. Aren’t you supposed to be at your college classes right now?” asked John, curiously. He also wondered why Astrid was trying to Skype Sierra rather than just calling Sierra’s cell phone.

“Aren’t you supposed to be in your secret Lair? Wearing clothes?” Astrid asked, smirking.

Before exercising, John had shed his shirt and that led to him now showing off his sweaty abs

John chuckled as he shoved on his grey T-shirt.

“Really, though, I know you’re Sierra’s boyfriend but why you’re in her room at this time of day and who’s that pretty little girl with you?” asked Astrid. Although Sierra had told Astrid about Charlotte, Astrid had had yet to meet her so she wouldn’t have known what Charlotte looked like.

Charlotte smiled nervously as she waved at the camera. “I’m Charlotte. Sierra’s my mom.”

“And we are crashing at Sierra’s for a bit. We needed a break,” said John.

Astrid looked thrilled to hear this. “Charlotte? Hi, sweetie. It’s so nice to finally meet you. I’m Astrid, a friend of your mom’s. Speaking of which, is she there? I was hoping to talk to her but she’s not picking up on her cell.”

“She probably went to the Lair. You can’t get a phone call down there,” said John. Sierra often went to the Lair on her breaks during her shifts at Ultra and for security reasons, cell phones were useless down there. “In the meantime, though, you’ve got us. So, what’s up?”

Astrid sighed. “Well, I don’t know if you heard but I got mugged last week. I’m okay, it’s just really rattled me and lately, I’ve been having trouble getting out of the house. I figured after all the crap Sierra’s gone through, she might be able to help me deal with it.”

John nodded. He’d heard from Sierra how Astrid had been attacked on her way home from a late-night class the previous week. The bastard had had a gun to Astrid’s head and although Sierra had heard Astrid’s panic telepathically and stepped in just time before the worst happened or Sierra
risked exposure, the scumbag had fired a warning shot beforehand and the experience had still left Astrid shaken up and she hadn’t been seen in days.

“Well, if you don’t object to a couple of visitors, I think I can help you out,” suggested John. If there was anything John understood, it was trauma and fear and how to conquer it. “Want us to come to you, Astrid?”

Astrid nodded and then yelped in fright when John and Charlotte teleported out of Sierra’s room and into Astrid’s own bedroom right before her eyes, literally. John chuckled as Astrid shot daggers at him from where she was sitting.

“Hi,” said John. He gestured to his daughter, who was holding John’s other hand and looking shyly up at Astrid. “I know you’ve just been introduced, but, uh, this is Charlotte. I like to call her Charlie. Sweetie, this is Astrid, your mom’s best friend.”

Astrid smiled as she knelt down to Charlotte’s level. “Hi, Charlotte. It’s great to finally meet you. I’ve heard so much about you. You know, your mom and I have been best friends since we were younger than you and I got to say, you look so much like your mother did at your age, it’s uncanny. I’d like to get to know you and become very good friends, if you’d like.”

Charlotte smiled and blushed a little. “I would like very much. Thank you.”

John smiled at the interaction before he got back to why they were there. “So, what’s going on with you, Astrid?”

Astrid sighed and shrugged. “Oh, you know. Stuff.”

John gave Astrid a look before he sat down in the window seat of the room with Charlotte and then he gestured for Astrid to join him, which she did so.

“I don’t know, I…I’m not really sleeping. Can’t eat. Haven’t left the house since Sierra rescued me and we turned that bastard into the cops,” said Astrid. Sierra had rescued Astrid before Astrid could be seriously hurt or worse but being at gunpoint, having her life threatened in such a manner when Astrid was supposed to be safe, had deeply shaken Astrid more than she could’ve imagined.

John nodded understandingly. “It makes sense. You were attacked. You could’ve been hurt or a hell of a lot worse. It’s no wonder why you’re struggling. Most people would be basket cases. But—” he added with a small, teasing grin. “—you can’t wear slippers the rest of your life.”

Charlotte couldn’t prevent the giggle that escaped her as she snuggled up under her father’s arm.

Astrid made a face. “These are my favorite slippers.”

This time, John was the one who laughed. “They’re nice slippers but that’s not what I meant.”

Astrid sighed as she rubbed her eyes. “Yeah, I know. It’s just…I was lucky that Sierra happened to hear me telepathically that night. If she hadn’t, who knows what would’ve happened? I’m scared that the next time I go out, Sierra won’t be able to save me. Is that stupid?”

John’s face softened as he shook his head. “Not at all. Now that you’ve been in real danger, you can’t unsee what happened and you’re wondering how you’re ever going to leave the house knowing you could be in the line of fire again. You know, I ask myself the same thing every day.”
Astrid made a disbelieving grunt as she looked down at her knee, which was pulled up against her chest. She knew the Tomorrow People were always looking over their shoulders and were on the run, but they at least, could teleport away or use their other powers to protect themselves. Astrid didn’t have that kind of luxury. She also found it hard to believe that John was ever frightened. From everything that Sierra had told her about him, John was the fearless type.

“No offense, but what do you have to be scared of? Anything goes bad comes along, you can teleport out. People like me? We die in car crashes and we get struck by lightning. We can’t run away from all the bad things out there.”

John chuckled again as he thought back to a certain memory from when he and Sierra first met. “Well, you still got to take a leap of faith and keep going anyway. Sierra had to learn that when she was breaking out.”

Charlotte’s head lifted up and her eyes widened with curiosity at this and Astrid did the same.

“What do you mean? What happened to Sierra?” asked Astrid.

John smiled, knowing that he’d gotten Astrid’s full attention. “When we first met, Sierra didn’t have the best control of her powers. Even after I told her about our kind and what she could do, she was scared out of her mind to try teleporting after all those sleepwalking incidents she had.”

Astrid made a face and laughed. “Yeah, yeah, I remember. She kept going to bed in her room and waking up in the worst places for months. It drove her up the wall. She even tried tying up her wrist to keep it from happening but no such luck. How did she fix all that?”

“Well, it all started shortly after we met…” began John.

**Years ago...**

John couldn’t help but smile as he watched Sierra swing around the pole in the empty subway car they were currently riding. He was still amazed this was even happening. Several months ago, John had detected Sierra breaking out, which was something that had never happened to him before. What’s more, John had felt a telepathic connection with the young girl who was terrified and yet also the most amazing person that John had ever known. Against his better judgment perhaps, he’d ended up talking to Sierra over the course of several months about everything and nothing, but mostly John had been trying convince Sierra that she wasn’t crazy like she believed. After Sierra had finally agreed to meet in person, John had explained that Sierra was actually one of the Tomorrow People like him and that she was breaking out and now she’d accepted John’s offer to teach her control of her rather strong powers.

“Okay, how exactly is taking a subway ride supposed to help me control my powers? I don’t think my telekinesis is strong enough to derail this car,” said Sierra. “And I can’t exactly read the minds of people who aren’t here.”

John smiled. “That’s not why we’re here. We’re going to work on your teleportation skills.”

Sierra frowned in confusion. “How?”

John used his telekinesis to open the back door and then took Sierra’s hand, bringing her over to him. It was a true mark of the friendship that had developed between them over the last several
months that Sierra accepted his hand without protest but she still looked somewhat nervous.

“I don’t understand. What you’re doing?” asked Sierra.

“Proving a point. In a minute, we’re going to jump and you’re going to teleport us away,” said John.

Sierra’s eyes widened in alarm as she clutched John for dear life. “What? No! No, no, no, John, I can’t! I’ve never done it on purpose and I don’t know where the hell to go. What if I wind up inside a wall? I’m scared. I can’t do this.”

John squeezed her hand comforting. “Yes, you can. You’re one of the most powerful paranormals I’ve ever met. You can do this. I know you’re scared but your fear doesn’t have to own you. Your fear is something you can control.”

Sierra bit her lip as she shook her head and closed her eyes tight. “John, I can’t do this. I don’t want to die.”

“Everyone dies, Sierra. All you can do is make sure you’re wearing the right shoes when it happens.” John gently lifted Sierra’s chin, making her look at him. “Do you trust me?”

Sierra nodded without hesitation. Even though she’d initially though John as a crazed hallucination, Sierra had still trusted him completely and that hadn’t changed one bit. “You know I do. But I’m scared, John.”

“I’m scared too,” admitted John, making Sierra relax a little. “But I’m right here and I’m not going anywhere.”

Sierra smiled and after a few moments, she took a deep breath before tightening her grip on John’s hand. “Count of three.” She was still scared out of her mind but if she was ever going to learn control, it was now or never. She couldn’t keep letting her fears control her like this. “Three!”

With a small yelp, Sierra and John leapt out of the back of the car and then Sierra teleported them into her bedroom, where they tumbled onto her bed and then onto the floor. Luckily, Marla and Luca were out for the day or they might’ve asked questions about the ruckus that came from Sierra’s bedroom.

John was smiling with pride as they picked each other up. He knew Sierra could do it and she’d just proved him right. “You did it. You got us here. Congratulations, Sierra.”

Sierra began crying and laughing before she pulled John in for a bone-breaking hug. “Thank you so much.” She kissed his cheek before pulling away to give him a grateful look. “I don’t know what I’d have done without you, John. Thank you.”

Having never known the sweetness of a woman’s kiss of any kind, John turned a faint shade of pink and his cheek tingled from where Sierra had kissed him. Though he didn’t yet know it, this was the beginning of far more than just a special friendship between them two of them.

Present day…
“After that, Sierra stopped being afraid of her powers. She excelled in everything I taught her. And it never would’ve happened if I hadn’t helped her learn to take a leap of faith,” said John, smiling fondly as he thought back to those simpler times.

Charlotte looked in awe of her mother. She was still working on control of her powers and hearing a story from her parents’ pasts like that really gave Charlotte the inspiration and incentive she needed to strive to become a stronger paranormal.

Astrid looked considerably cheered up at this and she unconsciously slid off her slippers and replaced them with a pair of sneakers that lay on the floor. “I’m glad you were there for Sierra when I couldn’t be. You’re a really good man, John, and really good at life-or-death situations. That being said, I don’t know why you’re avoiding the Lair and frankly, it’s none of my business but maybe you should face your fear. Take your own leap of faith.”

John just smiled softly in response. Astris had a point, he was willing to admit that. Perhaps it was time he finally got the guts to face Cara and have it out with her, return to the Lair to help his people and all that. But all the same, John didn’t know if he was ready to take such a great leap of faith just yet. What if it was too soon? John could only wonder.

XXX

Meanwhile, after Sierra had spent several hours shadowing Julian—much to the man’s chagrin at being babysat by the boss’s niece—she finally found a spare moment to slip away to the Lair to warn Cara to stay low for the next day or so. When she arrived in the Lair, her heart sank when she didn’t see Cara anywhere.

Russell, who was playing a game of pool, looked up and smiled when she came in. “Hey girl. What brings you down here?”

“Where’s Cara?” asked Sierra, as she frantically looked around. As Julian had been running telepathic scans to try and detect Cara all day, Sierra had had to keep her own shields up to keep Julian out of her head, so she hadn’t dare risked calling Cara telepathically.

“Out for a grocery grab with half a dozen others. Why? What’s wrong?” asked Russell, worried.

Sierra mentally cursed. Cara was out now? That was not good. “I have news about Julian.”

Russell looked excited to hear this. “Please, tell me he died choking on his own blood. Or no, even better, Ultra caught him and stripped him of his powers so that the next time I find him on the streets, he’ll be powerless and I can kick his ass. There’s no one who deserves the needle more than that sick bastard. Please tell me that’s what happened.”

Sierra looked grim as she shook her head. “Worse. He waltzed into Ultra and let himself get caught by my uncle. He’s struck a deal. He has to find and deliver the Tomorrow People in the next few hours or else the bomb my uncle shoved up his nose sends him to meet his maker.”

Russell looked horrified. “What? Oh my God. Wait, what about Charlotte? No one knows she’s living with you in your apartment. As far as Jedikiah knows we have her. Doesn’t this break your deal with your boss?”
Sierra shook her head. “No. Jedikiah’s sworn that Charlotte will be taken into my custody if she’s found but he doesn’t trust Julian not to renege on the deal, so I’m shadowing Julian until his time’s up. Speaking of which, I’d better get back to work.”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra teleported back to Ultra and her heart sank when she saw that Julian wasn’t where she’d left him. He was supposed to be sitting at a spare desk using one of the computers to scan for tele-signatures matching Cara’s. This did not bode well.

“Excuse me. Where’s Julian Masters? He was supposed to wait for me to return,” asked Sierra, to a passing security guard. She hoped he’d just taken a bathroom or snack break but something told her that wasn’t the case.

The security guard looked concerned at this. “I’m sorry, Miss Jameson but Mister Masters is already out in the field. Left about two minutes ago with him to go after a group of paranormals. He said you’d cleared him to go without you.”

Sierra’s face darkened with anger and she cursed. “I most certainly did not! Damn it!”

Quickly, she searched through the computer Julian had been using and found that Cara’s signature had popped up at a nearby supermarket. She then snatched up a spare key using for unlocking suppression cuffs and teleported to the supermarket.

When Sierra arrived, she found the six Tomorrow People that Cara had brought with her on the ground, injured and cuffed. One of them, Irene, looked up in relief at the sight of Sierra.

“Sierra, we were ambushed. Thank—”

“Shh!” whispered Sierra, gesturing for Irene to lower her voice. She quickly unlocked the cuffs and helped Irene to stand after healing her. “I know. It’s Julian. He’s made a deal with my uncle. Get the others free and then get the hell out of here. Don’t leave the Lair under any circumstances until I give the all-clear. I’ll find Cara. Got it?”

Irene nodded and set to work on freeing the others and getting them out of the store while Sierra chased after Cara and Julian. After a few minutes of searching, Sierra ducked behind a shelf when she saw Julian choking Cara. Sierra glanced around looking for something to use to distract Julian long enough to set Cara free and Sierra struck gold when she spied large cans of tomato puree sitting on the shakiest shelf in the store. Quickly, Sierra gave the shelf just enough a telekinetic jiggle to make it fall onto Julian.

The result was instantaneous. Julian was bashed in the head and brusied all over by the falling cans and the distracting pain caused him to accidentally stop Cara’s strangulation. Cara fell to the ground and gasped for breath, baffled by what’d just happened until her eyes met Sierra’s. She took the hint and then disappeared before Julian had a chance to finish what he started.

To keep up appearances, Sierra then teleported in front of Julian and began digging him out of the mountain of tomato sauces cans.

“Are you all right?” she asked, feigning concern. “Nothing damaged? Like your brain perhaps?”

Julian’s eyes narrowed in suspicious disgust at the sight of Sierra. “I’m fine. What the hell are you doing here?”

Sierra scowled at Julian’s tone and folded her arms across her chest. “In case you’ve forgotten, I’m your handler while you’ve got that deal with my uncle. Also, I don’t trust you to bring my
daughter back to me safely, so like it or not, you’re stuck with me with that bomb’s up your nose. Not to mention, you left Ultra without me and my permission. So, I tracked your tele-signature here. Given how I just found you under a mountain of tomato sauce, I’m going to assume your attempt capture Cara just failed miserably?”

Julian glared darkly at Sierra. “For your information, Cara may have escaped but I still captured half a dozen members of her little gang. Any one of them will lead us to her and the Tomorrow People. If you don’t believe me, follow me. They’re right around the corner.”

But to Julian’s fury, when they rounded the corner where he’d left the prisoners, all six of Cara’s grocery grab crew had vanished without a trace. Even the suppression cuffs had been taken, which suggested that when Cara had teleported away, she’d doubled back for her people and taken them with her to the Lair.

Sierra shook her head at Julian, fighting the urge to smirk in delight at the look on his face. “Oh, boy. My uncle’s not going to like this.”

Julian’s hand clenched into an angry fist and he didn’t reply.

XXX

Cara teleported into TIM’s room in the Lair, breathing hard and shaking as she anxiously rubbed her throat where Julian’s telekinetic grip had nearly crushed it. She couldn’t believe what’d just happened. Julian had showed up with a new crew and had tracked down Cara and the others. How had this happened? How the hell had Julian known where Cara was when he was supposed to have left the country? More importantly, how was he back and not in Ultra’s custody? After Julian’s last trip to the island, Ultra was supposed to be watching for Julian like a hawk.

Upon her arrival, Russell burst into the room and immediately hugged Cara tight. “Oh, thank God. When Sierra told me Julian was back, I thought the sick bastard might’ve gotten to you.”

“Sierra told you?” Cara pulled back with a concern look on her face. “What does Sierra have to do with Julian? What’s going on?”

Russell then informed Cara of the bargain that Julian had struck with Jedikiah. When he finished, Cara clutched a hand to her forehead as she realized her own stupidity.

“The grocery grab. I was borrowing a play right out of Julian’s playbook. That explains everything,” she said, in realization. “Damn it! Now Julian’s working for Ultra. He must’ve figured he could join forces and kill two birds with one stone.” It shouldn’t have come as a shock given how desperate Julian was for his revenge and his freedom. Joining up with Ultra must’ve been the perfect solution to both of Julian’s problems.

“Well, until Julian’s street pizza, we have to lay low until Sierra’s given the all-clear. We can’t—wait, TIM, where is that?”

Both Russell and Cara had turned around and saw that TIM was projecting a map onto the screen that was currently showing a single paranormal blip along with a truck bearing Ultra’s mark headed in the same direction.

“It’s Sierra’s neighborhood. Max asked me to locate it for her,” replied TIM. “I do hope I
Max was one of the Tomorrow People’s newest breakouts. She was very promising with her skills but she was also quite young, only fourteen years old and could also be reckless. She’d been studying under John’s tutelage prior to his departure and was fond of him as a mentor if not a friend or big brother-figure. She’d also been quite vocal in how much she’d been missing John since he’d left.

Russell and Cara’s blood ran cold at this. There was only one reason why Max would’ve asked for the location of Sierra’s apartment building.

“Where is she now, TIM?” asked Russell, dreading the answer.

Cara spoke before TIM could reply. “Looking for John.”

Despite not having spoken in quite a while, Cara wasted no time in calling John. John! John, are you there? Answer me!

Cara? came the confused reply. What’s going on? What’s wrong?

Please tell me you and the kids aren’t at Sierra’s apartment, said Cara. If Julian ignored Sierra’s deal with Jedikiah and found Sierra’s family at the apartment, Sierra’s cover would be blown and they would all be dead before they could blink.

What? No. We’re all at Astrid’s place. When Sierra had been unable to get away, she’d texted Robbie about Julian and also instructed him to teleport straight to Astrid’s after school. Why? What’s going on?

Max left the Lair without permission. We think she’s looking for you, said Cara. We also think Julian’s tracking her too.

Damnit, cursed John. I’ll try and notify Sierra, see what she can do. Just hang tight.

I will. Cara silently prayed that the situation wasn’t about to get as bad as she envisioned.

Meanwhile, in the back of the blacked-out Ultra SUV, Sierra had been nodding off from exhaustion at the extra-long shift she’d pulled, only to suddenly awaken when the car came to screeching halt and Sierra nearly slammed into the wall of the vehicle. What’s more, Julian was no longer with her in the back of the van, which did not bode well.

“What the hell?”

Sierra’s phone then lit up with a text from John, warning her about Max but before Sierra could do anything, Julian suddenly teleported into the back of the car, dragging Max behind him. The teenager looked scared out of her mind at being captured while Julian looked like the cat who’d just swallowed the canary.

“Look what I just found, one of Cara’s lost rats trying to find their way home,” said Julian. “She’s going to be very useful to us, aren’t you, sweetheart?”
“Let me go, please,” begged Max, as she struggled against the cuffs. It was lucky that Max didn’t at all acknowledge Sierra, otherwise Julian might’ve gotten

As she couldn’t help Max escape just yet, Sierra attempted to calm the situation down. Julian finding the Tomorrow People was inevitable but that didn’t mean she couldn’t try and make the situation work in their favor somehow.

“Listen, girl, it would be in your best interest to cooperate with us,” said Sierra, firmly. Her face softened as she touched Max’s shoulder. “Everything will be okay. Trust me. All you need to do is tell Mr. Masters what he wants to know and then you get to go home. Scout’s honor.”

Max then met Sierra’s dark green gaze and understood the message Sierra was trying to convey. She then took a deep breath and ceased fighting. “Okay. I’ll tell you whatever you want.”

Sierra bit back a sigh of relief as Julian looked both pleased and disappointed. He’d been looking forward to riding the edge of the Prime Barrier to interrogate the girl but Jedikiah’s instructions had been clear: if the prisoner cooperated, Julian was forbidden to use his favored interrogation methods and Sierra was going to watch to make sure that happened.

Julian pushed a lock of Max’s short dark hair back as he grinned a sickening grin at her. “Tell me what I want to know, pretty girl.”

Max whimpered and closed her eyes tight as Julian retrieved the information from Max’s mind. While he was doing this, Sierra took advantage of the distraction to call John.

John, it’s too late. Julian’s got Max and he’s getting the Lair’s location from her mind, said Sierra.

We’re on our way back Ultra and I can’t get her out of here. I’m sorry.

It’s not your fault. Keep an eye on Julian, try and stall him. I’m going to the Lair, said John.

Sierra swallowed painfully and silently prayed that they would find a way out of this mess. Because from where Sierra was sitting, it was looking like Armageddon.

When they returned to Ultra, Sierra was able to arrange that Max be taken to a separate Ultra vehicle for transport to an off-site Ultra location, but secretly she had also arranged for Russell to pop in and rescue Max. While this was happening, Julian had a little chat with Jedikiah.

“I heard over the grapevine that you got lucky capturing one of Cara’s people. I assume you know where the Tomorrow People are hiding?” guessed Jedikiah.

Julian nodded smugly. “I do. And I’ll gladly share that information with you as soon as you take this bomb out of my head.” When Jedikiah gave Julian a look, Julian smirked again. “No. I didn’t think so.”

“Time’s ticking, Julian,” reminded Jedikiah. There wasn’t much time left before the bomb in Julian’s nose exploded.

Julian scoffed. “You want me to give up my only bargaining with no guarantee that you’ll actually spare me.” Julian wasn’t stupid. He knew Jedikiah wouldn’t disarm the bomb until Julian had actually delivered the promised goods. “No thanks. Think I’ll stick to our original deal.”

“Good,” said Jedikiah. “In that case, a fresh team of agents will be at your disposal.”

“No agents!” said Julian, sternly. “I want a kill squad in case Cara’s people give me any trouble and since you’re so insistent on having your precious niece babysit me, I want her to come along
too. Consider Sierra’s life your guarantee that you’ll let me live.”

Jedikiah hesitated but then consented to Julian’s terms and with a heavy heart, dispatched a team consisting of four kill agents and Sierra to Julian’s command. He could only hope and pray that Sierra would return to Ultra safe as part of him had gone fond of his niece and he had no wish to see his little brother’s daughter get killed.

XXX

Meanwhile, John had returned to the Lair to retrieve his gun and to try and find some way to prevent Julian’s insane plan from succeeding. When John arrived, he was immensely happy to see that everyone there, including Cara was overjoyed to see him return. In the time that he’d been away, John had been greatly missed by everyone there.

“I promised myself I wouldn’t cry,” said Russell, sniffling as they shared a bone-crushing hug. “Welcome back, buddy.”

John returned the hug and smiled. “Good to be back.”

Cara also seemed to be on the verge of happy tears at the sight of John. “Max was captured but she’s been safely brought back. But Ultra’s still a danger to us.”

“You have no idea. Sierra just called me. You need to get everyone to the safe house at Far Rockaway right now. Julian knows where we are and he's on his way with a kill squad,” reported John, urgently. “Go. Now!”

The blood drained from Cara’s face and her heart pounded like a train at this. Quickly, she ordered Russell to see that everyone escaped to the safe house as John instructed while Cara followed John into TIM’s room. She was less than pleased to see John retrieving the spare gun he’d hidden before he took out a small packet of bullets to load it with.

“Wait, John, what’re you doing? Are you just here to get your gun?” asked Cara.

“The only way this ends is when Julian’s dead. If that means I have to cross a line, so be it,” said John, as he loaded up his gun. He didn’t like this one bit but there was no choice. Like or not, John was the Lair’s only defense against Julian and the kill squad. This was the only way to keep them all safe.

“Can’t we at least talk about this?” asked Cara, in desperation.

“Sure, let’s talk,” said John, sarcastically. What was there to talk about? John’s mind was made up and Cara couldn’t stop him. Besides, if John didn’t stop Julian before Jedikiah disarmed the bomb or worse, there was every chance that Julian would find out about Sierra’s life as a double-agent and that would lead to the loss of John’s family, something he refused to let happen. “But it won’t change anything.”

“So what, are you just here to say your good-byes before you get yourself killed?” demanded Cara.

John shook his head. “No. I also want to say I’m sorry for how things are between us right now.” Despite all that had happened, John had missed Cara’s friendship that they’d once shared.
Cara accepted John’s apology but even so, she still nearly ripped out her hair in frustration.
“You are just going to do the exact same thing, aren’t you? Would it even matter if I asked you not to do this?”

“No,” said John, without glancing at her.

“So nothing’s changed!”

“Nothing’s changed,” repeated John. His face softened and he squeezed Cara’s shoulder.
“You’re still my best friend.”

Tears pooled in Cara’s eyes as her throat tightened. “Then as my best friend, don’t let this be good-bye. Don’t let your only plan to be to try and kill Julian and the kill squad and die for it. John, please, everyone else is at the safe house in Far Rockaway. Go with them.” She couldn’t live with herself if John died when she could’ve prevented it.

John stubbornly shook his head. He knew that Cara thought he was going to get himself killed but that wasn’t what John intended at all. John would fight and he would find a way to come back to his family and his people. He had more reasons to want to live than to die. John wanted to be with Sierra and one day marry her like she’d always dreamed, he wanted to see his children grow up in a world where they weren’t hunted and he wanted to be able to live a free life. But none of that would be possible if Julian wasn’t dealt with and if John ended up sacrificing himself so his loved ones could lead that life, then so be it.

“I’m not going anywhere.” But maybe he didn’t need to go through with his original plan. Without another word, John holstered his gun and got out a large metal case full of Roger’s old belongings that he’d never been able to toss out, hoping that there might be some kind of arsenal in there.

Cara felt her anger return. “I need you at the safe house. Someone needs to be there to keep everybody calm.”

“They’ll be fine. I’m staying,” said John, without looking up.

Cara growled in anger. “John, this is exactly why things fell apart for us before!”

John’s shoulders slumped in annoyance as he briefly stopped what he was doing. “And why’s that?”

“Because you are so damn stubborn!” snapped Cara.

“I’m stubborn?” said John, incredulously. It wasn’t John’s stubbornness that caused all this mess, Irene’s capture, his and Cara’s fight, or any of it. The whole reason they fell apart in the first place was because of Cara’s stubbornness and her damned ego, not John’s. Yes, he could’ve handled things better but that didn’t mean the majority of the fault didn’t fall onto Cara.

“You don’t respect my decisions!” snapped Cara.

“That not true!” argued John. Just because he did what he thought was right didn’t mean that John didn’t respect Cara or her orders.

Cara took a deep breath. “I am in charge down here and I gave you an order. I want you at the safe house now, I’m not going to repeat myself!”

“I’m not going anywhere,” said John, stubbornly.
“Damnit, John! Where are you doing this?” yelled Cara.

John stood up straighter and faced Cara. She wanted an explanation? Fine. Cara would get one. “Because after finding you and our people, and building this place up together from nothing together, and turning it into a shelter or a home for us...can’t you see? This where I need to be, carrying on the fight from our end so Sierra doesn’t have to fight so hard on both fronts so our family, hell, everyone down here, can one day have the life that they deserve! I need to be here, helping you no matter what happens between us.”

John had given it a lot of thought and he’d decided that he was going to return to the Lair during the day to help in whatever capacity he could. Protecting and caring for the Tomorrow People in addition to his family was what he needed to. He was a leader and a caretaker and he had to return to that position. It was who he was.

Cara didn’t reply at first. She just hugged John tight. “I hate you so much right now.”

John chuckled as he returned the embrace. Everything was going to be all right between them now.

They then turned their attention to the box of stuff John had retrieved and went through it just as Russell entered the room, looking worried.

“And then there were three,” he said, sighing in worry. “Everyone else has teleported to the safe house and I just checked with Astrid, she’s got the munchkins somewhere safe if this goes south. So, what’re we doing in here?”

“We’re taking inventory of our arsenal. Julian will be here any minute,” said Cara, grimly.

Russell frowned as he looked at the junk on the table. “What is all this crap?”

“Most of it’s Roger’s, pieces of his old experiments. I haven’t been able to throw any of it out,” said John, frowning as he glanced over a piece of equipment that seemed useless. “So far, none of it’s any use to us.”

“We’ve got about a dozen working D-chips here,” said Cara, hopefully.

Russell made a face. “Which will only suppress our powers, not the human kill squad or Julian.”

Upon hearing this, John’s face lit up with an idea and then when he glanced at Cara, he knew that they both had the same idea as to how to deal with Julian and the kill squad. One that would work out more than perfectly in their favor.

XXX

Back at Ultra, Jedikiah was nervously pacing around the ops room as he watched and waited for any news of Julian’s mission as well as Sierra’s wellbeing. So far, he had yet to hear from the kill squad, though according to his people, the team was currently in Central Manhattan and on the move towards somewhere underground.

“Sir?” A security agent came up next to Jedikiah with a cell phone. “It’s him. It’s Julian.”
Jedikiah didn’t hesitate to answer. “Yes?”

“Hey, Jed, remind me. How can you be sure that the little bomb you shoved up my nose is going to kill me?” asked Julian, with a hint of sneer.

“Well, Julian, it has the same explosive force as a grenade, so…”

“And let’s say I decided to increase my leverage with your niece, who’s standing right next to me by the way, by slapping a suppression cuff on her wrist?” said Julian.

Jedikiah’s heart skipped a beat. Though he knew the cuff wouldn’t affect Sierra, he couldn’t prevent the sudden overwhelming feeling of worry for his niece that swept over him.

He covered the mouthpiece of the phone with his hand before hissing to one of his agents, “Get me an exact location on that kill squad, now!” Jedikiah then returned to his conversation with Julian. “Why the suppression cuff, Julian? Our deal stays the same, Julian, but all the same, I thought we had an agreement.”

“Oh we do, I’m just making sure it works in my favor,” sneered Julian. “I will uphold my half of the bargain and I expect you to uphold yours. Your niece’s life depends on it.”

“Put Sierra on the line right now,” demanded Jedikiah.

To Jedikiah’s relief, Julian did as he was ordered.

“Sierra, listen to me very carefully. Stick close to Julian and find your daughter. But if you get too far underground, I won’t be able to stop the countdown. He doesn’t know that cuff won’t work on you, so, if you have to, get the hell out of dodge. Is that understood?” If it came down to choosing between the capture of the Tomorrow People and Sierra’s life, Jedikiah would have to admit that he would choose his niece’s life.

“Perfectly, sir. Orders received,” replied Sierra.

And with that, the call ended.

Jedikiah’s heart then skipped a beat when the tracking signal on the computer screen disappeared. He ordered his people to keep on trying and they did so to no avail and what was worse, they couldn’t stop the detonation of the bomb. The team had gone too far underground and unless they returned aboveground and soon, the bomb in Julian’s head was going to go off and Jedikiah couldn’t stop it. What had he done?

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When the subway car they were traveling on came to a screeching halt, quite literally thanks to Julian pulling hard on the emergency brake, Sierra carefully followed behind him and the kill squad. The Lair was blissfully devoid of life, much to Sierra’s relief but she could still sense the presence of John, Cara and Russell and she was willing to bet that Julian could too, judging by the look on his face.

“So this is their hideout. What a dump,” said Julian, with a look of disgust. “Where is everyone? We’re running out of time!”
Right on cue, Cara teleported into the room with her hands up and in a surrender position.

“This isn’t about the Tomorrow People, Julian. This is about me and you,” said Cara. “You can take me into Ultra. It’s time for this to be over.”

Julian scoffed. “I’m not here to arrest you, Cara.” He gestured with his head for the kill squad to take aim, which they did so.

“No one has to die here,” said Cara. “Whatever you want from me, I can give you.”

Julian sneered. “Can you bring Nelly back from the grave? Then I beg to differ.”

“I didn’t kill her,” replied Cara, coolly. “But you are so bent on revenge that you would turn against your own kind! Someday, that’ll catch up with you!”

Cara’s words fell onto deaf ears. “Blah, blah, will someone shoot her already?”

Sierra didn’t even think, she just reacted. “NO!” She threw herself at the armed agent, sending him and his gun flying while Cara disappeared and Julian looked smug.

“I knew you were a rat, but thanks for the confirmation,” said Julian, before he tossed Sierra into the wall behind her, knocking the wind out of her. He then frowned as he realized he could still sense Cara and not only her but two others. “Wait. She’s still here. Poor thing. All of her friends have ditched her. And who could blame them?”

John teleported on Julian’s left side. “That’s not quite true.”

Immediately the kill squad began firing on John as he was Ultra’s greatest fugitive.

“HOLD YOUR FIRE!” roared Julian. “He’s just trying to disorient you.”

Russell then teleported into the room looking smug. “Oh, hey, Julian. Remember me?”

Furious that Russell hadn’t died as Julian had thought, he ordered the kill squad to fire.

Cara and John then teleported into the room together.

“I thought you said hold your fire,” said John, feigning confusion.

Cara nodded in agreement. “This is getting so confusing.”

Again, the kill squad fired but to no avail as Cara and John teleported away to safety.

“Make up your mind, Julian!” yelled Russell, from behind him. “Time’s running out!”

Julian nearly roared in frustration as he grabbed Sierra’s arm, pulling her up. “Come on. You’re going to see this through if you want to live.” He then dragged Sierra down the tunnel that Russell had come from and soon found himself in an empty round room. Suddenly, Cara teleported in and held Julian in a headlock, forcing him to let Sierra go and she wasted no time in leaving the room.

Julian laughed at Cara’s pitiful attempts to stop him. “Enough with the games, Cara! You may have saved your little traitor friend but it’s no use. You know you can’t kill me.”

“I don’t have to,” hissed Cara. “NOW!”

Quickly, Cara teleported out of the room and the door slammed shut behind her. A minute
later, all four of them were standing outside the glass, looking quite smug.

“The glass is bulletproof, Julian,” said Cara.

Julian just sneered and attempted to teleport away, only to find that he couldn’t thank to the dozen D-chips on the ceiling above him. Julian wasn’t going anywhere. Realizing he was about to die if he didn’t come up with a plan and quick, Julian turned his attention to Sierra.

“Sierra? If you let me out of here, I promise I won’t say a word of this to your uncle,” said Julian. Blackmail should work, it always worked.

But a surprise came Julian’s way when Sierra just smirked and slipped the cuff off. “Oh, I know you won’t, Julian. Ta.”

The blood drained from Julian’s face as Sierra made a little patronizing wave before leaving with John, who seemed more than pleased by Julian’s face.

Russell got right up against the glass of the door. “Hey, Julian, remember what you did to me when you caught me in your house? Now you’re in my house.”

And with that, Russell departed, leaving Cara the only one still watching.

Julian began to panic as he caught sight of his reflection in the glass of the door. The bomb was glowing bright blue, signaling the approaching detonation which was in less than a minute.

“Cara? Don’t do this. All right? I am begging you. I made a mistake. I’m one of you!” When Cara neither replied nor made any attempts to open the door, Julian thumped his arm furiously against it, trying to break it. “YOU CAN’T DO THIS TO ME!”

“You did this to yourself,” said Cara, coolly as she then departed.

No sooner had Cara left, the bomb went off, killing Julian and the kill squad but thankfully, the explosion was safely contained by the room that had been Julian’s prison. Julian and the kill squad were gone and the Tomorrow People were safe again. It was over.

XXX

When Sierra returned to Ultra shortly after Julian’s demise, she went straight to her uncle’s office. The man was standing hunched over by window, the glass reflecting the worry and regret he was currently feeling at the moment.

Sierra cleared her throat, getting his attention. “Hey, there. I’m back.”

Jedikiah looked disbelieving at Sierra before sighing in immense relief. “Thank God for that. But all the same…what happened? Where’s Julian?”

“In that order? What happened is nothing I can say I’m sorry about,” said Sierra, truthfully as she took a seat across from her uncle. “Apparently, Julian never learned to tell the difference between a false memory and a real one. Julian’s dead and so is the kill squad.” As much as Sierra hated taking lives, she’d long since come to the hard truth that some people were just far too dangerous to be allowed to live.

Sierra took a deep breath before telling the story she’d rehearsed with John and Cara. “Well, best I can figure, Cara decided not to take any chances after Julian failed to bring her in the first time. The so-called fugitive Julian captured? Just some unlucky idiot who was planted with a false memory to get Julian as well as Ultra off the Tomorrow People’s trail. We found an underground base, yes, but it was an old army base used for testing weapons. Nobody was there and when we went in, the door slammed shut and locked behind us before about a dozen D-chips lit up. By that point, Julian’s bomb was about to go off but I couldn’t disarm it or carry everyone else out with me, so I had to make a choice. My life or his. I barely got away in time before everything went ka-boom.”

To Sierra’s surprise, Jedikiah actually laughed before he sank into his chair. “Well, that is one hell of an ending to this rather fantastic adventure Julian took us on. And as much as I dislike losing good men, I’m more relieved that you’re safe and back with us. You’re damn lucky, you realize that?”

Sierra nodded in agreement before she silently gestured to Jedikiah’s drink cabinet. When he nodded, she poured them both a drink, fizzy water for her and a bourbon for Jedikiah. After the day they’d had, they’d both more than earned themselves a respite.

“I’m glad Julian’s no longer with us. He was too dangerous to be out on the street,” said Jedikiah, as they clinked their glasses. He took a long gulp of his bourbon and then sighed deeply. For the first time since Sierra had met him, Jedikiah seemed worn out both physically and emotionally. “I want this war to end, Sierra. I would do anything to see it finished.”

For once, Jedikiah said something that Sierra agreed with and she nodded at him. She, too, was sick to death of the shadow war. She wanted to be done acting as a double-agent. She didn’t want to just survive anymore, she wanted to live. She wanted to be able to live the life that she wanted with John and the kids without having to constantly watch her six or worry about who was gunning for her next. But until Ultra and the Founder were no longer in the picture, that was just a pipe dream at best for now.

“Yeah, me too. I would give anything to have this be over, for Robbie’s sake if nothing else,” she said, truthfully. When the shadow war finally ended, and Sierra was sure that it would, the first thing she was going to do was take John and the kids to the park and enjoy a day in the sun for the first time as a family like they deserved. “So, uh, what’s going to happen to that poor girl we captured when she arrives at the Ultra site?”

Jedikiah sighed as he put down his glass. “Well, she’s going to have to be put down. Regardless of how that poor soul came to be here at Ultra, I can’t take the chance that she’s as bad as Julian. I hope that you understand.”

Sierra understood all too well and strove to conceal her disgust and contempt for her uncle’s disregard for an innocent life. For someone who said the shadow war was to protect humanity, Jedikiah didn’t know a damn thing about being human.

“Well, if there’s nothing else, I should head home,” she said, politely. “If that’s okay with you?”

Jedikiah nodded. “Go rest up and take tomorrow off. You’ve earned it. Good night, kiddo.”

“Good night, sir.”
And with that, Sierra left her uncle’s office. It had been one hell of a crazy day, but it was finally over

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Down in the Lair, everyone had returned safely from the safe house and work was well underway in cleaning up the mess that Julian’s actions had caused. It was progressing rather quickly and smoothly, which was a load off of Cara’s mind. She was also quite happy that John had yet to return to Sierra’s apartment as she needed him now more than ever and she also had something important to discuss with John and a decision to make.

“You know what the scariest part of this whole thing was? Having to look you in the eye and see what we’ve lost,” remarked John. “It’s terrifying. I guess that’s one of the biggest reasons why I couldn’t bring myself to come back.”

Lack of trust and difference of opinion hadn’t been the only reasons why John stayed away, he’d also been afraid to face what he’d lost when Cara had kicked him out—their friendship and the world they’d built together. What’s more, he also felt like everything that they’d worked so hard to build in the Lair had been broken. They could rebuild, yes, but it wouldn’t be the same.

Cara’s face softened. “There’s nothing to be afraid of. We’re all still here. I’m still here. And I am so, so sorry for everything, John. You were right and I was wrong. I was just too stubborn to admit it.” She gave him a gentle, loving hug that seemed to last forever before John pulled away.

“Something else on your mind?” asked John, concerned.

Cara nodded and took a deep breath. “During the whole debacle with Cyrus and Nathan, Sierra said she didn’t recognize me anymore, that I wasn’t the same person who first befriended her. She was right. Ever since I became leader, I haven’t been the same. I’ve let it turn me into a monster.”

The more Cara reflected her past actions since John was deposed, the more shame and guilt she felt. She didn’t like what she had become, which was why she’d had a little chat with their people and they’d unanimously agreed on Cara’s suggestion.

“I’m not cut out to be leader, John. I’m better off as a second-in-command. So, that’s why I’ve spoken with the others and if you agree, your old job’s back and so is your home here,” said Cara.

John smiled and then he nodded. “I do accept.” It would be good to take charge again. John had missed it. “But just so you know, it won’t be the same as it was. I’ve talked with Sierra and we’ve decided that I’m going to be spending my nights with her and the kids unless there’s an emergency. As much as our people need me, my family needs me too.” John was a leader, yes, but he was also a boyfriend and a father and he wouldn’t neglect his duties to his family.

Cara nodded in understanding as though she’d expected this and she smiled. “Good to have you back, John.”

“Good to be back,” he agreed.

“Daddy! Aunt Cara!”

Cara spun around and her smile widened when she saw Sierra bringing in the kids, Robbie and
Charlotte, into the Lair. They were practically bursting with joy as they ran into Cara’s opened arms and hugged her tight. Everyone watched the sweet sight with great smiles and the odd happy tear or two. John hadn’t been the only one who’d been missed lately.

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Later that night, before she headed back to the apartment with her family, Sierra dropped by TIM’s room. She’d accidentally left one of her library books there the previous day and needed to get it back so she could return the next day and avoid paying a late fee. She’d just found the book and was about to leave when she saw the junk that littered the desk.

“Hey, TIM, what’s all this?” asked Sierra, curiously.

“According to John, it’s remnants of your father’s experiments,” said TIM.

Her curiosity piqued, Sierra began to look through the mechanical parts. Most of it was useless to her, obsolete and the like but when Sierra picked up a long silver cylinder doohickey, it suddenly beeped to life and glowed bright blue, much to Sierra’s puzzlement.

“What the hell…?” she murmured. “TIM, what is this?”

“But it does rather seem to like you, doesn’t it?” said TIM, regretfully. “Your father never told me,”

That it did.

And Sierra needed to know why. She had the feeling it was key to the location of her father’s body.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son and daughter, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

John knocked on the door and poked his head in.

“Hey, we’re all ready to go. Did you find your—what’s going on?”

Much to John’s confusion, TIM was projecting DNA data as well as some other jargon that John didn’t get a lick of and Sierra was holding a piece of one of Roger’s old inventions in her hands. Much to John’s surprise, it was glowing bright blue with life.

“I came to get the book when I found this. I had TIM analyze it and it appears to be a key of some kind and part of a larger device,” explained Sierra. “According to TIM, the component is biological in nature and it’s bound to my father. Best we can figure, this is looking for Roger, which means that we could be right about my dad’s body still being out there. But that’s the hiccup.”

John nodded in agreement, knowing where Sierra was going with this. “It’s more than just a hiccup, it’s a huge if not completely insane risk. Last time we tried to get into Jedikiah’s head, we almost all got ourselves killed.”

“I know, I know, and if I did anything—which I’m not saying I will—it would be on my own. No one else need get involved.” Sierra knew that Cara would strongly disagree if not completely go ballistic if she knew what Sierra was imagining and Sierra couldn’t blame her. But all the same, how could Sierra ignore what was right in front of her after searching for so long? “But John… everything we’ve been working towards is so tantalizingly close now. Don’t you think—”

Sierra took a step forward, only to suddenly become dizzy as her exhaustion caught up with her and she would’ve fallen flat on her head had John not swooped in and caught her just in time.

“I think that you’re dead on your feet with exhaustion and this can wait until morning when you’ve got a clearer head.” said John, half-teasing, half firm. Before Sierra could protest, John scooped her up into his arms, bridal style. “Come on, we’ll continue this later, I promise.”

Sierra wanted to argue with John but instead, she realized that John was right. She was exhausted beyond measure and a bed sounded very appealing right then and there. So, she just wrapped her arms around his neck and buried her face into his torso before she started drifting off, lulled by the sound of John’s heartbeat.
Sierra spent the following day getting caught up on her sleep and other such things after her hectic eighteen-hour shift at Ultra with Julian and then Russell dragged her out to a bar that same evening for a little fun and games. Sierra did enjoy herself for the most part, but her thoughts were occupied with the idea of finally finding Roger’s body and she was also trying to keep Russell from getting them both exposed and onto Ultra’s radar as the idiot kept using his powers to perform tricks to impress the pretty girls sitting near them at the bar.

“I am going to slap a suppression cuff on you if you don’t *knock it off!*” hissed Sierra, as she grabbed Russell’s hand before he could make the cherry in a blond girl’s glass float. She wasn’t joking as she did carry a spare cuff in her pocket at all times in case of an emergency while she was off-duty. “Quit it, if you know what’s good for you.”

Russell pouted but did as he was told before hunkering back down onto his stool. “Girl, you need to chillax and stop worrying about me. Tonight’s all about you and your need for some much-needed frivolity. Although, I wouldn’t refuse if you helped me snag a date.”

Sierra sipped her fizzy water and shook her head. “Sorry, Russell, but I am less interested in talking about our love lives and more interested in finding my dad’s body.” She made a disgusted face as she realized what she’d just said while Russell laughed. “Oh, ew. God, that sounded so creepy and *so* wrong coming out my mouth.”

Russell gently patted Sierra’s shoulder. “Don’t worry about it. At this hour, there’s nothing to do but be weird, if not a little creepy.”

Sierra checked her watch and cursed when she saw how late it was. She needed to get home before John and the kids started to worry. Before she could leave, however, her phone lit up with a text from Hilton, informing her about the latest case they were on.

“Who’s the text from?”

“My partner at Ultra, Hilton.”

“Great. Invite him out. The guy needs a date even more than I do,” said Russell.

Sierra shook her head as she quickly texted out a reply to Hilton. Inviting Hilton out while she was with Russell was a big no-no as Sierra couldn’t afford to be seen with Ultra’s known fugitives by any of her co-workers. “Nuh-uh, no. Besides, he’s on duty. We’ve got a new case he wants my help with first thing in the morning. There’s a breakout who thinks she’s a superhero. She’s using her powers in public to save humans and she leaves a rose behind.”

A strange look flickered across Russell’s face as he pushed his half-empty glass away, something that Sierra had never seen him do before. “Say what now?”

Sierra shrugged. “It’s her calling card, I guess. You know? Zorro has a ‘Z,’ Batman has batarangs, and this girl apparently has a flower.”

Russell didn’t reply as he spaced off and thought of a time just four years previously before he knew about Ultra and was recruited by the Tomorrow People. Four years ago, Russell had gone hogwild with his powers, using them to secure a fortune in Las Vegas when his fun had been interrupted by the most gorgeous redhead he’d ever seen. Her name had been Talia and she was just like Russell in everyway except she had a little more impulse control. Naturally, Russell had
fallen hard for Talia and the feeling had been greatly reciprocated. But their happy ending had come to a crashing halt and Russell had thought Talia lost to him…until now.

“Russell, you okay?” asked Sierra, concerned, snapping Russell out of his thoughts. “Should I order you some coffee? You look like you need to sober up.”

Russell quickly shook his head. “What? No, no, I’m fine. Say, uh, what’s Ultra going to do when they catch up with this Wonder Woman wannabe? Strip her powers?”

Sierra shook her head grimly as she rose up. “No. After how reckless she’s been and how close she’s come to exposing us all, they’re going to kill her. So, do me a favor. Be on standby, because I think I’m going to need some help with this one. This girl’s an idiot but she’s a good one and I don’t want to see her die if I can help it.”

Russell didn’t even hesitate to nod as he then slapped twenty dollars on the counter to cover their bill for the night. “Sure, not a problem. Let me know how it all turns out.”

Sierra nodded and then departed for home to get a good night’s sleep. She had the feeling she was going to need it, big-time.

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When Sierra joined Hilton in the interrogation room the next morning, she inwardly groaned at the scowl on his face as it meant that Hilton was not in one of his better moods and that also meant her day had already gone south and it wasn’t even nine o’clock yet.

“Morning. I got your message.” Sierra frowned in surprised confusion at the prisoner, who was a chubby, older man with brown beard. “So, who’s this? I thought we were looking for a female.”

“We are. This guy’s—is that the necklace I gave you?” asked Hilton.

Sierra’s hand unconsciously touched the shimmering sun and moon necklace encrusted with paste diamonds and gold that she’d won from the bar’s lottery necklace the previous night. “I won it last night in a little contest. Why do you ask? Want one for someone you like?”

“No. It’s just…my sister had one like it. Never mind,” said Hilton, briskly as he led her to their prisoner. “Meet Avery Fletcher, conspiracy theorist with a blog called The Fletcher Files. In addition to nano robots in our water supply, he also has a few theories about our superhero. He’s been tracking her for years, haven’t you, pal? He’s even given her a name, the Red Avenger.”

Avery looked nervous as he looked between Hilton and Sierra, the latter of whom glanced at the thick folder full of Avery’s stuff about the Red Avenger from his website.

“What is this? Some secret CIA within the CIA?”

Hilton glared and looked very unimpressed as he crouched down to Avery and hissed into his ear, “This isn’t your conspiracy crap. This is real. Tell us where we can find this ‘Red Avenger’ before I count to three, or else I will cut off your—”

“Hilton!” interrupted Sierra, quickly. She made a slashing gesture across her throat, signaling for him to knock it off. “Go get a coffee. Now.”
Hilton scowled for a moment before he realized Sierra’s plan and then he left without arguing. When all else failed, the good cop/bad cop routine was always a good fallback.

Sierra gave their prisoner a sympathetic look as she sat down and began leafing through the folder. “You’ll have to excuse my partner. He’s a little unhinged. Full disclosure, if he doesn’t pound someone’s head in every couple of days, he gets really testy and scares the crap out of me. So, why don’t you save us both a lot of trouble and give me something on this ‘Red Avenger’ chick so we can get my partner off both of our backs?”

Avery quickly nodded but he still looked pale as milk from Hilton’s threat. “I…I don’t know what to tell you. I don’t know her name or where she’s from.”

Sierra figured as much but she was still disappointed. If she didn’t get some kind of lead, Hilton was going to give this guy an aneurysm or worse, follow through on his threat. “Well, can you tell me about the rose, at least?”

“Yes, yes, of course. It’s an American Beauty hybrid in Red Fourteen or Sixteen. Super rare and only grows in maybe one garden in the city,” said Avery.

Sierra nodded but then her face fell when she came across a photo of the Red Avenger at a casino and standing next to the Red Avenger was none other than Russell. That explained his odd behavior at the bar last night, Russell didn’t just want to help out because the Red Avenger was a breakout. He knew the Red Avenger personally and Sierra was willing to bet that there was more between them than a love of shared recklessness.

“So, what’re you going to tell your partner?” asked Avery, nervously.

Sierra quickly pocketed the photo and closed up the folder. “The truth: that you are just some harmless wacko and that you should be released immediately. Excuse me for a sec.”

Avery sighed in relief. “Oh, God. Thank you so much.”

Sierra ignored this as she then left the room. Russell had a lot of explaining to do.

Meanwhile, Cara was busy working out, punching and kicking the living daylights out of the black punching bag when Morgan hesitantly interrupted.

“Hey, sorry to interrupt but can I talk to you for a sec?”

Cara nodded and wiped her sweaty brow. “Sure. I was done anyway.”

“You seem a little tense. You okay?”

Cara nodded again. “Just blowing off a little steam. Now that John’s taking the lead again and all’s quiet on the Ultra front for now, I’m not finding much to do other than this.” Cara loved having John back in charge again but she couldn’t deny that she was a little bored.

“Speaking of John, I overheard him and Sierra talking the other night. Sierra thinks she’s got a lead on finding her dad’s body but she can’t follow it through unless she can get into Jedikiah’s
head,” confessed Morgan. “She hadn’t decided for sure if she was doing it but I thought you should know.”

Cara made a face. “Go into Jedikiah’s head? That’s suicide. It’ll never work. Jedikiah’s too cautious. Sierra can’t even pick up a stray thought from him, never mind what she has planned.”

“I know and I agree, but that’s what I wanted to talk to you about,” said Morgan, as she twisted her fingers together. “I’ve been thinking it over and I think the best way for Sierra to get what she needs is if I do it. Jedikiah trusts me, he loves me. If I go to him, maybe I can get him to lower his guard long enough for me to get what I need.”

Cara hesitated. Morgan’s plan was sound but there were so many risks involved. Jedikiah may have been in love with Morgan and gone to great lengths to protect her from the Founder but that didn’t mean that he wouldn’t punish Morgan severely if she was caught betraying him.

“It’s not my call to make,” said Cara, finally. “And even if it were, there are so many risks. If you’re caught snooping in Jedikiah’s brain, you probably won’t come back.” Cara wasn’t just talking about John kicking Cara out of the Lair. What if Jedikiah decided to kill Morgan? “Besides, are you sure this isn’t just about you missing your boyfriend and why you’ve been blocking me out the last few weeks?”

Morgan sighed. Yes, she did miss Jedikiah and she did have a reason for shutting Cara out both emotionally and telepathically but that had nothing to do with why she wanted to help. “Cara, please, I’ve done more than my fair share to help out around the Lair and I’ve never asked you for anything in all that time. If I do this, we’ll be one step closer to getting our lives back. All I’m asking is that you cover me for a bit while I’m going. Please.”

Cara hesitated again and considered Morgan’s offer for a good long while. Morgan was right. In the time that Morgan had been living in the Lair, she’d done whatever was asked and more without any complaint. They did owe her a favor and if Morgan’s gambit paid off, they would be one step closer to winning the shadow war against Ultra and getting their lives back.

So, Cara made her decision.

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Meanwhile, Russell was going through a box of cereal and he made a face when he found that the toy surprise was missing, probably thanks to Sierra’s kids. The thieving little munchkins. He looked up when Sierra entered the room, looking far from happy.

“Perfect timing. Hey, did your kids take the toy without eating the cereal again? Because that’s the third time this month that this has happened,” said Russell.

“I’ll ask. Right now I want to ask you about the superhero breakout I’m after,” said Sierra. She dropped the picture onto the desk and folded her arms across her chest. “Turns out you know her.”

Russell sighed and his eyes became misty as he looked over the photo. “Knew her. We met in Vegas about four years ago. Her name was Talia. The girl was a total player. Schooled me sideways. So, naturally I had to partner up. Had a good run too. Took casinos from Macau to Montreal for more money than I could ever spend—not that I really did. We donate a good chunk of it to all kinds of charities, animal rescues, and cancer research facilities.”
“So, you fell for her,” said Sierra.

Russell nodded. “Yeah, I fell. Harder than I ever could’ve imagined. Anyway, after a while, Talia wanted to do more than just hit casinos and donate the winnings. She thought we had our powers for a reason and wanted to use them to do some good. She wanted to be a superhero and I went along with it. We had a blast. I mean, it was reckless but it was so amazing. We saved so many lives, helped so many people, you wouldn’t believe it.”

Sierra became concerned at the use of past tense. “So, what happened?”

Russell sighed again and looked grief-stricken. “We bit off more than we could chew, that’s what happened. We intervened during this really bad hostage situation held by this Julian Masters wannabe and got separated. Long story short, I’d just gotten the hostages all free when the bastard’s lair went ka-boom, taking that psych out with it. When I couldn’t find Talia, I thought she’d joined him. I thought she was dead. Until now.”

Sierra’s heart broke for Russell and she gently squeezed his hand. “I’m so sorry, Russell. Is it possible she thought you were dead too? Maybe that’s why she never came after you.”

Russell nodded. “Yes, it’s more than possible. We didn’t have telepathic link like you and John, so it’s more than likely she thought I was dead too. But it doesn’t change anything. Now that I know she’s out there, I have to find her, Sierra. I can’t lose her again.”

Sierra’s face softened as she nodded understandingly. She couldn’t help but see similarities in the history between Talia and Russell and herself and John. What if Sierra hadn’t been recruited by Cara and Russell and instead the truth about her faked death had been discovered by John some other way? Would John had been frantically searching for her like Russell was looking for Talia? Sierra could only wonder.

“Okay, well, we don’t have a ton of leads but this rose she’s been leaving behind is a pretty rare hybrid. Red 14 or 16 or something.”

Russell snapped his fingers. “Red Sixteen. It was her favorite roulette play.”

TIM then spoke up. “That particular varietal can be found locally at the Rockefeller Rose Garden at the Bronx. Also, your so-called Red Avenger snuck into the garden to pilfer a few roses not five minutes ago.”

Sierra cursed. Five minutes ago? That wasn’t good. “Were you able to follow her?”

“Indeed I was. I traced her to a bar in Little Saigon called the Dancing Dragon.”

Nothing more needed to be said as Sierra and Russell grabbed their jackets and headed topside to track down their breakout.

When they arrived at the bar, the Dancing Dragon, Sierra had to cover up her ears as the music was painfully loud. The bar was decorated with red paper lanterns and golden dragons and it was practically bursting with people dancing and drinking to their hearts’ delight. Sierra hated it and couldn’t wait until they were out of the bar.

Getting any paranormal vibes? asked Russell.

Sierra paused for a moment and scanned the area before replying. She’s down below us in the basement and she’s not alone, either.
Russell looked panicked before he and Sierra then went into the basement. They arrived to see a redhead woman dressed in black with a red mask beating the tar out of two men using both her powers and her martial arts skills. Not good. When Sierra and Russell tried to apprehend her, the girl turned on them.

“Hey, hey, it’s me!” yelled Russell, as he was punched in the face. “Talia, it’s me! It’s Russell!”

But the girl just ignored Russell and kept fighting him and in the all the commotion, the two men she’d been fighting took what they could of their cash and ran off. The fight finally came to an end when Sierra grabbed the back of the girl’s neck and invoked her power, causing the girl to fall to her knees in intense agony.

“Seriously, Talia, or whatever the hell your name is, what is wrong with you?” demanded Sierra, as she caught her breath and undid the damage she’d done. “Don’t you recognize Russell? Your boyfriend and partner in crime?”

The girl didn’t reply at first before yanking off her mask. Much to their shock, the girl was not Talia. In fact, they didn’t recognize her at all.

“Talia? My name’s Mallory. Who the hell are you two clowns and how do you know Talia?”

Sierra groaned as she rubbed her eyes. The Red Avenger wasn’t Russell’s long-lost girlfriend. Great. Just freaking great!

After explaining who they were and their connection to Talia, they took Mallory to the Noodle Bar for an apology meal as well as for a little chat. Mallory was more than happy to talk to them both now that she knew the whole story.

“I still can’t believe it. You’re really Russell Kwon? Wow. I feel like I should ask for an autograph or something,” said Mallory, smiling. “I mean, I know of you, everyone knows of you, you inspired the first line of Avengers, but I never thought we’d actually meet. The way Talia told it, you met your maker a few years back.”

Russell looked visibly touched as well as relieved. “Wait, so Talia’s alive? She told you about me?”

Mallory nodded. “She never gave up hoping you’d survive your last mission together.”

Sierra held up a hand. “Wait, back up. First of all, where the hell is Talia? Russell’s spent the last few years thinking she died. Second, what do you mean the ‘first line of Avengers’? Are you telling me that there’s more than one Red Avenger person?” Sierra really hoped that wasn’t the case as she could only imagine what Ultra would do with that information.

Mallory gave Sierra an incredulous look. “Don’t you get it? Talia’s everywhere. And the Red Avenger is a mantle passed down from person to person, city to city. I don’t know where she is right now, but Talia’s still out, doing what Russell taught her to do. And what she taught me. If I’m lucky, I’m going to pass it onto to this chick I’ve been training in Quebec.”

Russell looked flabbergasted by this admission. In the last few years, he never once imagined that Talia had not only survived but had also gathered disciples and spun a hero’s tale about him. It made him immensely happy to know why Talia had never found him and that she still loved him but at the same time, he was still worried for Talia as well as her protégé.

“Look, I’m honored by this and I’m very impressed with the way you took down those jerks
back there, but the situation’s gotten out of control. You need to slow down and lay low for a while,” said Russell. “Do you have any idea what you’re up against in this town? Have you ever heard of Ultra?”

Mallory’s brow wrinkled as she shook her head. “No. What’s that?”

Sierra sighed as she took over. “Ultra is our enemy in a shadow war that’s been going on for years between our kind and them. They’re a secret organization that hunts down and exploits our race. Those of us who don’t agree to work for them get their powers stripped or they get killed. You’ve gotten yourself the number one spot on their hit list. I’ve been working as a double-agent for the last several months to bring them down, but my mission’s far from over. Which is why the best thing for you to do is either quit this while you’re ahead or join the Tomorrow People in the Lair where you’ll be safe.”

Mallory laughed and shook her head. “Thanks for the heads up but you can slink off to your bunker without because I don’t play in a world of safe. Neither does Talia. I’m not afraid of Ultra or dying for that matter.”

“Then you’re idiot,” said Sierra, bluntly. Mallory was brave and she’d done a lot of good, yes, but she was a complete and utter moron. “My boss is my uncle and I’m terrified every damn day that sooner or later, he’s going to find out I’ve been deceiving him this whole time and kill me or worse. You’re being reckless, risking exposure for all of us. You need to stop this before it gets out of hand.”

“Too late for that, girl. Besides, the only thing I’m doing is finishing that mission that you two pooched,” said Mallory.

“What mission?” asked Russell, curiously.

Mallory smirked. “If you’re so interested, why don’t you join me for a ridealong?”

Sierra groaned but decided to go along with it. She’d gotten this far. She might as well learn the whole story and worst case scenario, she could just slap a suppression cuff onto Mallory’s wrist and force her into the Lair afterwards.

So, with some reluctance, Sierra and Russell followed after Mallory to her base of operations.

Meanwhile, far across town, Jedikiah was headed to a fancy hotel.

Earlier that day, he’d gotten a message from Morgan, begging him to meet her so they could talk, claiming it was important couldn’t wait. Despite Jedikiah’s concerns that Morgan was being reckless and was going to get them both caught by the Founder, Jedikiah had been unable to deny how much he’d missed Morgan and wanted to see her again. So, he’d cleared his schedule and gone off to the hotel room to see her.

When Morgan arrived, she was standing by the bed, wearing a silk nightgown, looking both nervous and relieved.

“You came,” she said, breathlessly.
“Yes, I did. Against my better judgment, I might add,” said Jedikiah, as he slid off his jacket. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but what the hell are you doing above ground, Morgan? If my employer finds out that your death was greatly exaggerated, he’ll—”

“I know. It’s reckless and stupid but I had to see you, Jed. There’s something I need to tell you, something important that’s going to affect both of us,” said Morgan, quickly. She bit her lip. “God, I imagined this so many times, but I never thought I wouldn’t be able to get the words out. I’m scared how you’re going to take this.”

Jedikiah became worried at this. He’d never seen Morgan so hesitant, so scared before in her life. She was even shaking like a leaf, which worried him even more.

“Morgan, you’re scaring me. What’s going on?” asked Jedikiah, worriedly.

Tears pooled in Morgan’s eyes as she took a deep breath and placed Jedikiah’s hand on her stomach. “Jed…I’m pregnant,” she confessed. When Morgan had begun suffering from morning sickness in the Lair, she’d immediately sought out Sierra’s help as she was the only other paranormal who’d been pregnant before to Morgan’s knowledge. Together, they had confirmed that Morgan was carrying Jedikiah’s child and Sierra had been aiding Morgan to the best of her ability but it was too early to tell which parent the baby took after. “We’re going to have a baby.”

The breath left Jedikiah’s lungs and for a moment he couldn’t speak. Pregnant. Morgan was pregnant with their baby, Jedikiah’s baby. Jedikiah was going to be a father. He couldn’t believe it. It was huge shock and not something that Jedikiah had ever imagined happening to him.

Taking Jedikiah’s silence as a rejection, Morgan began to cry and pulled away. “I’m sorry! I know we never talked about having kids and I know it’s not good timing with the Founder and the shadow war, but I couldn’t wait to tell you any longer. You don’t want the baby, I understand. I’m sorry. I’ll just go and you won’t have to see us again.”

Jedikiah quickly grabbed Morgan’s arm before she could teleport away and then pulled her in for an intense, passionate kiss that she returned as her arms snaked around Jedikiah’s waist.

When they finally broke apart for air, Jedikiah cupped Morgan’s face in his hands and gently wiped her tears away with the pads of his thumbs.

“Don’t you dare think I don’t want this,” he murmured, fiercely. Jedikiah was petrified at the idea of being a father and he was scared to death of what would happen if the Founder found out, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t happy. “You’re right, this is a shock and the timing could not be worse. But don’t think for one second that I’m unhappy or that I don’t want our baby. Nothing could be further from the truth, I swear. I love you both so damn much and I promise, I’m going to do everything possible for the baby, our baby.”

There were so many problems with raising a child at that time in their lives. The shadow war, the Founder, Jedikiah’s position at Ultra…not to mention, Jedikiah didn’t know how they were going to raise their baby when it was born. What would they do if the baby was human like Jedikiah? Or what if it was a paranormal like Morgan? And what would happen if their child ever found out what Jedikiah had done, the role he’d played in the shadow war between the Tomorrow People and Ultra, the lengths he’d had to go through in order to survive? It was a lot to deal with but Jedikiah was nothing if not smart and resourceful. He would find a way to get through this, he was sure of it.

Morgan smiled through her tears as she hugged Jedikiah again and this time Jedikiah winced as he felt Morgan touch his mind. She quickly pulled back, looking upset
“Sorry! I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to do that. The pregnancy hormones are making my powers a little wackadoodle,” she said, softly.

Jedikiah’s face softened. “It’s okay,” he murmured. He didn’t like the intrusion into his mind but in this case, Jedikiah was willing to forget about it.

Morgan smiled again but then became concerned once more. “Jed…this baby changes everything now. I don’t want to do this without you. I can’t raise a baby in the Lair but I don’t want the Founder coming after us. What’re we going to do?”

Jedikiah pulled her in again and gently rubbed soothing circles on her back. “I’m going to find a way to end this war so you can come home. I don’t know how or when, but I will make it happen. And when I do, we’ll go back to our cabin and start a new life there, all of us. For now, let’s just make the most of tonight and let me take care of you both.”

Morgan was overjoyed and responded by giving Jedikiah a deep, loving kiss.

XXX

When Sierra entered Mallory’s base of operations, she was unsurprised to find that it was a complete and utter dump. The room was dimly lit, the walls were full of holes, damp with condensation and mold, the wallpaper was peeling, the floor was patchy at best and the whole room sank. Also unsurprisingly was the evidence wall, covered with linking tape and Mallory’s scribbles in red ink. But as much of a dump it was, it was also the perfect place to lay low if one was hiding from the authorities.

Russell whistled low. “Ugh. You live here?”

Mallory shrugged. “No sense in putting down roots. As soon as the work here is done, I’m gone.”

Sierra resisted the urge to gag as she tried hard not to breathe through her nose. “So, what exactly is the Red Avenger up to these days?”

“Those guys I was trying to grab at the club? They weren’t purse snatchers, they were muscle for a Vietnamese gang. This—” Mallory beckoned to her evidence wall. “—is all a plot to disrupt the persecution of their money laundering ring. I’ve been following it for a few months now. It’s all what you’d expect: jury intimidation, witness tampering, the works. These guys will stop at nothing, not even threatening a Federal judge and his family, which is why I’ve been staking out their house. But first, I’m going to need to get you two some masks. If you’re going to play superhero, you need to look the part. You can also carry my calling card if you want.”

Sierra immediately shook her head. “Oh, no, no, no, no! We’re not playing superhero! The only reason I came over here was to get the whole story. I’m sorry about the gang and the judge but it doesn’t change the fact that if you’re caught, you’ll either expose us all to the authorities or Ultra will find you and kill you. You can’t do this, Mallory. I’m sorry.”

Sierra looked to Russell for support but after being given the rose, a look that Sierra didn’t like one bit flickered across his face.

“Russ, no. You can’t seriously be thinking of doing this!”
“And what if I am? What’s so wrong about using our powers to help people?” demanded Russell.

Sierra growled in frustration. She wished she could use her powers freely and she hated having to hide as they did, but exposure wasn’t an option. If humans knew the truth about the Tomorrow People, there would be a far worse persecution than what Ultra was currently making them all suffer. Playing superhero was dangerous and beyond reckless in every single way. Why could no one see that?

Before Sierra could reply, she was cut off by a beeping noise coming from Mallory’s computer. “What’s that?”

“Judge’s home security system,” replied Mallory, as she glanced at the screen. “While we were eating dumplings, the gang must’ve made their move. We gotta move. You coming?”

Russell nodded and took Mallory’s hand, teleporting away before Sierra could stop them.

“Damn it!” cursed Sierra. The situation had gone very far south and now she was left with one choice. John? John, are you there?

* I’m here, what’s up? asked John. You seem worried and pissed. What happened?

Russell and my breakout happened. She quickly filled John in on the situation before teleporting to the judge’s house. When she arrived, she found the judge and his family safe along with the gang members all out cold and disarmed thanks to Russell and Mallory.

Russell had just dropped the rose and was now talking to the judge. “It’s okay. You’re safe, you’re all safe, I promise. The cops should be here any minute.”

A tear slipped beneath the judge’s blindfold. “How can I ever thank you?”

“You already did,” said Russell. “Now, I—”

“Am in a world of trouble,” hissed Sierra. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

Russell and Mallory jumped a foot when they spotted Sierra and they paled when John and Cara teleported in, looking furious as the sounds of police sirens hit their ears.

“I’d like to know the answer to that myself. You’re not even supposed to be here!” said John.

Sierra then tensed as she felt Hilton and a team teleport onto the premises. “Damn it! Ultra’s here. Guys, we need to go. NOW!”

Her tone gave no room for argument, so thankfully Sierra’s orders were obeyed and they all went to the Lair just as Hilton and his team entered the house. Not noticing that in all the commotion, the clasp of Sierra’s necklace had broken and the necklace had fallen onto the floor, but Hilton did.

XXX

When Russell returned to the Lair with Mallory, he was read the riot act by not only John, but also Cara and Sierra, in that order. They were all furious with Russell’s reckless and quite frankly,
stupid behavior topside. Of all the things they’d come to expect from Russell, stupidly playing comic book superhero hadn’t been one of them.

“You are the **BIGGEST PINHEAD** that I have ever met!” yelled Sierra. “I ordered told you NOT to go and you deliberately disobeyed me! What the hell were you thinking? We do NOT risk exposure by using our powers in front of humans!”

How could Russell have been so incredibly stupid? Sierra understood the urge to go out and use one’s powers for the betterment of mankind but they had to suppress those urges as that wasn’t the kind of world they lived in! If they ever wanted to do more than just survive one day, they had to keep their heads down and more importantly, humans could never know about the Tomorrow People, not now, not ever. It’s just the way it was.

“They were blindfolded,” said Russell, weakly.

“The judge and his family were but those scumbags who saw you weren’t! Do you realize that not only could you have gotten us all exposed, but also killed? Ultra was less than a minute behind you!” snapped Sierra. She was so mad over Russell’s behavior that she could spit nails. “God, Russell! I knew you could be crazy but I didn’t think you were this stupid!”

John put a hand on Sierra’s shoulder, causing her to calm down just a little. “Sierra’s right, Russell. We’re trying to save our species and you’re risking it all. What do you think would happen if people knew about powers?”

“ Seems like it worked out pretty well for Superman and Spider-Man,” interjected Mallory, from down below them. She was completely unrepentant about her reckless behavior. “Not to mention the Justice League. The list goes on and on.”

Sierra glared so harshly at Mallory that the Red Avenger actually flinched and took a step back. “It’d be in your best interest to get the hell out of my sight because I am two minutes away from slapping a suppression cuff on you and turning you into Ultra myself. Is that clear?”

“Crystal,” said Mallory, quickly as she exited the room.

Sierra took a long deep breath calm herself down before folding her arms across her chest. “Russell, seriously, what the hell were you thinking? Exposure is never an option!”

“I know that but maybe it’s time to reconsider our position,” said Russell, slowly. “You know, do some good. We have been playing an awful lot of defense lately.”

Everyone stared at Russell as though he’d lost his marbles and who’s to say he hadn’t?

“Since when are you a philanthropist?” asked Cara.

Russell bit his lip. “Maybe I’ve evolving. Maybe I don’t want to see a teenage girl raped by a bunch of filthy gangsters.”

John’s face softened as he shook his head. “I understand how you feel, Russell, I really do. But we’ve got enough problems down here.”

Russell scoffed and looked unimpressed. “Like finding our ghost hero who’s lost in Limbo land?” When Sierra looked both hurt and angry, Russell winced and looked apologetic. “Sorry. I didn’t mean that. Excuse me for a bit.”

When Russell chased after Mallory, Sierra sighed in exasperation and leaned against John. “I
never thought Russell would act like this. He’s going to turn me gray before I’m thirty at this rate.” She rubbed her eyes. “Where’s Morgan? I need to tell her I found the tea recipe she was after so we can make it together like she wanted.”

Cara immediately fell silent and looked wary, rousing Sierra’s suspicion. “Cara, where’s Morgan?”

Cara hesitated and then burst out, “She’s with your uncle at the Paradise Hotel uptown. She begged me to let her go topside so she could get into Jedikiah’s head and find Roger’s body.”

“What?!” yelled John and Sierra, in unison.

“Cara, what the hell were you thinking?” demanded John. He couldn’t believe Cara had gone against John’s wishes and taken Morgan topside like that. More importantly, he couldn’t believe Morgan could be so incredibly reckless as to try and go snooping around Jedikiah’s head.

“Cara, are you crazy? You let Morgan go off in her condition?” hissed Sierra.

Cara frowned in confusion. “Condition? What’re you talking about?”

“Morgan’s pregnant with Jedikiah’s child!” explained Sierra. A fortnight past, Morgan had sought out Sierra’s help with a pregnancy test and when the test was positive, she’d asked for tips on what to do if the baby took on Morgan’s powers and showed those abilities from the womb as Robbie had. “She found out two weeks ago. She didn’t tell you?”

Cara looked horrified as she shook her head. “No, I had no idea. Oh, God. That explains why she was so desperate to see your uncle. She wanted to tell him about their bundle of joy.”

Realizing they were losing control over the situation, John took charge and began giving orders. “Sierra, get back to Ultra, check in with your partner and let us know if anything comes up. Cara, go keep an eye on Russell and Mallory. I’ll go to Jedikiah and stand on guard if anything happens.”

And with that, the three of them split up in different directions.

XXX

When Sierra returned to Ultra, she found Hilton punching the living daylights out of a punching bag. Normally, Sierra would’ve just left Hilton to his own devices but she happened to notice that Hilton hadn’t wrapped up his hands and nor was he wearing any gloves. The result was both of his hands becoming a bruised and bloody mess. Sierra had to stop this before Hilton seriously hurt himself.

“Hilton? Hilton! Hilton, stop! Sierra grabbed Hilton by the waist and with some difficulty, pulled him away from the punching bag. She then gently pulled his hands towards her, which were badly bruised and bleeding. “Hilton, what the hell’s gotten into you? You’re usually more careful than this.”

Hilton’s narrowed but he didn’t pull away or protest as Sierra healed his damaged hands. “You’re one to talk about being careful!” he hissed, when she’d finished.
Sierra looked confused. “What’re you talking about?”

“Spare me your lies, Sierra! You know damn well what I’m talking about! You were at the judge’s house the same time as the breakout! And before you deny it, you should know that I found this!” Hilton shoved his hand into his pocket and pulled out Sierra’s necklace, the clasp of which had broken, causing it to fall off Sierra’s neck. In all the commotion, Sierra hadn’t noticed it was missing until that moment when she accidentally touched her neck. “And before you ask, no. I didn’t tell anyone I found it. But don’t think it didn’t cross my mind. What the hell were you doing there?”

“I went to catch the breakout on my own, okay? I admit it,” she said, telling a half-truth, as she took her necklace back. “I’m using to going out on my own on the field and it was spur of the moment. I slipped back into an old rut. But that’s no excuse, I know. I’m sorry. I should’ve told you.”

“Damn right, you should’ve!” spat Hilton, furiously. “But that’s not the worst part. No, the worst part is, she saved an innocent family. A man, his wife and their daughter who couldn’t have been more than fifteen! If we can’t get behind a superhero, then what the hell are we even doing here?”

“Oh, I see.” So, Hilton was finally drinking less of the Ultra Kool-Aid as Cassie had put it and was starting to see Ultra for what it was—not humanity’s savior, but a conqueror and a pawn in a genocidal plan, if nothing else. “So, you do have a heart.”

Hilton glared darkly at Sierra as he toweled off and took a big swig of water. “You don’t know a damn thing about me.”

“Not for lack of trying on my part, remember? You always shut me out no matter how patient I was or how hard I tried,” reminded Sierra. She remembered all too well that Hilton had shut her out more than once in every way possible during the brief time that they’d been dating and Sierra had tried to be patient with him but in time, her patience had worn out. “Hilton, please, talk to me. You’re scaring me and I want to help you. Besides, if something’s bothering you this much, it’s going to affect you out on the field and I don’t think you want that, do you? And I promise whatever you say will stay between us. No one else need know, okay?”

It was a low blow but Sierra knew that making it seem like Hilton’s ability in the field would be compromised if he didn’t talk to her was the only way he was going to open up. And if it actually did help him calm down and relax, then the ends justified the means in this case.

Hilton hesitated for what seemed like an eternity before he sighed. “Growing up, my family and I were pretty close. My mom could make the stormiest day seem sunny, my dad taught me how to work hard and excel and my big sister, Hillary, was my hero—a paragon of duty, selflessness and courage—she was going to the police academy, you know? Anyway, one night when I was ten, three men broke into the house. All ex-cons. They were looking for anything they could trade for a fix. My parents did everything that they asked.”

Sierra’s heart sank as she guessed where Hilton’s story was leading and she felt a wave of grief and pity for him. Ten years old. That was just two years older than Sierra’s own two children at the moment. She couldn’t imagine them going through such a horrendous experience.

“So, what happened?” she asked, quietly.

Hilton, who’d started crying at this point, sniffled and rubbed furiously at his eyes. “Hillary wanted to be a cop, so naturally she was always trying to be a hero. They caught her calling the
cops. So, those bastards dusted all three of them right then and there. And the whole time, I just laid there under the bed, frozen with terror, wishing I had the power to save them.”

Realizing that Hilton was about to lose it and needed a friend, Sierra didn’t hesitate to act. She wrapped her arms around Hilton and pulled him in for a tight hug and stroked his short blond hair. Remarkably, Hilton didn’t pull away or object. Rather, he returned Sierra’s tight embrace and buried his face in the crook of Sierra’s neck and cried for several long minutes until he finally pulled away.

“Hilton, what happened wasn’t your fault. You were just a kid not much older than my son. If you’d tried to do anything, they would’ve killed you too or worse,” said Sierra, gently. “It wasn’t your fault. You have to believe that.”

“I know and I do believe it, but forgive me if sometimes I have a hard time accepting that,” said Hilton, as he took another swig of his drink. He took a deep breath to calm down. “After that I swore I would never again be that helpless, that powerless to protect the people I love. Then shortly after we started dating, I broke out and that’s when I vowed that I would use my powers to help not just those I love but all people who need protection. That’s why I’m such a hardass, that’s why I work for Ultra.”

Sierra nodded in understanding. Suddenly, so much of Hilton’s behavior from the past made sense. How had she not recognized the signs for what they were before now? Hilton could be a jerk, yes, but he was also a hardened survivor of a horrendous trauma. Sierra couldn’t fault him for that.

“So, I don’t care if you are more used to acting solo or if you are my superior officer, I want don’t you to ever leave me hanging like that again!” growled Hilton. He’d already lost too many people that he cared about and Hilton refused to let Sierra join that list of names.

Sierra nodded quickly and made placating gesture. “Okay, I promise.”

Hilton sighed in relief at this. “Hey, remember that drink you took a raincheck on? Feel like cashing it in right now? Because I sure do.”

“Sure,” said Sierra, smiling softly. “Why don’t you hit the showers and meet me at Rikki’s in twenty?”

Hilton actually smiled as he nodded and then he teleported to the showers.

XXX

Back in the Lair, Russell was in TIM’s room with Mallory, explaining the answer to her question of “who died and left them in charge?” When Russell had answered with “Sierra’s dad,” Mallory had winced and then asked for the whole story, which Russell was only too happy to give.

“So, this paranormal lunatic who had the Prime Barrier burnt out of his brain, Killian McCrane, killed Sierra’s dad. Then Sierra almost killed herself to prove that her father is, in fact, not dead. And now you want to find the guy’s body so he can lead you all to a Promised Land?” said Mallory, slowly.

Both Mallory and Russell laughed at this.
'Well, it does sound pretty looney when said aloud but yeah,” admitted Russell.

Mallory shook her head as she laughed. “See, this is why I prefer to be a lone wolf. Far less drama. But I got to say, it’s been pretty nice having a partner. I can totally see what Talia saw in you, Russ.”

“Ah, shucks girl,” said Russell, blushing. “But seriously, isn’t the mission over? I mean, we did just save the judge and his family.”

Mallory shook her head. “No. Until Om Lam Chung’s behind bars, this thing ain’t over. Trust me.”

Russell was puzzled. “Who’s—?”

“Om Lam Chung, leader of the local Made to Kill, Vietnamese American crime syndicate,” replied TIM, promptly as he pulled up the scumbag’s files. “Currently awaiting trial under the RICO Act.”

Mallory nodded. “Bingo. What the snooty, disembodied voice thingy said.”

TIM did not take kindly to being insulted. “Perhaps I should turn myself off if my intelligence isn’t wanted.”

Mallory laughed. “So sensitive. Must be a British thing.” She turned back to Russell. “Look, Chung’s gang is going to do anything to evade a conviction. Trial’s set to start on Friday.”

“Hmm. That’s what you think,” said TIM, sneering.

Russell made a face. “Huh? What do you mean?” TIM did not reply, making Russell roll his eyes. “TIM, I know you’re not sleeping. I can see your little light pulsing.” Mallory was right, TIM was quite sensitive for a computer.

“I just thought you should know that the trial’s just been pulled up forty-eight hours according to just filled court documents,” replied TIM.


Russell nodded quickly. This was probably going to bite him in the butt later, but damn it, Russell wanted to be a hero again and he was tired of hiding in the Lair. “Yeah, yeah, of course. Just let me tell the others. I’ll meet you outside the courthouse first thing tomorrow. Sound good?”

Mallory nodded and then teleported away just as Cara walked in. Judging by the look on her face, she’d heard everything and was not impressed in the slightest.

“Russell, you can’t seriously be considering doing this,” said Cara.

Russell, who’d risen up and dug out the mask he’d used while with Talia, shot Cara a hard look. “Why not? Look, I am tired of being a prisoner to a hypothetic cause when I could be out there helping real people right now.”

Cara returned the hard look. “Ultra is hardly hypothetical.”

Russell sighed. Cara didn’t get it. How could she? “We act like we have to choose between working for them and fighting them. That’s a fake choice. We—”
“It is our only choice!” interrupted Cara. Why didn’t Russell see that? “Do you really think Sierra would be working for Jedikiah if there’d been another choice? But there wasn’t because that’s not the kind of world we live in!”

“There are dragons to slay, we were given swords!” insisted Russell, as he put his mask on. “Talia always said we were destined for greatness and right now, that’s what I’m choosing. Destiny doesn’t ask twice and if I can’t come back from this, so be it. But this is what I’m doing. I’m going to be the man that Talia loves, even if it’s just one last time.”

Before Cara could protest, Russell teleported out of the Lair with his black hood up and his scarlet colored mask on.

XXX

The following day, Russell met with Mallory outside the courthouse.

Everything quickly went to hell when Chung’s gang arrived and took everyone in that courtroom hostage using horrible brutal tactics involving machine guns. Once the scumbags had their hostages under control, Russell and Mallory teleported in and used their telekinesis to empty the guns of the bullets before they proceeded to beat the tar out of the gang members. Once the gang members were beaten, Russell grabbed a set of handcuffs, pirouetted and did a move worthy of the cinemas in which the cuffs flew through the air and then Chung was handcuffed to the wall, preventing his escape.

“Justice is served,” said Russell, grinning.

Mallory laughed and smiled back.

“Okay, Russell, time to go,” said John, as he teleported into the room.

Russell’s grin broadened as he stood up. “Russell? Never heard of him. I think you mean the Scarlet P—”

“Don’t finish that sentence, please,” said John, as his face twisted in disgust. “Okay? Please. Ultra’s here with a kill squad. Cara’s running a distraction, acting as a decoy. But we’ve got to get out of here now because they catch onto us.”

When Sierra had called John and Cara to inform them that Ultra had gotten a bead on Russell and Mallory, they’d come up with a plan that would get them all safely out of the courthouse and back home in one piece. Cara was off a similar build to Mallory, that combined with a red wig and Mallory’s spare mask, she would act as the decoy to the Ultra and get them off Mallory’s scent.

Nothing more needed to be said as they all then left the courthouse. The mission was successful and there was no need to linger.

XXX

When Sierra returned to the Lair, she couldn’t but feel somewhat happy.
The Red Avenger was safely off Ultra’s radar for the time being and her mission had been a success, Russell was going to return to the Lair with his girlfriend, Sierra’s cover had been maintained and best of all, Morgan had safely returned to the Lair after the visit to Jedikiah. But Sierra’s happiness vanished when she saw that no one else was sharing in her happy mood.

“What’s with all the sad faces? What happened?” asked Sierra, concerned.

Morgan looked regretful. “I’m sorry, Sierra, but I wasn’t able to get much from Jedikiah. I was only able to get a few images from him before I risked blowing my cover.”

Sierra sighed and forced back her disappointment. “It’s okay, Morgan. I understand. You had to protect the baby. Was he happy about that, at least?”

Morgan smiled softly as she nodded.

“Wait, what about these images you saw? Maybe they could be some kind of clue. What did you see?” asked Cara, curiously.

Morgan’s brow wrinkled. “I saw him visiting some kind of deli, maybe a butcher’s shop. Maybe he took Roger there to eat? I got the impression that Jed was visiting the place on a regular basis.”

John’s face lit up. “I think I know what you’re talking about. It’s an Ultra front. Jedikiah took me there once when I was twelve. It’s Broadway and Bedford in Brooklyn. I’ll bet you anything that Jedikiah is hiding Roger’s body there.”

Sierra didn’t need to be told twice and with that, she teleported out of the Lair and to her apartment where she’d been storing her father’s device. She’d finally reached the point of no return and she was not going to look back.

Meanwhile, Russell was seeing Mallory off as she had plans to return to Quebec and pass her mantle onto her protégé after a little more training.

“I wish you weren’t leaving. It’s been cool working with you,” said Russell. The fun had come to an end. Mallory was going to pass on the mantle and Russell couldn’t be part of that.

“It’s been a blast,” agreed Mallory. She gave Russell a tight hug. “You’re the best, Russell. I’m going to miss you. Do me a favor, though? Stick with your partners at the Lair. They need you. Also, say hi to Talia for me.”

Before Russell could ask what Mallory meant, she’d disappeared and then Russell felt someone else teleport behind him.

“I always hoped that you’d survived. Glad to see I was right.”

Upon hearing this familiar voice, Russell spun around and his heart leapt when he saw Talia standing behind him, dressed in her Red Avenger’s gear minus her mask. She looked as happy to see Russell, if not more.
“Talia.”

Russell then kissed Talia with an intense passion that she returned. When they broke apart for air, they were both laughing and crying as they rested their foreheads against each other’s.

“I love you so much. God, I thought I’d lost you,” he whispered.

“I love you too,” said Talia. “God, Russell, I am sorry.”

“Don’t be. Just tell me what happened. Where’ve you been all this time?” asked Russell.

Talia sighed. “The bastard set off the bomb before I could stop him. I barely got away in time and when I did, I was pretty banged up. I passed out and woke up on the other side of the country a few months later from a coma. When I couldn’t find you, I thought you’d been killed too. But I still hoped that maybe you’d survived somehow. After all, I only bet on sure things, as you should know.”

Russell nodded and hugged her tight again. “I’m so glad you’re back. Take me with you. I’m ready to be a superhero full-time like we planned.”

Much to Russell’s surprise, Talia shook her head. “No. There are others who’ll carry on the mantle. For now, Ultra is our next mission.”

Russell’s heart leapt with hope. “Does that mean—?”

Talia smiled broadly as she nodded. “Room for one more in your Lair?”

Russell practically squealed like a child in delight as he told her yes and they kissed one another again. This wasn’t what Russell had envisioned, no. It was so much better and whatever the future held for them now, it was going to be amazing.

XXX

Meanwhile, Sierra had left her apartment and she hadn’t walked more than three blocks towards her favorite alley for teleporting when she felt a hand grab her shoulder. Thinking fast, Sierra grabbed that hand and swung its owner over shoulder. It was Hilton, who winced in pain from having been flung onto the pavement.

“Hilton? Oh, jeez. I’m so sorry,” said Sierra, as she helped him up. “What’re you doing here? And why’re you sneaking around like that?”

“I wasn’t sneaking. I wanted to talk to you but I know how you feel about Ultra at your apartment, so I traced your phone and followed you here,” said Hilton, indignantly.

Sierra raised a questioning eyebrow. He wanted to talk? Really? Hadn’t Hilton ever heard of a phone call or a text message? “Well, this isn’t exactly a good time so please make it quick. What did you want to talk about?”

Hilton took a deep breath before he pulled her onto a nearby bench to sit on. “Working with you has made me soft. All those things I told you? I never told anyone. I’m not used to being this vulnerable with anyone.”
Sierra was confused and made a face. “Hilton, what the hell are you talking about?”

“I mean, how else could I have missed the obvious? You were doing everything in your power to subvert the operation, weren’t you? You didn’t want to catch the breakout!” said Hilton. “You can’t be that reckless, SSierra!”

Sierra’s heart skipped a beat and her breath hitched in her throat but she strove to conceal this. Hilton was her friend and partner but that didn’t necessarily mean Sierra could trust Hilton with her secrets. He couldn’t know the truth about Sierra’s loyalties.

“Well, if you have all these doubts about me, why don’t you write up a report? What’s stopping you from going to Jedikiah?” asked Sierra. She wasn’t testing him, she was truly curious.

“Because, you stupid idiot, I still love you!” Hilton burst out. “Okay? I thought I was over it, thought I’d buried those feelings a long time ago after we broke up but you’ve brought them out again. And I’ve come to realize that I can’t just pretend that I don’t feel how I feel. I’m in love with you and I don’t want to see you get hurt or worse.”

Sierra was taken aback by Hilton’s confession and couldn’t speak for a few minutes. Hilton was still in love with her? That was the last thing that she’d expected to come out of Hilton’s mouth. Part of her felt flattered if not touched but it didn’t matter. Sierra no longer loved Hilton and she was in a steady relationship. Nothing could ever come of Hilton’s feelings for her.

“I know you’re seeing someone else and I know you don’t love me back but I don’t care. I care about you and I want you to be safe,” continued Hilton, as though he was guessing her thoughts. He looked pleadingly at her. “So, please, Sierra, for the sake of my sanity, so being so damn reckless before you enter a situation that I can’t protect you from. Please!”

Sierra gave Hilton’s shoulder a gentle squeeze. “I’ll do my best, Hilton. That’s the best I can promise you right now.”

Hilton wasn’t thrilled to hear this but he accepted it. “I guess that will have to do. Be careful.”

And with that, Hilton teleported away, leaving Sierra alone in the street with her thoughts. What other shocking secrets was she going to learn that night?

XXX

After Hilton left, Sierra went into an empty alley and teleported to Broadway and Bedford in Brooklyn.

Quietly, she walked along the street, using her father’s device as sort of compass in the right direction. It didn’t take her long to find the butcher’s shop which acted as Ultra front and then she entered the building. She then found herself going down a long winding tunnel until she came to door with a keypad, which glowed green and opened the door as soon as Sierra held the contraption to it. When Sierra opened the door, she found herself in a large room with several computers and medical equipment but what was most shocking was what was on the floor at the bottom of the stairs in front of her.

There, lying frozen like a popsicle in a special cryo-chamber was the body of Sierra’s missing father, Roger. Thanks to the chamber, he was perfectly preserved from that terrible night all those
years ago, but he still had the bullet in his chest.

“Oh my God. Daddy,” sobbed Sierra, as she pocketed the device.

Sierra teleported down to the chamber and knelt down beside her father’s frozen body. Tears slid down Sierra’s cheeks and splashed against the glass of the chamber door as she hesitantly touched the cold glass. After chasing down so many fruitless leads and searching for months, after dreaming about this moment for so long, Sierra had finally found her father’s body and now she would be able to bring him home.

“I loved him too, you know.”

Sierra’s head shot up and she looked to see Jedikiah standing on the top of the stairs. He was not at all surprised to see Sierra there, but he did look somewhat angry if not betrayed.

Sierra didn’t speak. She just swallowed painfully as she glared at Jedikiah. Her uncle had loved her father? Jedikiah didn’t know the meaning of the word. What did he know about love? For all his talk, the man had never loved anyone but himself.

“Here’s what I figure happened: Morgan used her pregnancy as an excuse to ransack my brain, shared her discoveries with the Tomorrow People and now here you are. A straight line of deceit,” said Jedikiah, coldly.

“You want to talk to me about deceit? You said you had my father cremated!” hissed Sierra. She had told her fair share of lies and made her deceptions from the beginning but Jedikiah was far from the honest man he was making himself out to be. He was a worse liar than Sierra had been and Roger’s frozen body was the proof.

“Yes, well, it looks like we both have some explaining to do,” said Jedikiah.

Sierra was forced to agree. No more secrets, no more lies. The time had come for the truth.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son and daughter, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

Thirty years ago…

Roger ran through the woods until he reached the river where his older brother, Jedikiah, had escaped to. It was their favorite place and it was always where Jedikiah went when he was upset. After what had happened earlier that day, Roger couldn’t blame Jedikiah for running off.

“Jed? Are you okay?” But even as he asked, Roger knew that Jedikiah was far from okay. Jedikiah was sporting several bruises and a black eye. “I heard what happened. That guy’s a jerk.”

Jedikiah had had the tar beaten out of him at school by the school’s bully, who made fun of Jedikiah on a regular basis, belittling him and patronizing him until Jedikiah’s self-esteem was all but gone. This time, the scumbag had taken it to the next level by clobbering Jedikiah to prove his ‘superiority’ over him.

Jedikiah’s hand clenched into a fist. “He’s right. I’m weak!”

Roger’s heart skipped a beat when he caught sight of a silver pistol in Jedikiah’s hand. “Jed, what’re you doing with that?” How had he even gotten a hold of a gun in the first place?

“It’s Dad’s. He doesn’t know I found where he hid it,” said Jedikiah.

“Jed, why?” asked Roger, worriedly.

Jedikiah cocked the gun. “I wanted to feel…powerful.”

Roger slowly took a step forward. Jedikiah was scaring him. Roger had to get the gun away from his brother before it was too late and the worst happened. “Bro, come on, don’t be stupid.”

Jedikiah scoffed. “I thought I was the smart one. You making fun of me now, too?”

Roger shook his head. “No. Put it down. Please!”

The two boys then fought for the gun and in the ensuing scuffle, the gun went off. But much to both their shocks, the bullet didn’t hit Jedikiah. Somehow, Roger was using telekinesis to hold the bullet in mid-air.
“How did you…? How’re you doing that?” asked Jedikiah.

Roger just shook his head as he dropped the bullet. “I don’t know,” he murmured. “I don’t know.”

Somehow Roger abilities beyond what any man could dream of and unbeknownst to them both, it was the beginning of a crazy ride wild ride than neither of them could have ever imagined.

Present day…


“So this is how you repay him?” snarled Sierra, furiously. She’d put up with so much of her uncle’s crap for so long but this time, her uncle had truly sunk to the deepest circle of hell and there was no redemption for him. “By working with the Founder and stealing Roger’s life from him?” Everything that had ever gone wrong in Roger’s life, in Sierra’s life, had all been because of Jedikiah and the Founder. She laughed bitterly. Jedikiah was so full of crap. “Don’t stand there and lie to me like that, Jedikiah. You’ve never given a damn about anyone but yourself, you son of a bitch!”

Jedikiah shook his head as he descended the stairs and stood beside Sierra. “That is a lie! I loved your father! Every book I read, every class I took was for the purpose of understanding him and protecting him! He was more than my brother, he was my life’s work! Everything you see here is part of a plan.”

A plan? A plan? Was that what he called it? Jedikiah was out of his mind in more ways than one if he actually truly believed that.

“My dad never would’ve chosen this!” Sierra insisted, as she gestured to the cryo-chamber. If Roger had truly had a choice in his life rather than what the Founder and Ultra forced on him, Roger would’ve been with his family rather than remain frozen and hidden away in Limbo. This was no kind of life for anyone to live!

Jedikiah shook his head. “Roger chose survival. He chose to protect you and everyone he ever loved!” Jedikiah’s face and tone softened. “I know you want him back, Sierra. So do I. Which is why I need you to be honest with me now.”

“Me? Honest with you?!” said Sierra, outraged as she stood up and glared darkly at her uncle. All the crap Sierra had had to endure, all the lies she’d been forced to tell for her and her family’s survival, all of it had only happened because Jedikiah had put her into a position where lies were the only way to live. That was on Jedikiah, not Sierra. “How dare you! I never would’ve had to lie to you if you had just been honest with me from the start! You knew what I was capable of when we first met! You knew I was looking for Roger! Why wouldn’t you just tell me about this from the start?”

“Because I didn’t know the full extent of your abilities until after I tried to take them away from you, and even so, you never would’ve believed me and with good reason!” insisted Jedikiah. “And I also couldn’t take the chance that your telepathy wasn’t powerful enough to keep the Founder out. What if you knew and the Founder sniffed it out like a shark after blood? It was too great a risk! And if the Founder knew I was protecting Roger—”
“Protecting him?” interrupted Sierra, incredulously. Her father had been cryogenically frozen for eight years with a bullet in his torso. How was this protecting Roger? “Frozen? With one of McCrane’s bullets through his chest? God, you’re even more deluded than I thought if you actually believe—”

“NOTHING in comparison to what, Bathory, the Founder, had in store for him!” said Jedikiah, loudly. “He’d invented some kind of machine to amplify your father’s powers.”

Sierra’s heart sank and she felt scared. Was that why Roger had warned Sierra not to trust the Founder? Why he’d been so afraid that Sierra would inherit her father’s powers? Because the Founder had some kind of twisted plan for those abilities for his own agenda?”

“Machine to do what?”

Jedikiah looked regretful. “I don’t know. I don’t know,” he said, quietly. “But whatever it was, your father risked death to stop it. He was always in danger of being turned into a weapon by the Founder or being destroyed by him—as are you and your children. That’s why I tried to take your powers from you at first, Sierra, because I knew Roger never would’ve wanted you to be exploited by the Founder like he was. I thought I was protecting you. But then I found out you were immune to the serum and then after you escaped from my custody, I got a call from the Founder.

“He’d been informed about you and your abilities and he wanted you brought in. I volunteered to do it and swore that you’d come in willingly if I said the right words. If I hadn’t, God knows what would’ve happened to you and your family. So, I had to resort to drastic measures to keep an eye on you and try to keep the Founder’s sticky paws off you and your family. You working at Ultra was the only way for that to happen.”

Sierra swallowed painfully. Much as she hated to admit it, Jedikiah was right. She hadn’t like being threatened into joining Ultra by her uncle but if Jedikiah hadn’t done what he did, there was no telling what would’ve happened to her and Robbie. They’d probably be lab rats or worse.

“So, that’s why you made me that deal. Gave me the apartment, the generous salary, told me about Charlotte…you weren’t just trying to protect me and my children. You were hoping I would become strong enough to take on the Founder,” she said, in realization.

Jedikiah nodded and looked remorseful. “I know you don’t believe it, but I am sorry about all the subterfuge and all I put you through. Believe me, if I could’ve seen another way, I would’ve taken it. But that doesn’t matter now. What matters now is what happens when Roger comes back to us. Because when he does, that threat will amplify a hundredfold. So, I need you to tell me truthfully, Sierra: your biological manipulation power…can you use it to revive the dead?”

Sierra nodded as she rubbed her eyes. “Yes, I can revive the dead,” she admitted. “But I’ve only ever done it only those who’ve been dead less than a day at the moment. And even if that weren’t the case, reviving my father won’t be that simple! Right before he died, he stopped time and transported himself to another dimension. Limbo, he called it. Getting there and getting him back won’t be easy. And there won’t be any point if we don’t have a way to take out the Founder. Wait…”

Sierra’s voice wandered off as her mind raced with thoughts.

“Oh, my God. The Annex Project was your way of trying to take out the Founder, wasn’t it? That’s why you were so hellbent on weaponizing my species. It wasn’t about humanity winning in the shadow war, it was about the Founder being taken down. You knew that only a powerful paranormal who could kill would be able to do it. That’s why you did all this. That was your plan,
Jedikiah nodded once more. “I always have a plan, Sierra.”

Jedikiah was nothing if not highly intelligent and he always had a plan A, and if that failed, then he had a plan B and so forth. It was the only way he’d been able to survive all these years.

XXX

Meanwhile, Cara was having difficulty sleeping and kept loading up a map of Lincoln Center onto TIM’s projection screen.

Robbie poked his head in. “Something wrong, Aunt Cara?”

Cara sighed as she beckoned for Robbie to come to her. Once he did, she pulled him onto the couch with her and held him close in her arms. She was grateful for the boy’s presence as she could use a friendly smile to keep her motivated and a fresh pair of eyes to help her with her new problem.

“I keep sensing a breakout near Lincoln Center. Now, usually it’s like they’re calling to me, but this time…I don’t know, it’s like this one is coming from inside me. The only other time I felt this way was with you,” explained Cara. “Have you seen anything?”

Robbie shook his head. “No, but I’ll try in the morning.”

Cara smiled as she playfully ruffled Robbie’s blond hair. “Thanks, sweetie. I appreciate it.”

One way or another, Cara would find out the answer to the mystery of the breakout. But until then, she could only wonder as to what she would find.

XXX

Meanwhile, Jedikiah had returned to Ultra to oversee a few things on the nightshift and finish up some paperwork before clocking out for the night. He was almost done with those duties when he was interrupted by the Founder.

“Doctor Price.”

Inwardly, Jedikiah groaned and his heart skipped a beat but he put on a charming smile so as not to tip off the Founder. “Mister Bathory.”

The Founder chuckled. “I haven’t been called that name in a good long while.”

“Oh, my apologies. Slip of the tongue,” said Jedikiah, sweetly.

The Founder brushed it off. “Don’t fret about it. It makes me think of the old days and friends. But I’m not here to walk down memory lane. We have business. I know you’re trying to finish up so you can go home for the night, so I promise you, this won’t take but a moment. Your office,
please.”

So, having no other choice, Jedikiah led the Founder into his office. Once they were inside, Jedikiah stood near his desk and sneakily slid a small letter opener into his hand. Pain could sometimes be used to block a telepath out, even one like the Founder and knowing Jedikiah’s luck, he would end up having to use it to keep the Founder out.

“So, I thought it’d best that you know that the reconstruction of the Machine your brother destroyed is nearly complete,” announced the Founder. “It’s time to move forward.

Oh, God. Jedikiah was appalled at this but strove to conceal it as he scoffed. “How? We’ve been looking for a suitable subject for years.”

“Oh, you know very well we found her and if necessary, her successor,” said the Founder.

“Sierra? No, she’s not ready. Plus, entrusting the future of the planet to a single mother—”

“You’re stalling,” interrupted the Founder. “Perhaps you’ve grown a little too close to the girl?”

Realizing he was at risk for an unwanted intrusion into his mind, Jedikiah began jabbing his letter opener into the palm of his hand so hard that began to bleed.

“She’s my niece,” reminded Jedikiah.

“And Cassie’s my daughter, a synergist just like Sierra and just like Robbie,” said the Founder.

Jedikiah could not disguise his shock at this information. He didn’t know what was more surprising, the fact that the Founder knew that Robbie was synergist despite all that Jedikiah had done to keep that information from the older man or that Sierra was secretly a synergist and Jedikiah hadn’t once realized it in all the time he’d known her.

“Excuse me?” he said. “Sierra’s mother is a paranormal?”

The Founder smirked. “You didn’t know that Sierra’s mother is one of my kind? I’m not entirely surprised. You always did have a blind spot when it comes to family. But as for Miss Jameson’s son, is it really so shocking that I know Robbie is, in fact, not only the son of your niece but also your favorite protégé, John Young? Really, Jedikiah. As soon as I became aware that Miss Jameson had offspring, it was quite simple for me to run a little DNA test. You were never going to keep that information from me for long, dear boy. Your little weakness is a luxury that I cannot afford.”

Jedikiah’s heart skipped a beat. “Does this mean you’re considering Robbie for the Machine if Sierra fails you as your daughter has?”

The Founder nodded as though it was obvious. “Of course. I had thought Cassie would be up to the task given her pedigree, but it was not to be. Fortunately, your brother left quite a legacy in his wake and the potential for both Sierra and Robbie is limitless.”

“Robbie is too young,” protested Jedikiah. “He’s just a child and he’s still coming into his powers! He’s not ready for the Machine!”

“I know. That’s why he’s the backup plan. If Sierra fails to come through, then I’m willing to wait until Robbie’s powers are fully developed and when he’s the proper age,” said the Founder. “I’m not quite so heartless as you may think, Jedikiah. But all the same, it would a great deal easier if we still your brother, wouldn’t it?”
Jedikiah shook his head, forcing himself to smile as the pain in his bleeding hand increased with each jab and cut. “But we don’t.”

“No, we don’t.” The Founder pulled back and rose up, unable to get what he’d wanted from the younger man’s mind thanks to Jedikiah’s tactic. “It’s a pity. But be advised, Jedikiah, this operation will move forward with or without you.”

Jedikiah nodded in understanding and then as soon as the Founder was gone, he sank into his chair and pressed a tissue into his bleeding palm. Moments later, Sierra, who’d accompanied Jedikiah to finish some paperwork before clocking out, entered the room looking worried.

“Oh, God, your hand!” Sierra ran to her uncle’s side and healed it before he could protest. “I take it the situation’s just gotten worse?”

Jedikiah nodded and flexed his now healed hand. “He’s onto us, we don’t have much time. And if that’s not bad enough, he knows that you’re a synergist, which you conveniently failed to mention to me before.”

Sierra looked taken aback by this before replying. “I only found a little while ago. I couldn’t exactly tell you before know. Does he know about Robbie?”

Jedikiah nodded. “Apparently, he’s known from the start. I’m so sorry, Sierra.”

Sierra cursed. “What the hell do we do? I can’t let my kids be used by that bastard. So, what’s the plan for taking down the Founder?” Sierra knew that her son’s final power would be the solution to the problem but using that power required physical contact and she refused to even consider putting Robbie in the line of fire like that.

“We kill him,” said Jedikiah. “And by ‘we’ I mean ‘John.’”

Sierra wasn’t surprised but nonetheless, she was sickened by this admission. “No. Absolutely not. Killing has taken a toll on John. I won’t force him to go through that again.” She was disgusted that Jedikiah’s motives for the Annex Project, everything that he’d put John through was so that he could have a paranormal gun at his disposal.

Jedikiah sighed as his face softened. “Sierra, we don’t have a choice. Can’t you see that was all part of my plan? The reason that I engineered him to be lethal?”

Sierra was shaking. “This is crazy.” But even as she said it, she knew it was the only way. But maybe just because killing the Founder was their only option, it didn’t mean that John had to be the one to pull the trigger on the bastard.

“Perhaps,” agreed Jedikiah. “But it’s the only way to bring your father back. A life for a life. What do you say to that?”

Sierra hesitated and bit her lip. “I’ll talk to John.” Sierra wouldn’t lie to her boyfriend nor keep him in the dark about their plan. “But if he refuses, I might have a backup plan.” She held up a hand to silence Jedikiah as he opened his mouth to speak. “No, don’t ask. I’ll explain more in the morning. Right now, we both need to hit the sack before we crash hard.”

Jedikiah looked questioningly at her but said nothing as he nodded in agreement.

XXX
The next morning, Sierra informed John of what she’d learned about her father, the Founder as well as her plan with Jedikiah. As predicted, John strongly objected to the plan.

“This is completely insane, you know that? I can’t believe you’re asking me to do this!” said John. “We can find another way.”

Sierra took a deep breath. “John, first of all, I know that it’s insane. Second, I have been racking my brains all night and the only other option we have is one we both know we cannot consider. Third, I am not asking you to do anything. I know what killing’s done to you. I’m only telling you because I thought you had a right to know.”

John looked confused. “Then how’re you—oh, God. Sierra, no!” John looked sickened and horrified as he realized what Sierra had planned. “You can’t be serious. You want to tell Jedikiah that you can kill and be the one to pull the trigger on the Founder? Even you could actually do that, why would you?”

“Because it’s the only way to bring my father back and if I don’t do it, God knows what he’ll do to our kids, not to mention the rest of humanity,” said Sierra. She didn’t like this any better than John did, but she was seeing no other way out of the mess.

John gave her a look. “So, what? You want to sacrifice your soul for the good of everyone else?”

Sierra scowled and found it hard to control her temper. “I don’t want to do any of this. Okay? It makes me sick just thinking about it. But if the Founder’s death means my father’s life? Or our kids’ lives and their happiness—”

“Says who?” interrupted John. “Jedikiah? The same man who ordered me to kill your dad? The same man who all but blackmailed you into joining Ultra? Sierra, listen to me. It wasn’t long ago that I started to think that this was hopeless, that I was propping us up on a promise that I’d stopped believing in. But then you and Robbie came back into my life and reminded me that we can change the rules. We’re not trapped. We can find another way. There’s always another way.”

“One that doesn’t involve our children’s lives being risked before the Founder finds out the truth behind my uncle’s secrets?” challenged Sierra. She wanted there to be another way more than anything but there wasn’t one as far as Sierra could see and they were running out of time. “John, whatever his damn Machine is, the one that Roger killed himself to destroy, it’s almost completely rebuilt. The Founder is getting too damn close. Now, if you want to stay out of this, that’s fine. I’ll need you to protect our kids if this plan fails. But if I have to do this alone, then I will.”

“How?” demanded John. He looked pleadingly at his girlfriend. “Sierra, this isn’t who we are and it sure as hell isn’t what your dad would’ve wanted.”

“I know,” said Sierra, softly. She knew that all too well. This wasn’t her at all and she knew that this wasn’t what Roger had wanted for his family or for any of their people. But she couldn’t afford to think like that at the moment. “But none of that will matter if I don’t do this. I’m sorry, John.”

Before John could protest, Sierra teleported away from the Lair.
Jedikiah anxiously waited for Sierra to meet him in his office at Ultra.

Just when he was about to call her and risk exposure too soon, she teleported into his office looking grim and upset.

“I’m here. How’re we going to do this?” asked Sierra.

Jedikiah sighed in relief. He took it as a sign that Sierra had gotten John to agree to the plan. “Well, it’s simple and not so simple. You and John are going to have to—”

“No,” interrupted Sierra. “No, I’m not involving John in this.”

Jedikiah wasn’t fooled and he made a face saying as much. “So, I take it your gentle-hearted boyfriend turned down my proposal?”

“He did, but that’s not why he’s not getting involved. I’ve seen what killing’s done to John and I will not put him through that again. But we need the Founder dead if we ever want this shadow war to be over, which means that if we want the trigger pulled so damn bad, I’m going to have to be the one to do it,” said Sierra, sighing. “I’m going to kill the Founder.”

Jedikiah raised an eyebrow. “Excuse me? Last time I checked, you weren’t part of the Annex Project, so since when can you kill?”

Sierra sighed again as she held out her hand. “Let me show you.”

Jedikiah took Sierra’s offered hand and then she showed him the memory of her and Roger in Limbo when Roger had explained Sierra’s immunity to the serum as well as her ability to kill.

Jedikiah looked quite shocked when the memory ended. “Roger always was one step ahead of everyone else. But I never imagined he could’ve accomplished this. Still, all the same, you couldn’t have told me that you could kill a little sooner, Sierra?”

Sierra gave her uncle a look. “After what you did to John, you really wonder why I wouldn’t tell you?” She hadn’t wanted to be exploited by Jedikiah or the Founder if they knew Sierra was capable of killing, even though it sickened her.

Jedikiah sighed. “Fair enough. All the same, I reserve the right to feel slighted about this.”

Sierra bit back a hiss of annoyance. “Look, we don’t have time to argue about secrets or you damned feelings about it. I’ve killed only the one time. But the fact remains that I can do this. Do I want to? No. Killing repulses me. But there isn’t a choice here. If I ever want my kids to be able to lead any kind of life, I have to. The Founder is the devil and I have to take him out. But the question remains: how do we do that? Where do I find the Founder? I take it you have an address?”

Jedikiah shook his head. “Unfortunately, no. You have to understand, Sierra, this is a man who broke out decades ago, long before your father even. Hiding became a kind of survival instinct for those early breakouts. He has more safe houses than the CIA and he trusts a very small circle of people, and sadly I am not one of them.”

Sierra’s heart sank. She was all set to kill one of the most dangers members of her race and yet so far, she had nothing. No game plan, no time set, no address and her window of opportunity was closing. Could this possibly get much worse?
“What do you expect me to do, then? You’re not giving me much to work with. There’s got to be some way to do this,” argued Sierra.

“Yes, provided you adapt,” said Jedikiah, testily. “So, think Sierra. No man’s an island.”

Sierra sighed and was quiet for a moment as she racked her brains for a solution. After a while, it came to her. “His daughter. Cassie. But with the Citadel shut down and destroyed, Cassie’s God knows where. So, we’re back to square one.”

Jedikiah held up a finger. “Actually, we’re not. You see, the Citadel was shut down but the Founder still has a secret site where he does his own private experiments. Experiments he would’ve subjected you and your son to, had I not been protecting you both by the way.”

Sierra was tempted to ask what kind of experiments but she buried the feeling quickly. Now was not the time for her to lose her focus. Cassie was their only hope of locating the Founder’s place of residence so they could take him out.

“So, where is she and how do I get to her?” asked Sierra. “Do I sneak in or contact John and ask him to rescue her?”

Jedikiah shook his head and look a little grim. “No. Where Cassie’s located, a rebel assassin wouldn’t stand a chance there. But an Ultra agent acting on my orders? That’s a different story.”

Sierra gave her uncle a long, hard look. Part of her felt grateful that he was willing to do this but at the same time, she wanted to make sure he knew what he was doing if he issued those orders, for they were a death warrant by themselves.

“You realize that if you do this, if you issue those orders, the Founder will know. You’ll be putting the noose around your own neck,” reminded Sierra.

“And you’ll be standing right there on the gallows with me,” replied Jedikiah. “Which is why you cannot fail and why I need to speak with John before we enact our plans.”

Sierra sighed in agitation but she could see her uncle would not be swayed, so she reluctantly went along with Jedikiah’s instructions.

XXX

The sight of the Founder’s private experimental facility sickened Sierra to her core.

It was clean and orderly but also very confining with hardly any sunlight allowed in, the equipment looked frightening and to make matters worse, there was a chair with five gigantic needles lined up along the back all set to be jammed into the victim’s spinal column and brain. It did not bode well for what kind of experiments that they were running on Cassie.

The head nurse did not take kindly to Sierra’s surprise visit but any protests she had died when Sierra produced solid proof that she was acting on Jedikiah’s personal orders. However, when Sierra requested to speak with Cassie alone, the nurse thought very little of it and not in a good way. When she took Sierra to a window looking into Cassie’s room, Sierra was sickened to see Cassie with her hair tied up, wearing nothing but a hospital gown and all-too familiar painful looking holes on her spine and the back of her neck. What’s more, Cassie was horrendously pale.
and thin and there were great bags under her once beautiful eyes.

“Like I said, she’s in a vegetative state. She’s been that way for two weeks,” said the nurse.

Sierra’s heart clenched with guilt. Though she knew it had been Cassie’s decision to sacrifice herself for Sierra, she couldn’t help but feel responsible for Cassie’s current state. Gone was the spunky beautiful young girl who’d given Sierra a run for her money, in Cassie’s place was a mere shell of her former self. The girl had been tortured and used like a lab rat for her father’s sick, twisted plans but now Sierra was going to try and fix that.

“Well, I still need to talk to her in private,” said Sierra, briskly.

The nurse scoffed. “You might as well try talking to a brick wall.”

Sierra gave the nurse a cold look and took out her cell phone. “Well, if you’d like to tell my uncle, Dr. Price, that his orders are pointless, feel free to do so. I’ve got him on speed dial.” Sierra hoped it wouldn’t come to that, but if she had to, she would call Jedikiah and have him speak to the insolent nurse.

The nurse decided against risking her boss’s anger and opened up the door to Cassie’s cell before leaving to give Sierra some privacy.

Once the nurse had left, Sierra slid into Cassie’s room and sat down beside her. “Hey, Cassie. It’s Sierra. I’m here. Can you hear me?” she whispered. But Cassie gave no notice that she’d even heard Sierra, much less seen her, which worried Sierra. “God, Cassie, what has the bastard done to you?”

Gently, Sierra placed her hand on Cassie’s and then healed Cassie of the injuries the poor girl had suffered but still, Cassie did not move or speak.

Cassie, please, I know you’re still in there, said Sierra, telepathically. I know you can hear me. Follow my voice. You saved me. Now, it’s my turn to save you.

This time, Cassie did react. Her eyes glistened with tears and moved around a little before she turned to face Sierra with a mixed look of gratitude and fear on her face.

“No, you can’t save me. You have to go. You’re next on his list and your children will follow. They’ll tell my father,” whispered Cassie, hoarsely from weeks of disuse. She also suddenly seemed very tired as though she hadn’t slept properly in weeks, which she most likely hadn’t.

Sierra’s face softened. “Let them. For now, just wrap your arms around my neck. I’m getting you out of this hellhole,” she said, firmly.

Cassie nodded before she wrapped her arms around Sierras’s neck and then rested her head on Sierra’s shoulder before dozing off. Sierra then carefully slid an arm under Cassie’s knees and the other around her waist before picking her up. Unsurprisingly, Cassie was very light in weight, far too light to be considered a healthy weight, which worried Sierra. Whatever the Founder had done, it was not going to be easy for Cassie to heal from it, even with Sierra’s powers. This was going to be a long day.

XXX
Meanwhile, Cara was high in the rafters at the Lincoln Center, watching a bunch of ballerinas practice for the upcoming performance of *Giselle*. Earlier that day, Robbie had come to Cara with one of his pictures, claiming that the breakout Cara was looking for was one of the best dancers at the Center and that she was wearing a pink tutu but he hadn’t seen her face. It was the best lead Cara had and after yet another fruitless attempt at locating the breakout her usual way, Cara had decided to enter the belly of the beast and search for the breakout at the Center. Robbie had accompanied her as he’d wanted to help Cara out.

At that moment, Robbie had gone off to get a drink while Cara was trying hard not to pull out her hair in frustration. Nearly every girl there was wearing a pink tutu and although Cara could sense the breakout was near, she still had yet to pinpoint exactly which girl it was. She could sense the breakout but there was too much noise. She was so close and yet still so damn far.

“Oh my God!” shrieked a voice.

Cara nearly jumped a foot as she spun around to see Robbie holding the hand of a terrified young girl in a pink tutu.

“I found her, Aunt Cara,” said Robbie, proudly. “This is Sophie.”

Sophie? Cara gasped, as did the girl when they laid eyes on each other and then they instantly recognized one another. Now, Cara knew why she’d felt so connected to the breakout, why it was so strong, it was because the breakout was none other than Cara’s little sister whom she’d been forced to leave behind all those years ago when Cara had broken out.

“Cara?”

“Sophie?”

Without another word, the two women hugged each other tightly as they cried and laughed at the same time. Neither of them wanted to let go as it was a reunion several years in the making and it was one that was well worth the wait.

“I thought I’d never see you again,” said Sophie, when they broke apart. “God, you look amazing but so different. I have so many questions. Where have you been? How did I get up here and what the hell is happening to me?”

Sophie seemed to be on the verge of a breakdown, so Cara hugged her again to comfort her. “Shh, I know, it’s a lot to take in. But if you have the time, I’ll explain everything. Can you get away from here for a little bit?”

Sophie nodded. “Rehearsal’s over, but I need to be back by six. I’m playing a major role tonight. Will you take me back later?”

Cara hesitated as she knew it was a risk to let Sophie return. If the Tomorrow People had found her, then surely Ultra could too? But Cara didn’t have the heart to completely disrupt her sister’s life and she knew that if one of them stuck close with Sophie at all

“Sure.”

After dropping Robbie off with Astrid, who was babysitting Charlotte at Sierra’s apartment, Cara took Sophie on a walk through the city to explain everything that had happened to her over the last few years as well as what the Coburn sisters both were.

“…after that guy attacked me and I fought back, something happened. For the first time in my
life, I could hear that it wasn’t just sounds, I could also hear peoples’ thoughts. Everyone’s thoughts. And I could also move objects with my mind,” finished Cara. “I found out that I was a paranormal, one of the Tomorrow People. A new species that’s been slowly emerging for the last few decades.”

Sophie shook her head in amazement. “And the disappearing into thin air thing? The way that little boy, Robbie, took me up into the rafters?”

Cara grinned. “Teleportation, one of the three T’s. Third one’s telekinesis. But if you’re lucky, you might get a few other abilities like Robbie.”

“Moving objects with your mind. I did it a few times accidentally. I thought I was hallucinating,” said Sophie, chuckling. “And no offense, but I think the three T’s are more than enough.”

Cara’s heart sank. She’d hoped that Sophie might find this exciting but so far that wasn’t the case.

“It can be scary, I know, but once you get used to it, it’s not so bad. By the way, how exactly did you and Robbie meet?” asked Cara.

Sophie chuckled. “I was hiding in a corner having a full-blown panic attack, thinking I was going crazy because I was hearing everyone’s thoughts when he just came up to me with this cute smile. He introduced himself to me, said I wasn’t going crazy, that he was just like me and if I was willing, he would take me to someone who could help me. I didn’t know what to think, but the kid seemed so nice and I didn’t have much to lose, so I took his hand and the next thing I knew, we were up in the rafters. The rest, you know.”

Cara chuckled. She could easily envision Robbie doing such a thing. “That’s Robbie for you.”

“That reminds me. Why does he call you ‘aunt’? Don’t tell me we have a secret sibling I don’t know about?” asked Sophie. “We don’t, do we?”

Cara laughed fully this time as she shook her head. “No, no. Nothing like that. I’m just a very close friend of his parents. That’s all,” she assured her. “But Sophie, as much as I hate to ruin this moment, there’s something I’ve got to warn you about. Now that you’ve broken out, you’re in danger. There’s an organization who hunts us. Ultra. They—”

“I know,” interrupted Sophie. This time, tears pooled in her eyes and she looked miserable. “Robbie mentioned them too. Said they were Men in Black psychos who’ll always be after me unless I wear a suppression cuff and his mom wipes me from their systems. And I’m sorry, Cara, but I think that’s what I want. I love having you back in my life, but I can’t live your life. I feel like I’m losing everything.”

Cara couldn’t say she was surprised. She knew how hard Sophie had worked to become a professional ballerina and that only one in six girls made it into the academy Sophie studied at. While they were a leap in evolution and very special, Sophie was already special in a different way. Nevertheless, Cara couldn’t deny that part of her felt hurt that Sophie wouldn’t even consider Cara’s lifestyle.

“I understand,” said Cara, her voice thick with emotion. “But can I at least show you what my life looks like before I take you home?”

Sophie nodded and took Cara’s hand, allowing Cara to teleport her to the Lair. When she saw
where Cara lived, the expression on Sophie’s face was a mixture of displeasure and amazement.

“This is where you live?”

Cara nodded. “It’s not as nice as our childhood home, but this place does have its perks and it’s pretty cool sometimes. Hungry? We just stocked up on fresh fruits and vegetables, including those bananas you like so much.”

Sophie’s face brightened as she nodded. “That sounds perfect.”

Cara was just about to take Sophie into their makeshift kitchen to eat when she caught Russell’s eye. He was standing in the doorway of TIM’s room, looking worried as he beckoned for Cara to join him where he was.

“Sorry, Soph, but could you excuse me for one sec? I’ll be right back,” said Cara. She whistled for Morgan and the older woman then joined her. “Morgan will take you to get a bite to eat. And don’t worry, she won’t bite.”

Sophie made a face at Cara’s teasing before laughing and then following Morgan out of the room.

When Cara joined Russell, she was shocked, if not horrified to see Cassie, the Founder’s daughter, lying on a spare cot as Sierra gently stroked her hair and John pulled two thick blankets over Cassie’s shivering shoulders.

“I could only hear the doctors’ voices. I knew they were testing me but I never knew what for,” said Cassie, hoarsely, as she tightly clutched her blankets.

“From what Sierra said, it seems like they were torturing you,” said John. His tone was soft, but he was unable to hide his disgust.

“The device they hooked me up to harness my powers, whatever they wanted, they weren’t getting. But they just kept trying. I also heard my father’s voice once or twice. He was so disappointed with my test results and mentioned using Sierra and your children as a backup plan,” said Cassie, as she trembled. “And all the while, I prayed they’d kill me and you would go into hiding so you’d be safe. God, it was so awful. I thought—”

“Shh, don’t worry about that right now. Just get some sleep. I’ll wake you in a few hours,” said Sierra, soothingly. She had healed Cassie’s physical injuries but the rest, Cassie’s exhaustion and mental trauma, were beyond even Sierra’s capabilities. Those were going to take a great deal of time to heal and even then, Cassie would need the help of her friends.

Fresh tears glistened in Cassie’s eyes as she took Sierra’s hand. “I’m sorry, but could you stay with me? I don’t want to be alone right now.”

“Of course. I’ll be right here on the couch and I’ll be here when you wake up, I promise.” said Sierra, gently. “But seriously, get some sleep.”

Cassie nodded and then drifted off into a deep slumber.

John then rose up and left the room so he could speak with Cara, who had wisely stayed silent while Russell had telepathically explained the situation to her. But she still wished to speak with John on the subject as well as tell him about her sister.

“John, I found the breakout,” said Cara. “I know why the connection was so strong.”
“That’s great. So, who is she?” asked John.

Cara smiled. “My little sister, Sophie.”

John smiled back. “That’s fantastic.”

Cara’s smile faded as she nodded. “I wish she thought so. She wants to wear a suppression cuff and have Sierra wipe her from Ultra’s systems so she can get back to her old life. I won’t interfere if that’s what she wants, but still…” Cara sighed again. “She’s terrified. She looks at me like a stranger, which I am. But I just…I don’t know. I’ve waited for this day for so many years and now…I guess I just imagined something different.” Cara had always hoped that one day, Sophie would breakout and then they could find each other again, and that Sophie would be as thrilled to have powers as Cara was, but now that their reunion had happened, it was nothing like Cara envisioned and it was a little disappointing. “Was it like this when you and Sierra reunited?”

John nodded and his eyes became glassy with thoughts of memories. “When Sierra came back into my life, it felt like a miracle. I was so happy. But reconnecting wasn’t that simple not just because of our past history but because we’d both changed. Neither of us was the same person we knew before. My advice? Do what Sophie wants, but before you do, you should take her to Sierra’s apartment for a few hours and give yourselves both some time to get to know each other again. Hell, go to her show tonight. Just because Sophie may not want this life doesn’t mean she doesn’t want you in her life.”

Cara’s face brightened up considerably at this plan and she agreed to do it. But before she could do this, she couldn’t help but notice the weariness and pain in John’s eyes, which worried her. “John, what is it? What’s wrong?”

John sighed. “Cara, what if I told you that Sierra’s got a plan to end this war? I mean for good and get us all out of the Lair and into the sunshine?”

“I’d be for it,” said Cara.

“Even if it meant killing someone?”

Cara’s heart skipped a beat as she realized what John was saying. “Sierra’s going to kill the Founder, isn’t she? She told Jedikiah that she can kill.”

John nodded. He was still very much against Jedikiah’s plan but at the same time, he couldn’t deny that if it was true, if killing the Founder meant that his children could finally lead free lives, then maybe it was worth the risk. “I don’t like this one bit but if Sierra’s right, then Jedikiah’s been doing the Founder’s dirty work this entire time. Ultra, this war, it all begins and ends with the Founder. But if Sierra kills him—”

“It means our freedom,” said Cara, as happy tears pooled in her eyes. Having finally gotten her head out of her butt, she now felt a pang of worry and guilt at what Sierra would experience if this plan succeeded, but at the same time, Cara couldn’t deny her happiness at what it would mean if they no longer had to look over their shoulders all the time. “A life for my sister, our people, your kids out of the trenches up in the real world. I say, kill the bastard.”

Russell then joined them, looking grim. “Sierra just got a message from her partner. Ultra’s launched a full-out manhunt. They know Cassie’s out, which means the Founder’s hunting us.”

John exhaled deeply. “Tell Sierra to set up a meeting with her uncle. Before I agree to help out, I need to know we’re not walking into a buzz saw.”
Russell nodded and went to deliver the message.

XXX

Shortly after this, John was have a meeting with Jedikiah at the dockyards. It was very tense meeting, as John was finding it hard to control his temper and not put a bullet into Jedikiah’s brain right then and there for all that he’d done to John’s people, John’s family and John himself.

“Thank you for coming, John.”

John clenched his hand into a fist. “I’m only here for Sierra.”

Jedikiah nodded in understanding. “I expected nothing less. I know she told you about Roger, the Founder and I. I’m sorry, kiddo. I wish I could’ve explained to you a long time ago.”

John snorted. “Lying comes easier to you, I guess.”

Jedikiah made a face before agreeing with John’s assessment. “Fair enough. But you’ve got to understand that—”

“Understand what?” interrupted John, furiously. Who was Jedikiah to talk about fairness and being understanding when the man was a monster in every way? “That you manipulated me my whole life? Lied to me? Used me? You turned me into your own personal killing machine!”

Jedikiah looked remorseful. “John, I’m going to tell you something. Every time you hurt, I hurt right along with you. Every trial you endured, I was right there with you for a single purpose that I could not tell you until now.”

“I will never trust you,” said John, bluntly. “Get that through your head right now.”

Jedikiah did not take kindly to this. “A little truth? Fine. Your double-agent was, in fact, mine. I’ve known about Sierra’s deception from the very beginning. In fact, the minute that Sierra popped up on Ultra’s radar, I ran the DNA test for her son and knew that he was yours too. So, I let you and your little friends find her and turn her because I knew it would bring us right to this exact point!”

Jedikiah wasn’t stupid. He knew that even when Sierra and John had been broken up, he’d known that Sierra was never willingly working for the Founder. All the supposed injuries Sierra had received in the line of duty, Charlotte….none of it had fooled Jedikiah one bit. He’d known from the start that Sierra was secretly working for John and the Tomorrow People. But Jedikiah had looked the other way because he knew that Sierra was the key to taking the Founder down and if he hadn’t done what he did, things would’ve been so much worse.

“You can’t—you can’t paint yourself as the good guy after all you’ve done!” spat John, in tears. “You let me think that McCrane killed Roger and that I failed to stop him! You let that haunt me for eight freaking years!”

Jedikiah looked remorseful but unrepentant. “Had no choice, kid. Your ignorance was part of the conspiracy.”

John gave Jedikiah an incredulous look. Was Jedikiah completely incapable of understanding
just how much grief and pain that he’d inflicted on John? Was he actually capable of true guilt and remorse? John’s grudge towards Jedikiah went above and beyond truth about Roger.

“\textit{You ruined my life!}” hissed John, as angry tears stung his eyes. “You made me into something that I hate! I broke up with Sierra because you were getting too close and I was scared you’d kill her or worse! I lost eight years with her and the son I never knew I had because of what you did!”

This time, Jedikiah did look truly sorry and ashamed, and he bowed his head for a moment. “I know. And I am sorry, John. For all of it. If I could change the past, I would but I can’t. The best I can do is help us free ourselves from the past by killing the Founder, but I can’t do it without Sierra and I can’t take the risk that she could fail. Which is why I need you there with her as her backup. You’re the only other of your kind who can do this and like it or not, John, it’s your destiny. So, please, John, for your children’s sake if nothing else, stop this war.”

John did not reply before walking off to the other end of the dock. He needed a few minutes alone to breathe and to try and calm himself down. His head was a mixture of emotions that he didn’t know how to deal with. His entire world had been turned upside-down yet again and this time, he didn’t know if he could ever put it upside-right again.

XXX

Later that day, everyone was gathered in TIM’s room to make their plans.

As he was the only one who could hack Ultra’s mainframe using TIM to get the team in and out of the Founder’s mansion undetected, Jedikiah was currently with them, much to everyone’s chagrin. He was to be kept under guard and never left alone and he swore up and down that there would be no tricks or lies, but this did little to allay everyone’s concerns. Not that it mattered in that moment.

At that moment, they were trying and failing to get a good satellite photo of the Founder’s place of residence so they could get a better idea of what they were up against. The only image TIM was able to produce was a rather poor one.

“TIM, are you sure this is the best image you can give us?” asked Sierra, frowning.

“No other images exist of the address that Cassie’s provided,” replied TIM. “Seems to be in some imaging dead zone.”

Cassie was unsurprised. “It’s the same technology the CIA uses to keep you from spying on Langley.”

Russell groaned. “So, we’re gunning for a paranormal supervillain holed up in his secret hideout with government-grade defenses? Hallelujah.”

“Don’t forget the place will be \textit{swarming} with his personal guards, all of them ex-military. But first we have to get inside and the only way past the perimeter is a lock coded with his DNA.”

“Meaning yours will unlock it? Fine. We’ll take a strand of your hair with us, no problem,” said Sierra.
Cassie shook her head. “Unfortunately, that won’t work. My father’s paranoia knows no bounds and due to the sophistication of his security system, we’ll only be allowed access if the system does a full body scan. Which means, I have to go with you.”

“What? No! Absolutely not!” objected Sierra. “You only just escaped your father and you’re still recovering from what that bastard did to you. You can’t come.”

Cassie stubbornly shook her head. “You don’t have a choice. I’m coming. Besides, it’ll be worth going back to the front lines if it means I can finally have my life back.”

Sierra sighed but ceased arguing as she knew that Cassie was right. Like it or not, they needed Cassie. Otherwise, their mission was over and a failure before it’d even begun.

“What happens once we’re inside?” asked John.

“Most likely, we all die,” said Cassie, grimacing. “Unless my father dies first.”

Everyone exchanged grim looks at this. Their entire survival all depended on this one single job. It was quite stressful and scary to think about.

“That’s not going to work for me. I barely got started on my bucket list,” said Russell, trying to lighten the mood a little.

“Come on, guys. This is the moment we’ve all been waiting for, so how do we get our supervillain to lower his guard?” asked John.

Cassie told them and after some further discussion, they finalized the last few details of their plan and then when the time came, John and Sierra said their good-byes to their children (just in case) and then they loaded up the two guns with a full clip of bullets. As agreed, John would be Sierra’s backup if she didn’t succeed or ran out of bullets and should the mission fail, Robbie and Charlotte were to be taken to the Lair and reside there permanently as they both refused to allow the Founder to get his claws on them.

“You ready for this?” asked John.

Sierra slammed the clip into her gun. “Well, given how this is my first suicide mission? No. No, I’m not. But that doesn’t matter right now. Because the thing about a suicide mission is that you only get one shot.” Sierra was petrified down her core, but she was still determined to go through with their plans. She didn’t like the idea of deliberately taking a life but nevertheless, she was sick and tired of the double-life she’d been forced to lead and she wanted her children to grow up in a better world than the one she’d known.

John’s face softened as he put down his gun and pulled her in for a deep, passionate kiss that Sierra returned with an equal fervor.

“However this ends, know that I love you,” he murmured, as they broke apart. “I’m so glad you came into my life.”

“I love you too,” said Sierra. She gently cupped his face. “If we make it through this, promise we’ll finally start that life we always talked about.” Long before they broke up, Sierra and John had always talked about starting a life together in a cottage by the seaside in the summers and a nice apartment during the schoolyear where their kids could grow up free and happy.

John smiled. “I promise.”
Sierra kissed him one last time and then holstered her gun. This was it. The point of no return and Sierra wasn’t going to look back.

XXX

It was dark that night as the Founder sat alone in his study, pouring over a stack of books while the fire in his fireplace crackled and popped. Despite having been informed of Cassie’s escape from his facility, the Founder was smiling to himself as he was enjoying his momentary peace and quiet as it also gave him time to contemplate his thoughts and consider additional plans for the future. Was there nothing his favorite pastime couldn’t fix?

The Founder’s private time was then interrupted when his head of security, Mister Cawston, burst into the room looking alarm. “Sir, we have a breech. Someone’s just accessed the main gate.”

“Then they’re already inside.” The Founder briefly closed his eyes as he detected a tele-signature. “One of my own kind, if I’m not mistaken.” He was amazed. What paranormal would be so foolish as to attack the Founder in his own sanctuary?

Cawston nodded and repeated this information over his earpiece to his subordinates.

Daddy? It’s me.

The Founder rose up and stiffened upon hearing his daughter’s voice. “Stand down! The intruder is my daughter.”

Cawston nodded once more and relayed this information to the others before leaving the room.

Cassandra, what are you doing? demanded the Founder. He was thrilled to have his daughter back, there was no question of that, but the Founder preferred not to look a gift horse in the mouth. After all the fuss Cassie had kicked up and given how she’d escaped him, why would she ever dare return to him like this? He wanted to believe that she was finally cooperating, but the Founder preferred to be cautious.

I want to come home, Daddy, sobbed Cassie.

The Founder’s face softened. Then welcome home, Cassie. Please, join me for a drink in my study.

Moments later, Cassie teleported into the room, her arms wrapped around her thin frame as she hunched over.

“Thank you, Daddy,” said Cassie, softly.

“Oh, you’re sick, darling. Look at you! You should be in the hospital,” said the Founder, kindly.

Tears pooled in Cassie’s eyes as she clutched a nearby chair for support. “No, no hospital. They doctors…they hurt me so bad.”

“I’m sorry, my dear. But surely you know that they were just trying to help you. After all, you do have a powerful imagination,” said the Founder, softly.
“I can still see their faces. And the needles and that *chair!*” sobbed Cassie, as she shook from her tears and fear. “It was so awful, Daddy.”

“Oh, you poor thing,” said the Founder, feigning sympathy. “Tell me, however did you manage to get out?”

Cassie shrugged as she folded her arms across her chest. “I must’ve teleported out.”

The Founder laughed. He didn’t buy it for one sec. “In your condition? No. Speaking of which, now that I’ve gotten a better look at you, you do seem quite healthy. Which is remarkable, given how ill I last heard you were. Which begs the question, were you helped? By perhaps, by the girl who brought you back to me the last time?”

It wasn’t hard to guess that somehow Sierra Jameson was involved. He’d seen what she was capable of with her biological manipulation power. Cassie had only just escaped that morning and she was in poor health then. How else could Cassie have recovered from the experiments so quickly?

Cassie shook her head. “The only thing that got me through that hell was thinking of you.”

She then proceeded to pull the Founder into a deep, loving hug that the Founder found himself returning. But in doing so, he failed to notice the D-chip that Cassie slipped into his pocket until it was too late.

“What is it, darling?” asked the Founder, when they broke apart.

Cassie just looked smug as she spoke into the touchscreen smartphone watch on her wrist. “It’s done. Enter now.”

Suddenly, the Founder realized what was happening and he took a step back. “I’ve truly broken your heart, haven’t I, darling? SOUND THE ALARM.”

“Yell all you want, Dad. It’s over,” hissed Cassie. “As we speak, your guards having the stuffing beaten out of them. Let me show you.” Cassie touched her father’s temple and showed him images of Sierra and John fighting off the Founder’s guards using their telekinesis, fighting skills and even Sierra’s biological manipulation ability and they were all dropping like flies.

Cassie’s smugness and fury increased when she stepped away from her father. She clearly enjoyed the look of horror and fear that was flickering across his face. “Dreaming of this moment was the only thing that kept me going through the nightmare *hell* you abandoned me to. It’s time to reap the whirlwind, *Daddy*,” she spat.

Before the Founder could reply, Sierra entered the room with John close behind her.

“Oh, let me guess. You’ve had a little heart-to-heart with your uncle,” said the Founder, in disgust. “Can’t you see what he’s doing?”

“This isn’t about what my uncle’s doing. It’s about what you’ve done,” spat Sierra, coldly.

“Just let me explain—” began the Founder, but he was cut off when Sierra produced a gun from a holster on her waist and cocked it in his face.

“Sit your ass down,” she ordered.

This time, the Founder actually laughed in disbelief. A gun? Wielded by Roger’s daughter?
What a joke! Sierra couldn’t kill!

“You can’t kill me, Sierra. With the exception of Mister Young here, none of our kind can kill on purpose,” said the Founder, smugly.

“Want to bet?” Sierra fired off two rounds into the Founder’s bullet-proof vest, shocking the man as he was slammed into the wall from the force of the bullets. “I aimed for your vest but the next one’s in your face. I can kill, shocking, I know. But unlike you, Roger was more than just my father—he was my dad, and like any dad, he went to every length he could to protect me if I ever broke out. So, get on your damn knees. Now.”

The Founder looked truly scared as he knelt down and kept his hands in the air. “Sierra, listen to me. All that Jedikiah’s told you about me and the Machine has been to drive a wedge between us. Just like he did with your father and me. To make himself into a monster when your uncle’s a monster.”

“My uncle’s no saint, in fact, he’s a scum-sucking bastard. But you? You’re the devil!” growled Sierra. “You experimented on your own daughter!” As a parent herself, Sierra couldn’t imagine how any kind of parent could do such a thing to their own child. “And you stole my DNA and John’s to create an innocent life and then experimented on that child!”

Panic flashed through the Founder’s body as he tried to rectify the situation. “What I did with your DNA was a mistake, I admit, one that I can never apologize enough for. It was wrong and unforgivable, I know. But I do regret it. And yes, I did hope Cassie would be able to activate the Machine, and I have made sacrifices no father ever should. But the Machine was your father’s dream, Sierra! A device that could finally lead the road to our salvation. Why else would I risk my own child? I did it for you. I did it for your father. I did it for all of us!”

Sierra’s dark green eyes remained cold as she shook her head. “Like hell you did. Besides, why the hell should I believe a word out of your mouth when my father warned me never to trust you and when I know that he risked death to destroy your damn Machine? Jedikiah—”

“Jedikiah’s always been fueled by jealousy!” interrupted the Founder. Carefully, he slipped his hand into his pocket and then he destroyed the D-chip that Cassie had placed there. “He formed Ultra with the sole purpose of acquiring your father’s powers for himself and now he’s using you! You don’t need tricks and I don’t need to lie to you. I’m on your side. Just like the weakling he is, Jedikiah poisoned your father’s mind, turned him against me and tricked him into destroying the Machine! Think about it, Sierra! Who ordered your father’s death? Who forced the gun into your hand? Who coerced you into joining Ultra? Jedikiah and his bitterness and his lies! But now we can end this, we can do this together! We can complete your father’s work!”

Sierra stubbornly shook her head. “No. I don’t believe you, you lying bastard.”

Without further hesitation, Sierra fired off the rest of the clip into the Founder’s face. She thought that would be the end of it, but to her horror, the Founder reacted faster than she could fire and the bullets were deflected into Cassie’s body. Seconds later, Cassie crumbled down into her father’s arms, dead as a doornail.

“Oh my God,” gasped Sierra. *No, no, please no. What the hell have I done?* She’d just taken an innocent life, the life of a friend who’d trusted her. Granted, it’d been the Founder who’d sent the bullets flying into Cassie’s body but it didn’t change the fact that Sierra had been the one to fire them.

The Founder wailed in grief as he seemingly wept into his daughter’s body. “Cassandra, no, no,
dear. My poor girl.” He looked up at John and Sierra with red eyes. “This is because of him. Your uncle did this! You have an enemy, Miss Jameson, but it is not me. All I ever wanted was to stop the bloodshed. To stop it.”

The Founder continued to wail and cry into his daughter’s body. His grief seemed to be real but Sierra had no time to study it as the second batch of guards broke into the room, forcing Sierra and John to depart from the Founder’s mansion.

Their mission had been a failure and now that they’d just tried to kill the Founder, Ultra’s wrath towards the Tomorrow People would be far greater than it ever had been before. What were they going to do now?

XXX

When Cara returned to the Lair with Sophie, she was in a lighter mood than she’d had in years. The hours she’d spent reconnecting with Sophie and watching her little sister perform in Giselle had been some of the happiest of her life and she never wanted it to end. She now felt even closer to her sister than she ever had before.

“Definitely not used to teleporting, yet,” said Sophie, shakily as she caught her breath.

Cara laughed. “Well, that’s amazing considering how much time you spend flying through the air.”

Sophie smiled wistfully. “No matter how many times I perform it, that last dance always brings tears to my eyes. It’s just—”

“Beautiful,” finished Cara, smiling proudly at her. “You were beautiful. And I am so damn proud of you, Sophie. But are you sure you weren’t your powers just a little bit?”

Sophie laughed as she shook her head. “No, it was all me.” As if for proof, Sophie started to spin around gracefully, only to slam into Russell, who was holding an ice pack to his forehead, which was sporting a nasty-looking bruise and lump the size of a chicken egg.

Cara instantly became alarmed and that alarm worsened when Robbie and Charlotte teleported into the Lair and ran straight for Cara, crying as they clutched her for dear life.

“Charlotte, Robbie, shh. Calm down,” soothed Cara, as she tried to soothe them. “What’s wrong? Where’re your parents?”

“This mission went sideways,” said Russell, before the kids could speak. “Very, very sideways. I don’t know if they made it out okay or not.”

Just then, John and Sierra teleported into the Lair, looking distraught. Upon seeing Russell’s wound, John went straight into TIM’s room while Sierra pulled Cara aside.

“Sierra, what happened? Where’s Cassie?” asked Cara, worriedly.

“She’s gone. She’s dead,” said Sierra, her voice thick with grief.

Cara was distraught and then looked confused. “The Founder couldn’t have—”
“He didn’t. I did,” explained Sierra, as tears pooled in her eyes and slid down her cheeks. “I had the shot and I took it, but the bastard was too quick. He destroyed the D-chip and deflected the bullets into Cassie’s body. She died instantly and then the rest of his guards showed up before I had a chance to revive her. I had to leave her behind. She’s not coming back. I screwed up everything, Cara.”

Sierra was the one thing she swore she would never become—a murderer. And it was all her own damn fault. If she’d just shot the Founder outright instead of letting him yap on and on, the Founder would be dead and they’d all have their freedom. Instead, the Founder had lived and now, the war would only get worse. She’d just painted targets on the back of everyone’s heads.

“Oh my God,” said Cara. Her face softened as she squeezed Sierra’s shoulder. “This wasn’t your fault, Sierra. Okay? It wasn’t your fault. This is all on the Founder. Not you.”

Sierra looked unconvinced but said nothing.

John then teleported to them. “Russell, where’s Jedikiah?”

Sierra’s eyes widened in alarm. “What?”

Russell looked apologetic. “After Mission Impossible went off the rails, he cracked me on the head with the third gun and forced me to bring him topside.”

John turned away and slammed his fist into the walls. “DAMN IT, RUSSELL!”

“Okay, okay, where did you take him?” demanded Sierra, she got in between them before a worse fight could start. “Where’s my uncle?”

Russell sighed. “The belly of the beast. His office at Ultra.”

“Then that’s where I’m going,” said John, determinedly.

Sierra ran to John and grabbed his arm, stopping him. “Wait, wait. John, wait! We don’t know who we can trust but if you set foot into Ultra, you are a dead man and I refuse to let our kids lose their father! We need answers. I will get them. Just wait here for me, please.”

John looked as though he wanted to refuse but then he said, “One hour. Then I’m coming for him.”

Sierra nodded and then teleported to Ultra.

XXX

Seeing her sister’s distress at the scene she’d just witness, Cara took Sophie home and sat down with her in Sophie’s bedroom. Once they were there, Cara gave Sophie the promised suppression cuff which had undergone a little tinkering so that it now resembled a stylish bracelet so it wouldn’t bring about any unwanted questions. Sophie was relieved to have it and she was even happier when Cara promised that Sierra had already wiped Sophie from Ultra’s mainframes, guaranteeing the younger girl a safer, happier life.

“I’m sorry you had to see that,” said Cara, softly.
Sophie shook her head as she squeezed her sister’s hand. “Don’t be. I’m just sorry I can’t change all that for you and those poor children. You saved my life. I wish I could save yours.”

“Well, maybe one day I’ll be free, but until then, all I can do is keep you safe.” Cara rose up and tenderly kissed Sophie’s head. “I should go.”

“Wait, you’re leaving?” Sophie immediately rose up in a panic. “I just got you back. Can I ever see you again?”

Cara’s heart leapt. Though she and Sophie had reforged their sisterly bond, Cara hadn’t thought that Sophie would want Cara back in her life on a regular basis now that Sophie knew the full story of Cara’s new lifestyle.

“Do you really want to?” asked Cara, hesitantly.

Sophie nodded. “Of course I do. You’re my hero, my sister and I love you.”

Cara’s throat tightened as she hugged Sophie. “I love you too. And yes, I will keep in touch and visit, I promise. You can’t get rid of me that easily.”

Sophie’s grip on her sister tightened at this.

The mission had been a failure and Cara would need to be more cautious now, but she wasn’t going to cut Sophie out of her life again. Fate had brought them back together and Cara would be damned if anything or anyone ever dared to try and separate the Coburn sisters ever again.

XXX

When Sierra rushed into Ultra, she wasn’t surprised to find Jedikiah making preparations to run. After how badly the mission had gone, it was only to be expected. Jedikiah was a dead man now as the Founder knew of Jedikiah’s involvement in the kill order. But nevertheless she wasn’t happy about it.

“You’re running.” Typical that Jedikiah would run off, even though Cassie had died for them, for Jedikiah’s plan and also typical that Jedikiah could back out of his word. “You’re not even going to try to uphold your end of the bargain, are you? You swore that you’d bring my father back to me!”

Jedikiah jabbed an angry finger in Sierra’s face. “No, I won’t. And you want to know why? Because you failed him, Sierra! Just like you failed Cassie! Now, the Founder—”

“No, don’t you DARE put this all on me! I took the damn shot, I played my part! This was YOUR insane plan and YOU were the one who introduced my father to the Founder in the first place! I am NOT the only one who’s at fault here and you know it, you bastard!” yelled Sierra, furiously. She’d messed up, yes, but she wasn’t the only one who was to blame.

Jedikiah stopped what he was doing and his shoulders slumped in regret as this. He didn’t argue with Sierra. What would be the point? He knew that she was right. Sierra had done her best in their plan. It wasn’t all her fault that the plan had failed. Jedikiah was also at fault for everything that had happened to his family over the years even if he didn’t want to admit it.
“The Founder also said that your jealousy destroyed our family—my family. Is that true? Is that why you called Roger your life’s work?” demanded Sierra. Was that why Jedikiah had done what he did—hunting Sierra’s kind, killing her father…was it all because Jedikiah had wanted Roger’s powers for his own self?

Jedikiah stubbornly shook his head. “No. No! Was I sometimes envious of Roger? Yes. But that was normal. It didn’t change the fact that I loved Roger. He was my brother. And for your information, it wasn’t Roger’s powers that saved me all those years ago. It was his love for me, his humanity.”

Jedikiah tried to exit out of his office but Sierra blocked him.

“What I am supposed to do now? I tried to kill the Founder and I failed. What the hell do I do?” asked Sierra, as fresh tears pooled in her eyes. Sierra had screwed up, she was willing to admit that. Now, her family would pay the price for it. She couldn’t let that happen. Much as she hated to admit it, she needed her uncle now more than ever. She’d just tried to kill the Founder and he was not the kind of man who forgave and forgot such things.”

Jedikiah’s face softened as he touched Sierra’s face. “You need to decide who you really are. Your powers make you strong, but only your humanity will save us. Every one of us. You keep fighting until you’ve finally done what you’ve set out to do. That’s what you need to focus on, Sierra.”

Sierra swallowed painfully as she took a step away from her uncle allowing him to leave. “Go while you still can,” she said, brokenly. “I’ll find a way to protect my father’s body. But if all else fails again, I’ll need you as backup. Go.”

Jedikiah nodded and then disappeared out of his office and from Ultra.

He didn’t leave a moment too soon, for no sooner had Jedikiah left Ultra, the Founder stormed the younger man’s office with a small army of goons behind him.

“Where is he, Sierra?” asked the Founder. “Where is your uncle?”

Sierra wiped her face of the tears that had fallen before she turned and faced the Founder.

“I don’t know,” she said, truthfully.

Sierra didn’t have a clue where Jedikiah had gone. It was just one of the many things she didn’t know anymore. She didn’t know who to trust or what to do now. She just didn’t know.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son and daughter, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

After the Founder questioned Sierra about her uncle’s whereabouts and deemed her lack of knowledge about it to be truthful, he ordered a manhunt for Jedikiah’s known hideouts and then pulled Sierra into a private word. He wasn’t at all happy that Sierra’s actions had led to his daughter’s death or that she had kept her ability to kill hidden from Ultra. But whether it was by the grace of God or if he’d suddenly grown a conscience, the Founder had decided that Sierra wasn’t going to be punished for what she’d done. Instead, he decided that Sierra’s mind had been twisted by Jedikiah’s lies and manipulations, that she was an innocent victim in the affair. What’s more, the Founder wasn’t going to tell anyone about what Sierra had done. So, for the time being, Sierra was free but she got the impression that she was going to be under scrutiny for the time being.

The Founder then called an emergency meeting and every single Ultra agent, even those who’d been off-duty and asleep in their beds.

“All right, everyone, I know this is highly irregular and most inconvenient, so I’ll be brief and then you can return to what you were doing before. So, listen up,” said the Founder, briskly. “The Ultra I founded was based on a vision. A world in which paranormals would live not as a mutation or a freak of nature but as a blessed being graced with astonishing gifts. But as I became consumed by the advancement of my kind, Doctor Jedikiah Price turned this place of science into a fortress of brutality. A death factory. To my own ruin and my daughter’s.”

At the mention of Cassie’s death, Sierra ducked her head down and failed to stop the tears from escaping her. She was never going to get past the guilt she felt in her role in Cassie’s death as long as she lived and she would forever atone for it.

Worried by Sierra’s reaction, Hilton reached out and gave Sierra’s hand a comforting squeeze and a small smile but respectfully, didn’t ask questions.

The Founder then proceeded to empty a gun of its bullets, causing a clattering sound to echo throughout the room.

“Therefore, the Ultra that you have come to know is no more!” declared the Founder. “The hunting of our own kind is over. The imprisonment, the killing, through. From now on, all paranormals will live in peace. Breakouts will still be monitored, and those abusing their powers will be detained and instructed in the need for discretion before being released. Any questions?”

Though everyone was shocked to hear this, nobody spoke up.
“Good. Back to your business,” ordered the Founder.

And with that, everyone left the ops room and went back to their business.

Suddenly feeling quite suffocated, Sierra teleported straight to the Lair.

When Sierra teleported into TIM’s room, she was immediately swept into one of John’s bone-breaking hugs and felt her children hug her from her waist down. Her family had been worried sick about her and judging from the look on Cara and Russell’s faces, they hadn’t been the only ones.

“Thank God you’re back. We’ve been worried sick,” said Jedikiah, his voice slightly muffled by Sierra’s black leather jacket. “What happened at Ultra? Are you being punished by the Founder?”

Sierra pulled away and shook her head before sitting down on the couch. She ignored how squished she felt as John and kids joined her. She then proceeded to fill them in on everything that happened when she left to chase after her uncle. How Jedikiah had fled for his own safety, how the Founder was not going to punish Sierra, and of the new changes to Ultra’s protocols that the Founder had just installed there.

“Do you really think the Founder’s serious about all this? Putting an end to Ultra’s dark practices and turning into, like, Professor X’s mansion?” asked Russell, hesitantly.

Sierra shrugged as her eyes stung with fresh tears. “I don’t know,” she admitted. “I want to believe it, yes. But do I dare actually do so? I don’t think I can. My dad never would’ve done what he did if he believed the Founder was actually a good man and I’m trusting my earlier instinct about him. But what if I’m wrong? I don’t know what’ll happen. What I do know is that I murdered Cassie in cold blood and I’m damn lucky the Founder didn’t kill me for it.”

“Sierra, no,” said John, dismayed. “Cassie’s death wasn’t your fault.”

Sierra shook her head. “I pulled the trigger. I did the one thing I swore I’d never do.”

“Mom, no. If anyone’s to blame, it’s the Founder. He forced your hand,” argued Robbie.

Charlotte nodded in agreement. “They’re right, Mom. This isn’t your fault. Cassie wouldn’t want you to blame yourself either.”

Sierra sighed and didn’t reply. The Founder didn’t force Sierra to do anything. Everything that had happened was of Sierra’s own doing. She’d been the one to agree to Jedikiah’s plan, she’d insisted on being the one to pull the trigger and Sierra had been the one who’d fired off the bullets that had killed Cassie in the blink of an eye. Yes, the Founder was to blame, but that didn’t mean that Sierra wasn’t any less guilty for her role in Cassie’s death.

“Sierra, please, don’t disappear inside yourself,” begged Cara, worriedly. “If we’re going to survive, if we’re going to help you, then you have to let us in.”

Sierra swallowed painfully as she nodded. Cara was right. Now wasn’t the time for Sierra to hide away in her grief and guilt. “Look, I don’t trust the Founder, but I do want this to be real more
anything. I want all of you to not have to live down here anymore. I want to be able to lead the life I want with John and have my kids have a real childhood. But I’m exhausted and I’m scared to death that this is just a prelude to something far worse. And I can’t do anything because for the time being, I’m going to be under a very tight microscope. So, for the time being, I need you all to stay low and I want the kids to stay down here in the Lair until I can be sure it’s safe.”

Everyone agreed to this without hesitation. None of them trusted the Founder after what he’d done to their kind and his daughter and none of them wanted to suffer his wraith, especially the kids. So, for now, they would have to be more careful than ever. They wouldn’t give up their generals, their spies and foot soldiers and wave the white flag for surrender until they were one hundred percent certain that their lives weren’t at risk.

“Totally off-topic, but where’s our favorite paranormal exterminator?” asked Russell.

Sierra shrugged again. “He’s gone. Disappeared. And I don’t have a damn clue as to where.”

Maybe that was for the best, at least for now. If Jedikiah was somewhere safe, then Roger’s body would be safe too. The mission to stop the Founder wasn’t over yet, merely delayed until it could be safely enacted for everyone’s sakes.

XXX

The following morning, Sierra was not in the best of moods as she walked into Ultra’s ops room to meet with her partner, Hilton. He had a video on his tablet of a new breakout, Monty the Magnificent, a street magician who was using his powers for his magic tricks.

“Our new breakout’s a street magician? Are you kidding me?” said Sierra, incredulously. Out of all the things that could’ve happened, a magic paranormal was not one of them.

Hilton nodded as he scooped up his tablet. “Nope. Come with me. You and I are going to make a good first impression on the boss.”

Sierra inwardly groaned. She’d already made a first impression on the Founder and she had no wish to speak with the man again so soon after what’d happened the previous night. But she had no choice in the matter, so with great reluctance, she followed after Hilton.

“No need to knock,” said the Founder, after Hilton gently tapped on the glass door. He smiled and gestured for them to take a seat. “My door’s always open. Please, do sit down.”

Sierra forced a smile as she sat down.

“We have a breakout, sir—”

“Bathory,” he interrupted.

Hilton stared, confused. “I beg your pardon?”

“Hugh Bathory is the Founder’s name,” explained Sierra.

The Founder nodded. “I’ve decided to have people refer to me by it again. It’s what my friends used to call me back in the old days.”
“Right,” said Hilton, slowly. He placed his tablet onto the desk. “Anyway, our breakout’s posing as a street magician and using his powers recklessly in front of humans. Whether he’s deliberately being an idiot or just plain doesn’t know what he’s doing, I can’t say. But either way, I would like your consent to find him and bring him in, Mister Bathory.”

The Founder nodded. “Very well. Do as you see fit. Dismissed.”

Hilton nodded, then he and Sierra left the Founder’s office.

Sierra’s mood did not get any better as she and Hilton went out looking for their street magician breakout. After circling the block more than a dozen times with no results, Sierra’s bad mood only worsened.

“Hilton, I know you want to impress the Founder but seriously, we’ve gone around the block fourteen times! This Eisenheim wannabe’s not here,” said Sierra, in irritation.

“This is where his last tele-signature registered,” said Hilton, stubbornly.

“Then maybe he’s not using his powers anymore. Maybe he called a cab or had his mom pick him up. Either way, this idiot’s not here!” snapped Sierra.

Hilton rolled his eyes. “The guy’s teleporting in broad daylight. I highly doubt he’s going to lay down the cash for a taxi.”

Sierra scoffed. “Look at you. Little paranormal profiler. You should have your own reality show. You have fun. Me? I’m out.” She tried to leave but Hilton grabbed her arm and forced her back.

Hilton looked at her with worry and agitation. “What the hell’s going on with you? You’ve had a bee in your bra all day and you looked positively sick last night. What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong is that someone I cared about, a friend, died right in front of me last night because I screwed up and couldn’t protect her,” Sierra burst out, telling a vague truth. “And you want to know what else? I don’t like you kissing up to the new boss, okay?”

Hilton frowned. “Well, I’m sorry about your friend, Sierra, but the rest of it is completely nuts. Is that what you think? That I’m all gung-ho? Sierra, that’s not what I’m doing. This is about a second chance. A chance to finally do our damn jobs without feeling like we’re selling out our kind.”

Sierra scoffed again. “A pro-paranormal Ultra sounds great, but I don’t buy one word out of the Founder’s mouth. And if you were smart, you’d keep your head down and steer clear of that freaking bastard. Okay?”

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Hilton’s frown deepened as he folded his arms across his chest. “You seem awfully certain of a man that you’ve only met once. I trust him. Why don’t you?”

“Then you’re naïve. I don’t trust the Founder because I’ve met him several times before and each time was not good, Hilton. All right? For all his talk about his daughter’s death, that bastard only cares about power and loyalty. And you want to know what else? He scares me in a way that my uncle never did, Hilton,” confessed Sierra. “So, please, trust me when I say that the Founder not some kind of hero for our species. He is a monster.”

Hilton’s face softened as he gently squeezed Sierra’s shoulder. “Okay, okay, fair enough. I do trust you, Sierra, but all the same, I need to verify this. So, we need to bring in our breakout. We’ll
see what happens to him and if you’re right about the Founder, I’ll do whatever you want for a week.”

Sierra relaxed a little but she still shook her head. She hadn’t gotten through to Hilton at all. He was her friend now but he was still a thickheaded moron and she couldn’t stop him. “Fine, whatever. But I’m not taking any stupid bet. I’m not really the gambling type.”

“Then don’t make it a bet. Just a promise. If I’m right, you’ll buy me a drink. If you’re right, I’ll buy. Sound good?” offered Hilton.

Sierra sighed again before nodding in agreement.

She and Hilton then decided to split up and rendezvous later on.

Sierra hadn’t walked more than block or two away from Hilton when she suddenly got a tele-signature on her phone. She then proceeded to follow the signature almost a mile away from the park where the magician had first appeared. Soon, she trailed down a dark, empty alley and then she was suddenly pulled into one of the buildings as the door slammed shut behind her.

“Hey, Sierra,” said Jedikiah, smiling.

“Damn it, Uncle Jed. Don’t do that!” hissed Sierra, as she clutched her chest. “You scared the crap out of me. Also, how the hell is this happening? I was tracking a tele-signature.”

Jedikiah looked rather pleased with himself. “Well, I designed these instruments, so I can do what I want with them.”

“Fair enough. But all the same, seriously? Hiding out in alleys? Not really your style. I figured you’d be with my dad’s body or out of the country with Morgan by now,” said Sierra.

“Yeah, well, as much I’d love for the latter to be happening, it can’t happen right now. I refuse to put Morgan and the baby in danger until the Founder’s dealt with. On that note, since that mission was botched, I’ve had to lay low until I can figure out our next move against the Founder,” said Jedikiah, briskly. “Have you given that much thought, by the way?”

“Yeah, but it doesn’t matter right now,” said Sierra.

“‘It doesn’t matter right now’?” echoed Jedikiah, incredulously. “Sierra, he has to be stopped!”

“I’m not arguing that. But in case you’ve forgotten, I am under a damn microscope right now because of what I did! Okay? Not to mention, he’s changing Ultra presumably for the better, which means everyone’s going to be on his side now and I can’t take down all of Ultra by myself. So, I can’t make any further moves against the Founder yet. So, what the hell do you want me to do?” snapped Sierra. “Both my kids are in hiding because I’m scared of what that bastard’s going to do!”

Sierra wanted the Founder dead and out of her life more than anything. But taking a move now, especially so soon after her failed assassination attempt on the Founder was beyond insane and stupid. If she did anything now, the Founder would assuredly kill her or worse and then do the same to her children. Sierra couldn’t do anything, not yet.

Jedikiah’s face softened but he still kept arguing with her. “Sierra, I understand your concerns, but trust me when I say that we need to take action against the Founder as soon as possible. The only reason he’s playing nice right now, the only reason he hasn’t killed you or worse is because he wants to manipulate you and then exploit you as soon as he has your trust—”
“Which he never will,” interrupted Sierra, fiercely. “I know that my ability to stop time’s crucial to his plan, but we don’t have a bloody clue what the hell that plan even is! I know that if I join forces with him, millions of humans will die and I’m going to do everything I can to stop that. But right now, I don’t see a way out of this mess. So, until we do figure something out that doesn’t involve a repeat of past mistakes. I’m sorry, Jedikiah. But that’s my decision.”

Jedikiah didn’t look happy to hear this but Sierra didn’t give him a chance to argue with her further as she then departed from her uncle’s hideout.

Sierra, you there? I can’t find you, said Hilton.

I’m on my way back. I’ll be there in a sec. I thought I had a bead on our magician but the signal went cold, said Sierra, as she teleported back to the park.

Well, lucky for both of us. I picked it up. I got a flyer with our breakout. Turns out, Monty the Magnificent is going to be performing at the Fort Greene Theater tonight at seven and I just purchased two tickets for us, replied Hilton.

Sierra sighed. She really didn’t like this. The guy seemed harmless. Couldn’t they just give him a warning and be done with it?

Look, Hilton, I know Monty’s being stupid but he seems harmless. Why don’t we just talk to him and give him a cuff if he misbehaves? Are we really going to pick this guy up for a magic show of all things? asked Sierra. I thought Ultra was supposed to be better than this now.

I don’t like it any more than you do, but delivering a breakout’s the only way we’ll know if the Founder is for real or not. What choice do we have? reminded Hilton.

Sierra was forced to admit defeat at that point.

XXX

A couple of minutes before seven o’clock that evening, Sierra walked into the Fort Green Theatre with Hilton close behind her.

“Want to grab us some drinks? Our usual, an ale for me and a fizzy water for you?” asked Hilton.

Sierra laughed. “I’m sorry, I think I’m having a stroke. Did you just suggest we break the rules?”

Ultra agents were forbidden from drinking while on duty as alcohol clouded the mind, impaired judgment and caused a paranormal’s powers to go wonky if used.

Hilton made a face as he playfully smacked Sierra’s shoulder. “Very funny. I just thought we should try and blend in a little. But if it bothers you that much, make it two fizzy waters. I’ve been curious about how it tastes.”

Sierra smiled and nodded. “Sure.”

Sierra, can you hear me?
“Did you feel that? I just felt a telepathic burst,” said Hilton. Thankfully, Hilton hadn’t heard Cara’s voice or else, there would’ve been trouble.

“Yeah, it’s my son. He’s trying to talk to me. Look, would you mind giving me a sec alone?” lied Sierra, quickly. “Go grab us a booth while I get us some drinks?”

Hilton nodded and went off to get them a place to sit while Sierra ordered two fizzy waters.

*Cara, now is not a good time,* said Sierra, through clenched teeth.

*Sorry, I was just—*

*Worried about me? I’m fine.*

*Well, you did just try and kill your new boss,* reminded Cara.

*You don’t need to remind me of that,* said Sierra, sharply. *Like I said, I’m fine, thank you very much. And need I also remind you that I’m under a microscope right now because of what I did? So, now I have to bring in a breakout to say that I’m sorry to that bastard.*

*And you’re willing to risk the breakout’s life for that?* asked Cara, incredulously.

*If I don’t at least try, he’s going to have my head on a platter and I rather like my head where it is. So, I’m going hang up on you for now. Bye-bye,* said Sierra, bluntly.

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra closed off the connection, picked up her order and joined Hilton at the booth he’d picked out for them. They had a pleasant conversation as they sipped their drinks and waited for the show to start as Hilton had decided not to go through with their initial plan to nab the breakout backstage. Hilton wanted to see the act, document the breakout’s paranormal abuses and write a comprehensive report on Monty before doing anything. Sierra was more than happy to go along with this plan until her heart sank at the sight of Cara and John at the bar.

“Damn it,” whispered Sierra. Why did Cara have to do this kind of crap? Why couldn’t she just leave Sierra alone when she was on duty? Especially *now* of all times!

“What?” Hilton looked in the direction Sierra had been glancing at and then his face darkened with fury. “Cara Coburn and John Young. Ultra’s most wanted fugitives. You’ve met them before, haven’t you, Sierra?”

“You could say that, yeah. It was before I went to work for my uncle.” She grabbed Hilton and forced him back into his seat when he tried to rise up and go after them. “Don’t. Not here. Not now. And need I remind you that John can kill while you and I can’t? Just wait for the opportune moment. Okay?”

“Like right now, for instance?” hissed Hilton.

Sierra was about to ask what Hilton meant when Cara and John suddenly appeared by their table, smiling too sweetly for Sierra’s liking and acting like a couple out on a date.

“Hey, Sierra. Do you mind if we join you?” asked Cara, sweetly.

“Actually, I do. So, if you don’t mind…” Sierra gestured for Cara to go away.

John wrapped an arm around Cara’s shoulders. “Not a problem. We’ve got a table.”
“Actually, why don’t you stay? We don’t mind the squeeze,” said Hilton, sweetly.

Sierra resisted the urge to face palm as she gritted her teeth. This was going to be awkward.

“I hear this Monty guy’s supposed to be great. A real breakout star,” said Cara.

Sierra nearly choked on her drink and then she dabbed at her face with the napkin Hilton offered.

“Oh, you two make such a cute couple. How long have you been—ow!”

The ‘ow’ was due to Sierra kicking Cara in the shin under the table.

“Oh, my bad. Sorry,” said Sorry, not sounding the least bit sorry as she glared fiercely at Cara. Did she really have to do this? It was completely obnoxious and really pissing Sierra off. “And FYI, we’re not dating. We’re friends and coworkers.”

Cara glared as she rubbed her shin where Sierra kicked it. “Coworkers? Oh yeah, where?”

John then intervened before a bigger fight could erupt. “Come on, sweetheart. It’s Saturday night. Who wants to talk work? Besides, look, it’s starting.”

John was right, for right then and there, Monty the Magnificent started his magic show. His opening act was a classic escape artist trick complete with the usual straitjacket, chains and locked water tank. But the pièce de résistance came when Monty teleported out of the water tank, causing a great round of applause from his audience.

“How did he do that?” asked Cara, feigning ignorance.

Hilton’s face twisted with anger. “You know damn well—”

“Okay, time to go! People are watching!” hissed Sierra.

Sierra grabbed Hilton by the arm and pulled him away from the booth before he could lash out and get them all into big trouble.

When the show ended, Sierra and Hilton cornered Monty in the back alley as Hilton had decided that since Cara and John had showed up, their initial plans to stake out Monty were now kaput and they had to act then and there. Sierra was forced to reluctantly agree.

“Mister Magnificent!” called Sierra, as the magician exited the building. “We caught your show tonight. A word, please?”

Monty smiled. “Sure, anything for my fans. How can I help you? An autograph, perhaps?”

“Nope. Just want to show you a magic trick of our own. Hold out your hands,” said Hilton, as he produced the suppression handcuffs from his coat pocket.

The blood drained from Monty’s face and then as expected, he bolted. Sierra and Hilton chased after him and then Hilton telekinetically tossed Monty into a nearby pile of garbage bags. He was about to slap the cuffs onto Monty and take him in when Cara and John showed up. Cara TK’d Hilton into the chain link fence before the two of them got into a full-out brawl while Sierra and John watched with interest.

“As much as I like watching these two beat each other’s brains in, if we don’t mix it up a little, Hilton’s going to know something’s off,” said Sierra.
“I know. But I wish I didn’t have to fight you over some kid who thinks he’s magic,” said John.

“Glad you understand. Sorry, John.”

And with that, Sierra punched John hard in the face, causing him to spin and stumble before he gave Sierra look, which she responded with a helpless shrug. They then proceeded to stage fight until Cara finally overpowered Hilton and then took off with Monty to the Lair. John then punched Sierra one last time before disappearing from the alley.

Sierra groaned as she stood up. She wasn’t badly hurt but she was definitely going to feel the bruises in the morning. She then grabbed Hilton’s hand and helped him to stand.

“Damn it. The Founder’s going to love this,” said Hilton, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

Sierra was about to reply when her phone went off. When she checked it, she found a text from Luca, begging her to come to his house, claiming it was an emergency.

“Shoot. It’s my little brother. There’s an emergency at his house. I have to go. Do you mind?” asked Sierra.

Hilton shook his head. “No, go ahead. Help your family. I’ll take care of the paperwork.”

Sierra nodded gratefully and then took off.

XXX

Sierra was immensely grateful that her mother was working late that evening as Sierra had little to no desire to speak with the older woman. Though it had been quite some time since Sierra had all but severed ties with her mother, they had yet to even begin attempts to reconcile as Sierra refused to put her heart on the line again. Sierra’s infrequent visits since then had been difficult affairs as while Sierra was polite when she visited, any warmth they once shared was long gone. Luca didn’t know the truth, but that hadn’t stopped him from trying and failing to fix things.

But much to Sierra’s surprise and displeasure, Marla was waiting for her on the front steps. She looked worried and then relieved when Sierra came into view.

“What’re you doing here? I thought you were working late tonight,” said Sierra.

“I’m on my dinner break. Luca called me, said there was an emergency. Did he call you too?” asked Marla, worried.

Sierra nodded and the two women exchanged worried looks before going into the house. They’d just entered the living room when Luca emerged from the kitchen, looking scared out of his mind and frantically searching for some kind of relief.

“Thank God. Look, Mom, sis, something’s wrong with Uncle Jed. He’s talking crazy,” said Luca.

Oh, hell’s bells. No! Sierra’s heart sank as Jedikiah emerged from the kitchen with a smile on his face.

“Sierra, Marla. Thank goodness you’re here. Go ahead, Luca. Ask her. Ask your sister.”
“Ask me what?” demanded Sierra, dreading the answer.

Luca took a deep breath. “Jed says that you both have powers, like comic book stuff. And not just you two, but that Dad did and so does John and Robbie. He also said that you have some secret petri-dish grown daughter who’s got powers too. And he said that you’ve been working to bring Dad back from some place called Limbo. What the hell is he talking about?”

Damn you, Jedikiah. Sierra could hazard a guess as to why Jedikiah was doing this. He didn’t like that she wasn’t acting as fast as he wanted to take down the Founder, so he was forcing Sierra’s hand by exposing her secret in front of Luca. Well, Jedikiah wasn’t going to win this fight.

Sierra took a deep breath. “Look, Luca, Uncle Jedikiah’s not feeling well and he was just leaving.”

She moved to grab Jedikiah and force him out of the house but Jedikiah slipped away from her and gestured at Marla.

“Marla, are you going to tell him? I mean you should, considering what happened the last time you tried to hide a secret of this magnitude from your children.” Jedikiah smirked at the horrified look on Marla’s face. “Yeah, I know, Marla. It wasn’t hard to figure out why you became estranged from Sierra in the first place and why you kicked her out all those years ago. She was breaking out, becoming too much like her father and you couldn’t hack it, could you?”

Marla shook and her hand clenched into a fist before she replied. “Believe what you like, Jed. You’re crazy and clearly sick. Come with me. I’ll check you into the E.R. for the night.”

Luca looked relieved but Jedikiah’s irritation worsened.

“Really? Really?” he said, incredulously. He turned to Sierra. “You know better than anyone the dangers of knowing too much. I’ve just told Luca everything. Now, tell him what’s in store for his future. Like the kill squad that came after John’s comic book vendor friend. Like why you’ve taken your children into hiding. Why you’re at odds with your mom right now. Tell him!”

“Why are you doing this?” demanded Marla, as angry tears glistened in her eyes.

Jedikiah pointed to Sierra, who was shaking with fury. “You want to know why? It’s because of your daughter. This is a paranormal intervention. I brought her into Ultra to protect her and her family, and now instead of taking action against the Founder like she’s supposed to, she’s doing nothing because she’s a damn coward! She’s fallen in with the wrong guy.”

“That is not true!” spat Sierra, momentarily forgetting her audience, who looked wide-eyed and confused. “I have NOT fallen in line with that soulless bastard and I am NOT a damn coward, you lying scumbag!”

“Oh really? All evidence to the contrary. You think it’s easy to dismiss what I say? What’re you going to do now that your little brother knows the truth? He’s human for now, but unless he breaks out, you know what the Founder will do. You know better than anyone how it feels to be lied to, Sierra. So, do you and Luca a favor and tell him the truth!” demanded Jedikiah.

Sierra didn’t care how much truth was in Jedikiah’s words. Luca was human and innocent. He deserved to stay that way for as long as possible. Jedikiah had no freaking right to out Sierra like this to him and completely destroy Luca’s world. She wouldn’t let him.

“GET OUT!” yelled Sierra, pointing to the door. “GET OUT OR I SWEAR TO GOD, I’LL—”
But Jedikiah instead took action by grabbed Luca in a headlock and holding his gun to Luca’s head. “Tell him or I swear I’ll put a bullet in him.”

“What the hell?” gasped Luca.

“Okay, okay, okay!” said Sierra, quickly as she made a placating gesture. “Just don’t hurt him. Luca? Luca, it’s all true.”

Sierra hoped that would be good enough but Sierra missed the mark with her acting skills.

“Yeah, not buying it,” said Jedikiah.

So, having no other choice, Sierra used her telekinesis to throw the gun across the room. Jedikiah then released Luca and Sierra’s brother then looked at his mother and sister as though he didn’t recognize them from Adam.

“Thank you for proving my point,” said Jedikiah.

Sierra furiously grabbed Jedikiah by the lapels of his coat and pinned him to the wall. “You son of a bitch! We had a deal!”

Jedikiah held up his hands in a placating gesture. “I know we did, but things have changed, Sierra. Your brother needs to know the truth! Please, listen to me!”

“So, it’s true.”

Luca’s heartbroken tone caused Sierra to release her uncle and face her little brother, who had tears in his eyes.

“You’re some kind of mutant like the X-Men?” asked Luca. “You? Mom? Dad? Your boyfriend? Your kids? I knew we were messed up, but I didn’t realize we were like some supernatural freak show. And everyone knew about it except me! Why the hell did you tell me?”

Tears pooled in Sierra’s eyes as she tried to regain control of the situation. This was one of her absolute worst nightmares and now it was coming true.

“Luca, no, please. I was only ever trying to protect you. I swear to God, I wanted to tell you a million times, I almost did tell you a million times…” she began.

“So, what stopped you?” interrupted Luca, as angry tears slid down his cheeks. “All this time, I knew something was wrong, that you were hiding something from me. I was always there for you! But you weren’t there for me! You and Mom…why did you keep the truth from me? What, did you think I was going to blow the whistle on your secret?”

“It wasn’t like that!” Sierra burst out. Logically, she could see how Luca would think that had been Sierra’s reason for hiding her secret but it just wasn’t true.

“Then what was it like?” demanded Luca, furiously. “Because where I’m standing, you were all hiding this huge secret from me because I couldn’t hack it! So, why the hell didn’t you tell me, Sierra?”

Sierra swallowed painfully as she silently prayed Luca would understand her reasons and forgive her. “When I broke out, when I found out that I had powers…I was so scared you’d reject me, that you’d think I was some kind of freak or a monster. It’s no excuse, I know, but I was young and stupid. I—“
“Am I like you?” interrupted Luca, thickly. “Am I going to ‘breakout’ too?”

Sierra hopelessly shrugged. “I don’t know,” she confessed. “Right now, you’re human but you do have the potential to be a synergist like me.” Luca had a fifty-fifty chance of breaking out and becoming a very powerful paranormal like Sierra and her children given his lineage, but privately, Sierra believed Luca was going to be the paranormal equivalent of a Squib. “But it might not happen and even if it does, I won’t let you be used by Ultra like me, I swear.”

Luca looked comforted by this but then resumed his questions. “You still haven’t explained about Mom or why you didn’t tell me about all this later on.”

“Mom has her own reasons she’ll explain to you. But as for me, I swear, I didn’t find out about Mom being like me until the drive-by at the diner and by then, I couldn’t tell you the truth because if I did and my work found out, you would’ve been killed. Okay? Ultra, the place I work for, isn’t some cushy research facility. They’re an organization dedicated to the containment of my species and any human outside of Ultra who finds out the truth is killed to maintain their silence. I was coerced into working for them and I was desperate to protect you from them,” said Sierra, hoarsely.

The blood drained from Luca’s face and he shook, but whether from his heartbreak and betrayal or because he was frightened, Sierra couldn’t say.

“I…I need some air. We’ll talk later, but right now, I need to get out of this house,” said Luca.

Before Sierra could stop him, Luca took off into the night and Marla chased after him, leaving Sierra alone with Jedikiah.

“I’m sorry to have to do that, Sierra, but the time for secrets is past. Everyone you love needs to know the stakes,” said Jedikiah. “Listen to me, the Founder cannot be trusted—”

That was as far as Jedikiah got before Sierra tackled Jedikiah in a rage and teleported them to the banks of the river that Jedikiah had loved so much as a child. She’d had it and now that Jedikiah was no longer armed or her boss at Ultra, Sierra was going to unleash all kinds of hell on him for his betrayal, for outing her in front of her brother.

“YOU BASTARD!” yelled Sierra.

Jedikiah attempted to block the multiple blows Sierra delivered to his face before they wrestled on the ground. Jedikiah then got on top and tried to pin Sierra down on the forest floor.

“I don’t want to hurt you, Sierra!” yelled Jedikiah.

“Too late for that!” hissed Sierra. She jerked her head and then Jedikiah was slammed into a tree. “You wanted to force my hand? Well, congratulations! You did it and now you’re going to pay dearly for it, you sick scumbag!”

Jedikiah shakily rose up just as Sierra did the same. “Please, I did it for your own good, Sierra!”

“For my good? You lying son of a bitch! You only did this because I wasn’t acting fast enough for your damn liking!” snarled Sierra, as she slammed him into another tree. “My family was off-limits, you BASTARD!”

She placed a hand on Jedikiah’s face, causing him to scream in horrible agony for several long minutes before she undid the damage and then lifted him up into the air by his throat telekinetically. It was taking all Sierra’s restraint not to kill Jedikiah then and there.
“You want to talk about trust? About the Founder? Fine! I damn well know the Founder can’t be trusted! So, I don’t trust a damn word that comes out his mouth! You think that I don’t want to put a bullet in his head for what he’s done to me, my family and my kind? You think I don’t want to make that bastard suffer before I finally put an end to him? Well, you’re wrong!” snarled Sierra. “The only reason I haven’t taken further action is because I can’t yet and you damn well know it! So, don’t you freaking DARE judge me or how I do things!”

She then released Jedikiah, causing him to fall onto the ground, gasping for breath as his coloring changed from a faint shade of blue to pale pink.

“If I didn’t need you, I would make you suffer worse than I already have for your sins,” hissed Sierra. “But if you EVER do something like this again, I won’t hesitate to cross that damned line. Are we clear on that, Uncle?”

Jedikiah just nodded as he continued to take in huge gulps of air. Sierra then proceeded to teleport Jedikiah to safety before leaving him alone in his misery. However angry Sierra had been, she hadn’t enjoyed doing what she’d done to Jedikiah and nor had she been serious about the threat she’d made him, but she was sick and tired of being jerked around like a damned puppet and now thanks to her uncle, she had another problem to deal with on top of the Mt. Everest of problems that was Sierra’s life. How was she ever going to find a way out of it?

XXX

Back in the Lair, while Russell was helping Monty get accumulated to his new surroundings, John was admonishing Cara for her behavior topside.

“What the hell was that back there?” asked John.

Cara feigned ignorance. “What? I was protecting a breakout?”

“At expense of Sierra’s cover?” said John, skeptically. “They were only there for monitoring purposes. They wouldn’t have tried to apprehend the breakout like that if you hadn’t dragged the both of us up there like that.”

Cara shrugged. “Well, what’s done is done. Besides, it doesn’t matter now that the Founder’s ushering in a newer, gentler Ultra,” she said, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

John sighed. So, that’s what this was about. “You don’t believe that.”

“Sierra wants to believe it,” reminded Cara. “And she’s willing to risk Monty’s life to prove it.”

“And you’re willing to risk Sierra’s life to prove her wrong?” said John, incredulously. Had John just stepped into Crazy Town yet again? “Cara, just because Sierra wants to believe that the Founder’s not the devil doesn’t mean she actually buys what he’s selling. Those are two very different things. Also, if she did believe it, she wouldn’t have insisted that the kids stay hidden down here instead of at her apartment. And not to mention, it was her partner’s plan to go after Monty and if Sierra isn’t there to keep a leash on Hilton, God knows what he’ll do just to gain the Founder’s favor.”

Cara sighed in defeat, knowing that John was right. Cara had acted too rashly, she would admit to that, yes. But it was too late to take back what had been done and even so, Cara was still very
worried and felt that her concerns were justified.

“Okay, okay, you’re right. I’m just…I’m scared that sooner or later, Sierra won’t just want to believe that Ultra’s changed, she will truly believe it. I’m scared that maybe she’s been undercover at Ultra for too long and she’ll start to think like them,” confessed Cara. “I don’t want to lose her to them.”

John’s face softened as he squeezed Cara’s shoulder. “That’ll never happen. The Founder stole and used Sierra’s DNA to create the perfect super soldier, tortured me, caused her father’s disappearance, used his own daughter as a guinea pig and threw Cassie away when he was done with her. Trust me, Sierra’s never going to think any good of that son of a bitch.”

Cara looked a little comforted by this and then Sierra teleported into the room, looking like a complete and utter wreck, both physically and emotionally.

“Whoa, Sierra, are you okay? What happened?” asked John, worriedly as he ran to her side. He could feel her distress, anger and pain through their link and the sheer volume of it scared him.

“I don’t want to talk about it. Not yet. John, please, just take me and the kids to somewhere private and hold me,” begged Sierra. “I need to forget about this for a little while.”

John looked questioningly but said nothing and just nodded instead before taking Sierra away.

XXX

The next day, Sierra went to the Founder’s office to check in with him, as per the new protocol. The man was looking over Cassie’s DNA files on his laptop and seemed utterly entrapped by them.

“Excuse me, sir? I’m here to check in,” said Sierra.

Without looking up at her, the Founder gestured for Sierra to join him. “Just four letters. Four simple building blocks. It seems like there should be something more to us than that, some… ineffable thing that makes us unique. But we’re all the sums of these four components. Guanine, Adenine, Thymine and Cytosine.”

“Yes, DNA, I understand,” said Sierra, softly. She became little uncomfortable. “Um, sir, if this is a bad time, I can check in later, if you’d—”

“But this particular DNA is my daughter’s,” continued the Founder as though Sierra hadn’t spoken. “For so long, I searched through it, looking for the key to save us from the threat of humans and their petty fears. But in the process, I…I sacrificed the part of Cassandra that was unique and now all I have left are these four letters.”

Sierra swallowed painfully and forced back tears as she took a slow, deep breath through her nose. “I am so sorry, sir.”

“No, I’m sorry, Sierra. I shouldn’t be bothering you with this after all you’ve been through,” said the Founder, as he leaned back into his chair. “You wanted to check in, I understand?”

Sierra nodded quickly. “Yes, the breakout Agent Cole and I were chasing? We lost him last
night, I’m sorry to say.”

“We didn’t lose him, the Tomorrow People took him,” retorted Hilton, as he burst into the room. “Which is why we need to bring them into custody as soon as possible.”

“Sierra, I know that you have ties to them,” said the Founder.

Sierra froze and her heart leapt into her throat. “Excuse me?”

Granted, it wasn’t a difficult leap to make given how Sierra had just showed up with John at the Founder’s house the other night, but part of Sierra had hoped that her connection to the Tomorrow People wasn’t known to the Founder.

The Founder held up a hand. “I know you’ve been a double-agent for them this entire time, at your uncle’s behest perhaps, and I know that John Young fathered your son. But it’s all right. You’re not in any trouble. I just want you to take them a message. Tell them to release the breakout and in exchange, I am prepared to offer them a truce. If our kind is to survive, it must be in peace. Otherwise, my daughter’s death will have been for nothing. Please, Sierra.”

Sierra suddenly felt like she was caught between a rock and a hard place as she stiffly nodded. “I can’t make any promises. But I’ll see what I can do, sir.”

The Founder nodded in understanding. “Go on, then.”

Sierra nodded again and left the Founder’s office with Hilton close on her heels.

“Jameson? Jameson! Sierra, stop!”

Hilton grabbed Sierra’s arm, forcing her to stop in her tracks and face him. “You want to fill me in on all that? Your file said you had history with John Young, not that he’s your son’s father. And also, what the hell? You know where the Tomorrow People are hiding because you’ve been a double-agent this entire time?!”

“It’s a long story, Hilton. One, I really don’t have time for,” said Sierra, briskly, as she pulled her arm free of Hilton’s grasp. “I’m sorry I lied to you, but I had to protect myself and my family. I’m sorry if you hate me now—”

“Hate you?” interrupted Hilton. He looked at Sierra as though she’d lost her mind. “Do I like that you’ve kept this from me? No. But I can see why you did. I don’t hate you. I think this makes you more amazing than ever.”

Sierra stared in disbelief at Hilton. “Say what?”

Hilton sighed. “Look, Sierra, I don’t like being lied to and I sure as hell don’t like that you withheld information about the Tomorrow People. But ever since that superhero case, I’ve come to realize that Ultra isn’t the hero I was led to believe it is. But I can’t do anything about it because I value my head and my powers. But you? You took an initiative beyond anything I could’ve ever done. So, if what you do somehow changes Ultra and the lives of our people for the better, I’m on your team. Whatever you need my help with, just say the word.”

Sierra was very touched and immensely grateful for this but before she could respond, she received a telepathic call from Cara.

*Siera, are you there?
“Hold on a sec.” What is it, Cara?

Bad news. Monty was performing magic tricks for Russell and the kids when he decided to use a disappearing act as a ruse to teleport topside. I’ve lost track of him, I’m sorry, said Cara.

Sierra inwardly cursed. Monty really was a complete moron. Didn’t he realize the kind of danger he was putting himself in now? Well, I will see your craziness and raise you one. The Founder’s just offered a deal: if Monty’s brought in, he’ll call a true between Ultra and the Tomorrow People.

What? Cara sounded shocked. Do you trust the Founder will keep his word?

No, but I trust what’ll happen if I don’t bring Monty in and believe me, Cara, it kills me to do this but I don’t want Monty to get killed. I’ve seen enough death for a while, said Sierra, gratefully. She didn’t trust the Founder to keep his word but she knew if she didn’t bring Monty in, the poor man would only get himself killed and Sierra couldn’t let that happen so soon after Cassie’s death. And if that’s not enough, the Founder knows I’m a double-agent but he thinks it was at my uncle’s behest.

Are you kidding me?

Nope. Also, Hilton’s decided he’s on our side. He’ll help us, whatever we need, added Sierra.

Cara hesitated before replying. Are you sure we can trust him? I know Hilton’s your friend and partner but he’s still an Ultra agent, Sierra.

So was John when I first met him, reminded Sierra. But don’t worry. I’m going to be careful with Hilton. I promise. I’m not going to lose sight of why I went undercover at Ultra if that’s what you’re worried about.

I didn’t say that, said Cara, hastily.

You didn’t have to, replied Sierra. She wasn’t stupid. She knew Cara was worried that Sierra was going to lose sight of their objective that wasn’t going to happen. Not now, not ever. Her cell phone then went off with a call from Marla. Look, I’ve got to go. Let me know if you get a lead on Monty.

Will do, said Cara.

Sierra then pressed the ‘receive’ button on her phone and pressed it to her ear. “Yeah, what’s up?”

“Have you seen Luca? Is he with you?” asked Marla, sounding panicked.

Sierra’s blood ran cold. Luca was missing? That wasn’t good. “What? No. He hasn’t come home yet?”

“No. I looked all night but I couldn’t locate him. He hasn’t been to school and I can’t find him anywhere. I’m really worried something’s happened to him. If Luca doesn’t come home in a few hours, I’m going to have to file a report with the police,” said Marla, tearfully. “Sierra, I’m losing my mind. We lost your father, I lost you…I can’t lose Luca too—!”

“Okay, okay, calm down. I’m going to put out some feelers for Luca and I’ll check in with you soon. We’ll find him, Mom. I promise. Just wait at home in case he shows up,” said Sierra, soothingly.
Okay.”

Sierra hung her phone and bit her lip in worry. She knew Luca had needed time alone to think about what he’d found out but almost twenty-four hours? That was a bit much. And now wasn’t the time for Luca to go missing. If anyone from Ultra found him and picked up a stray thought from him on what he knew, then Luca would be in serious trouble.

“What’s wrong?” asked Hilton, concerned.

Sierra sighed. “That offer you just made to help me? I need to cash it in now. My little brother, Luca Jameson. He’s missing. Last night, there was an incident at my mother’s house and he found out about me. It’s been almost twenty-four hours since then and he’s still AWOL. My mother’s going frantic and if he doesn’t turn up soon, she’s going to have to call the cops and I’d like to avoid that. Can you help me look for him? Regardless of what the Founder says, I am not taking any chances with Luca’s life. Also, please keep this on the quiet.”

Hilton nodded quickly. “You have my word. Now, do you have a recent photo of Luca with you? I’ll put it through facial recognition and keep an eye out for him. If I find him, I’ll bring him straight to your mother’s.”

Sierra nodded and then sent a two-week old photo of her and Luca to Hilton’s phone for him to use. Hilton then disappeared into the ops room, causing Sierra to sigh in relief. Maybe there was a way out of this mess after all.

But Sierra apparently thought this too soon when she caught sight of the Founder heading up a tac team, all armed to the teeth. Fearing that her worst nightmares had come true, Sierra quickly ran to the Founder’s side.

“Didn’t expect to see us arming up,” she said, nonchalantly.

“Well it seems the breakout you and your partner failed to apprehend has been located,” said the Founder. “While I am aware that this doesn’t look like a truce, this breakout’s proved to be very elusive and as much I loathe force, it will be necessary on occasion. I’d like you to join this team, please.”

Sierra’s blood ran cold as she nodded. “Yes, sir, but if I may ask…what do you plan to do to him? He’s just a street magician. Nobody believes he’s actually magical.”

“Well, the magician’s fate will be up to him. Dismissed,” said the Founder, briskly as he departed.

God, I hope I’m doing the right thing, thought Sierra.

But it was far too late to back out now.

Soon, they tracked down Monty and brought him into Ultra. Sierra could only watch as he was strapped into a chair, despite all Monty’s pleas and protests.

“How is this a better Ultra? From where I’m standing, you’re no different than my uncle,” said Sierra, furiously.

“I never said that Ultra would tolerate reckless paranormals revealing our powers on a whim or worse, a profit,” said the Founder, coolly as he prepared a syringe filled with an orange liquid.

“Don’t,” begged Sierra. “Please. He’s been warned. Just make him wear a suppression
bracelet."

If this was the Founder’s idea of a better Ultra, then Sierra would have to do something drastic.

The Founder ignored Sierra as he turned his attention to Monty, whose pleas fell onto deaf ears. “You performed parlor tricks for humans, you allow them to record our antics and broadcast them across the globe. Do you think that’s wise?”

Monty struggled for an answer. “No? But I swear, I meant no harm. I’m just a magician!”

It was the wrong thing to say as the Founder then injected the serum into Monty’s neck. “And what’s the first rule of magic? Tell no one your secrets.” Much to Monty and Sierra’s shock and confusion, nothing happened after the serum entered Monty’s system. He hadn’t had his powers stripped. “Do you think you can do that? Do you think you can keep our secret?”

Monty quickly nodded. “Yes, yes, of course, sir.”

“Good.” The Founder snapped his fingers and had Monty released. “I look forward to catching your show some time. Just try and keep the tricks a little more plausible.”

Monty agreed and then quickly departed. He wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Sierra gave the Founder an apologetic look. “Sir, I am so sorry. I shouldn’t have spoken as I did.”

The Founder’s face softened. “No. Quite understandable, given all that you’ve been through lately, dear girl.”

“Thank you, but what was in that needle? What did you give him?” asked Sierra. Whatever it was, Sierra was sure it was going to come back and haunt them all later.

“Nothing you need to worry about, Miss Jameson. But all the same, I did tell you that things were going to be different here at Ultra now. So, in future, you’d do well to trust me.”

Sierra nodded and then her phone lit up with a text from Hilton. He’d found Luca and had dragged the boy home, where he was waiting to talk with Sierra. Sierra then excused herself and went to Marla’s house to have a long overdue chat with her little brother.

XXX

Meanwhile, John was playing a game of chess with TIM, or at least he was supposed to be doing that. John had picked white and was supposed to make the first move but he had yet to do that as he was currently burying his face in his hands, going over the mess they were in over and over again in his head, trying to find some way out of it.

“White makes the first move, last time I checked,” said TIM, annoyed.

John’s head shot up. “Sorry, zoning off a little.”

“Is that slang for being preoccupied with one’s romantic mate?” asked TIM.

John chuckled and shook his head. “TIM, mind your own business. Pawn E4.”
“Pawn to E5,” countered TIM.

A black pawn moved towards John’s white one on the screen, in a perfect position to capture it.

“My, aren’t we feeling bold?” teased John. “Knight to F3, tough guy.”

John’s knight moved into position.

“Knight to F6,” countered TIM.

John grinned, clearly impressed. “The King’s Gambit. What’s gotten into you?” TIM never took such risky moves in chess, he was like Spock, always preferring the more logical chess moves.

“I don’t know, but it certainly wasn’t my move,” said TIM, sounding confused.

John didn’t like this. If TIM hadn’t made the chess move, then who had? “What?”

“Someone’s entered my mainframe and is playing you remotely,” replied TIM. “Clearly, your opponent knows a great deal about my operating systems.”

John sighed and rose up from his seat. “Maybe that’s because he designed it.” There was only one person with enough knowledge to hack into TIM like that, Jedikiah. The old bastard was trying to reach out to John the only way he knew how. Well, message received.

After instructing Russell to watch his kids, John went topside and found Jedikiah playing a game of chess on his tablet on an empty chess table.

“I see you got my message,” said Jedikiah, without looking up.

John snorted. “Would else would be reckless enough to break Sicilian and rush a knight?”

“Well, John, you know I’ve never subscribed to the historical defenses. Always better to sacrifice a pawn—”

“And draw a prey for the bigger guns,” finished John, bored. He ignored Jedikiah’s impressed look. “Yes, you taught me that the first time you brought me here to play. I never forgot it.”

“I did,” said Jedikiah, proudly. He closed his tablet. “Let’s cut the crap, kid.”

“Let’s,” said John, bluntly.

The sooner John could leave Jedikiah’s presence, the better.

“I need you—let me rephrase that, humanity needs you,” said Jedikiah.

John scoffed, unimpressed. He’d heard that line of crap from Jedikiah one too many times. “Always in the name of humanity.” Ironic, considering that Jedikiah was one of the least humane people that John had ever met before.

“I’m running out of allies,” said Jedikiah.

“After the stunt you pulled at Sierra’s mother’s house last night? Outing her in front of Luca because Sierra wasn’t moving fast enough for your liking? Gee, I wonder why,” said John, sarcastically. After some coaxing, Sierra had told John what had happened with Luca and it had
taken all of John’s restraint not to go after Jedikiah and strangle the bastard. “You’re damn lucky she didn’t kill you for what you did. Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t walk away from here right now.”

“Because if you walk away from me now, every last single human on this island will be in grave danger,” said Jedikiah, bluntly.

“Even if I were to believe you, how is it my problem? My family’s safe,” said John, coldly.

Jedikiah shook his head and looked grave. “No, John, they’re not. And I know I act rashly the other night, but the time for caution is over. We need to take action and soon. Look, I know that Sierra feels guilty for Cassie’s death—”

“Don’t go there,” growled John, as he undid the safety on his gun, which he was hiding under the table. How dare Jedikiah speak that poor girl’s name when it was his insane plan that got Cassie killed? “We’re not going to talk about Cassie.”

Jedikiah held up his hands. “Okay, we won’t.” When John put the safety back on, Jedikiah went on, “But I will say this: I am offering you a way to help Sierra atone for Cassie’s death.”


Jedikiah shook his head. “Quite the contrary. I want you to help save someone, John. Someone very dear to the both of us and your girlfriend.”

John quickly guessed who Jedikiah was referring to. “You want me to save Roger?”

Jedikiah nodded. “Rather poetic, if I do say so myself.”

“You getting to save the life of the man you ordered me to kill only for McCrane to do it first and then I had to leave Roger alone to die? Beautiful,” said John, sarcastically.

“This is all predicated on Sierra’s participation. And at the moment, she’s convinced it’s too soon to take action after our last botched mission, not to mention, she’s not keen on listening to me after what I just did to her,” said Jedikiah. “If she’s not dissuaded of this, Sierra will die and then so will her children, your children. Roger will die. I will die. You and all the Tomorrow People—”

“Will die?” finished John, rolling his eyes. He knew Jedikiah believed the threat the Founder posed, as did John, but wasn’t the older man being just a tad dramatic? “The Founder wins, the whole world comes to a brutal end? How horrible.”

“You’re being facetious.”

John scoffed. “Sierra is under a tighter microscope than ever at Ultra because of the stupid, crazy plan that you put her up to. It’s no surprise she’s acting as she is right now. She’s scared to death of what that bastard will do.”

“And rightly so, but Sierra’s plan to sit back and wait for the opportune moment is a faulty one at best now, John,” groaned Jedikiah, as he rang his fingers through his hair in frustration. “He’s trying to play her just like he’s playing everybody else. And for the plan that Roger chose death to stop! Look, you want your leader back? I have his body and I have the means to bring him back but I need Sierra to help. Otherwise, this is all for nothing. If you want proof, come with me.”

John sighed and after a long moment’s consideration, caved. “Fine. I’ll go. But if you’re lying, I will put a bullet in you.”
Jedikiah nodded as though he’d expected this and then he lead John to Roger’s cryo-stasis chamber. Upon seeing the frozen body of the man who’d been like a father to John and whom John had failed to save all those years ago, John’s eyes became red with tears and he knelt down beside Roger’s frozen body as John’s own shook with grief.

“What the hell have you done to him?” demanded John, hoarsely.

“It was the only way I could save him, John,” whispered Jedikiah. “To bring him back, I need Sierra. She’s the only one who can reach Limbo and restore Roger’s life. I’ve tried everything, but she will not listen to me. But she will listen to you because she loves you as much as you love her.”

John swallowed painfully as his tears splashed down onto Roger’s chamber. “If what you’re saying is true, if Roger put himself into Limbo to stop the Founder, you say bringing Roger back doesn’t play straight into the Founder’s hands?”

Jedikiah looked remorseful but no less determined. “It’s a risk we’re going to have to take. John, please, you’re the only sway over Sierra I have left.”

John sniffled. “You’re crazy.”

Jedikiah sighed in relief, knowing what John actually meant. “I knew I could count on you, kid.”

One way or another, they were going to take down the Founder and bring Roger back, come hell or high water. Whatever it took.

XXX

When Sierra teleported into Marla’s living room, she sighed in relief at the sight of Luca sitting alone on the couch. Without another word, she pulled him into a tight hug.

“Oh, thank God, you’re okay. I was worried sick,” said Sierra, breathlessly. “Where the hell have you been, Luca?”

“I camped out at Kogan’s house and then hid at the library. Figured no one would look for me there. Turns out, I was only mostly right, because that’s where your crazy ex-boyfriend, Hilton, found me before he dragged me back,” said Luca, as they broke apart. “He’s like you too?”

Sierra chuckled. “Yeah, it’s kind of a long story. But one that can wait. Can we talk?”

Luca nodded and then they both sat down.

“So, after I got home, Mom spilled the beans on everything. She told me about all the crap you’ve been going through, why you two have been fighting so much and all about your powers and the practices that Ultra does. I’m so sorry, sis. I can’t imagine how hard that must’ve been for you to shoulder alone,” said Luca, regretfully. “No wonder you felt like you couldn’t tell me.”

Sierra’s face softened. “It’s not your fault. I’m just sorry you had to find out like this. I should’ve told you from the beginning, long before I went to work for Ultra. Just because it was my burden didn’t mean you couldn’t help carry the load. You deserved to know the truth and I know better than anyone how it feels when that’s kept from you. I’m sorry, Luca.”
Sierra wished she’d told Luca the truth about what she was from the start, then it wouldn’t have led to such a horrible incident with Jedikiah.

“Don’t be. I understand why you did what you did. Mom, however, I am going to have a hard time forgiving after all the crap she put you through,” said Luca, with a hint of venom in his voice. “But I got to know, what would’ve happened if I’d broken out like you? Would I have had to work for Ultra like you? Be experimented on by them?”

Sierra fiercely shook her head. “No. No. I never would’ve allowed that. I would’ve found some way to keep you away from them, I promise.” Sierra never would’ve allowed Ultra to get their claws into her brother. At worst, she would’ve hidden him in the Lair or at best, made him wear a cuff like Sophie and wiped him from Ultra’s mainframe. “But if you do, then I promise, I’ll figure something out.”

“Speaking of promises, promise me you’ll never lie to me like that again. Because I don’t think I can handle a repeat of all this insanity,” said Luca, quietly.

Sierra nodded. “I promise, I will never lie to you again, Luca. Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a cupcake in my eye. Now give me a hug, you little brat.”

Luca smiled and then they hugged one another tightly.

Words could express how relieved Sierra was that everything had worked out so well with Luca. He still wanted to be part of Sierra’s life and they were still siblings despite all the secrets and lies between them. Sierra thanked her lucky stars for such a blessing.

The moment was interrupted when Sierra’s phone went off with a text from the Founder, requesting her immediate presence at Ultra.

“Ugh, I've got to go. Work’s calling,” said Sierra.

“It’s okay. I’ll see you on Friday for dinner?”

Sierra nodded and then teleported back to Ultra. Much to her surprise, the ops room was completely and utterly empty save for the Founder.

“Where is everyone?” she asked, dreading the answer.

“Oh, I gave them all the night off. I wanted to talk to you in private,” said the Founder. “You can relax, dear girl. I know you’ve come up through ranks through a reign of terror. The notion of injecting a breakout with a tracer and then releasing him must seem unbelievable.”

Sierra was aghast. “A tracer? My God. I…I should’ve guessed. I mean, the serum was orange, not a weird green. I do apologize.” But inside, Sierra was panicking. Maybe she’d watched too much TV, but what if that tracking device also doubled as some sort of kill switch and the Founder just hadn’t yet admitted it?

The Founder’s face softened. “To be fair, I didn’t exactly tell this upfront, now did I? The tracking device lodges itself in the cerebellum and sends radio waves that my network monitors. Can I trust you with another secret, Sierra?” When Sierra nodded, the Founder continued, “While your uncle was stripping our kind of their powers, I was operating my own pet project.”

Sierra nodded as she glued her eyes to the screen, which was currently project a map of the island with countless blinking red lights. “So, I gathered. What is all this?”
“Each light represents a paranormal tagged and released. Many by Ultra before Jedikiah’s paranoia set in,” explained the Founder. “There are over two hundred in this city alone.”

Two hundred. Two hundred paranormals all under Ultra’s control. Sierra didn’t like the sound of that one bit. “And what’s Ultra’s plan for them, exactly?”

“Oh, it’s not what Ultra has planned for them. It’s what you are going to do,” said the Founder, as Sierra narrowed her eyes in disbelief. “You, Sierra, will lead them all one day to a place known as the Refuge. If you follow me, I’ll show you how.”

Sierra nodded and then followed the Founder to an off-limits section of Ultra.

“You must wonder how I lost sight of the horrors being committed under my own nose, even committing some of them against my own blood,” said the Founder. He held a key card to a lock and it glowed green, causing the door to seal and hiss as it opened. “The answer, Sierra, is this.”

Sierra’s blood ran cold as she stood before the Machine that her father had risked death to destroy. It was completely rebuilt. Padding for a human to be strapped in like one being crucified stood in the center of a large cylinder with four small bent pillars standing around it. It was all glowing bright orange and blue. It looked like something out of Sierra’s nightmares.


“Yes, well, your father actually built the original. He was to serve as it’s…engine, battery, for lack of a better term,” explained the Founder.

“To do what, exactly?”

“Amplify his powers,” said the Founder. “In theory, it was to make them strong enough for him to bring all paranormals with him to the Refuge.”

Sierra didn’t believe it. Maybe that’s how her father’s work had started, but clearly something else had happened, something big enough and horrible enough that Roger had forsaken any dreams of the Refuge in order to protect both humans and the Tomorrow People from the Founder’s lunacy.

“If that’s true then why did my father blow it up?” asked Sierra.

“Indeed, indeed. Finding the Refuge is in the best interest of both species. Homo sapiens and homo superiors cannot coexist in peace. Unfortunately, your uncle poisoned your father’s mind against me,” said the Founder.

Sierra seriously doubted that had actually happened. She had seen Jedikiah’s memory. Roger had been the one arguing against the Founder, not her father. Roger had been the one warning Sierra not to trust the Founder from the very beginning. She’d believed it then and she believed it now. Bathory was trying to play her like a fiddle and it wasn’t working, but she couldn’t let the Founder know.

“Why would Jedikiah do that?” asked Sierra.

“Simple. Your uncle doesn’t want this war to end because without it, he’s nothing. You’re not sure if you can trust me. Understandable, given how Jedikiah’s poisoned your mind too. But unless your son develops all your powers one day, for the moment, you are the only one who can lead us to the Refuge. After years of toiling, I have finally rebuilt the Ark that will sail us to our destiny. But we must launch before your uncle interferes.”
Sierra hesitated. This sounded too good to be true, which meant it was probably a load of crap. But nevertheless, if this Machine amplified her power to stop time and if it brought her to a near-death experience, then maybe, just maybe, she could use it to reach Limbo and bring her father back.

“Okay,” she said, finally. “What do I have to do?”

The Founder looked pleased with her response. “What I want you to do is a little test run, find out if you can do what my daughter could not. You see, the Machine uses your power to stop time and open the portal. Godspeed, Miss Jameson.”

Sierra nodded and swallowed painfully. This was a huge risk but if it paid off, then the ends would justify the means.

Sierra stripped off her shirt and allowed the doctors to strap her into the machine and apply some monitoring equipment just below her collarbone. Sierra then took a deep breath to calm herself before she concentrated hard on her temporal manipulation ability. What happened next was something out of a sci-fi film. The Machine activated and encompassed Sierra in intense, bright blue light and sparks and then Sierra’s eyes rolled into the back of her head as she reentered Limbo.

Sierra entered Limbo once again but this time it was different than what she remembered. This place in limbo was not dark with watery shadows. This was the park in which Sierra and Luca had spent many an afternoon playing together as children. Roger was sitting on a park bench with a fond smile on his face but then his brow wrinkled with puzzlement at the sight of Sierra walking towards him.

“Sierra? Is that you?” asked Roger.

Sierra nodded and then blinked in confusion. “Dad, this isn’t the Limbo I recognize. What’re you doing here?”

“I’m just watching our family play,” said Roger.

Sierra spun around to see her childhood self playing with her little brother, Luca. They were currently taking turns making the remote-controlled toy car zoom in every which way and playfully arguing about whose turn it was. Sierra’s heart clenched as she realized that Roger had somehow twisted Limbo to recreate some of his fondest memories.

“Dad, listen, this isn’t real. That’s not me, not anymore,” said Sierra. She cupped her father’s face in her hands, silently pleading with him to see the truth. “Okay? This is real, this is me. I’m right here.”

Roger became alarmed. “You’re not dead?”

“No,” assured Sierra. “I’m very much alive. It’s just back in the real world. I’m using the Founder’s Machine—”

“The Founder’s Machine?” repeated Roger, horrified. He tightly gripped Sierra’s arms. “Sierra, you have to listen to me very carefully. The Founder—”

But that was as far as Roger got, for Sierra was forcefully pulled out of Limbo and back into the real world.
Unbeknownst to Sierra, Jedikiah was standing guard over Roger’s body and when his brain monitors spiked with activity. That could only mean one thing. Sierra was using the Machine and was in Limbo speaking with Roger.

“Oh, you stupid, stupid girl,” whispered Jedikiah, horrified.

Sierra may have just unknowingly damned them all.

This was not good.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son and daughter, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

After Sierra used the Machine, she was dead tired and suffering from a nose bleed and according to the Founder, she had been unsuccessful in bringing anyone to the Refuge but her test results were far more promising than that of Cassie’s. So, the Founder ordered Sierra home for some rest and the promise of further training so that they could achieve the results they wanted.

When Sierra returned to Ultra the next morning, she was surprised to find the bullet-proof glass lining the door to the Machine’s chamber severely damaged with dried blood on it as well as several bullet casings littering the floor. Before she could question what had happened, an urgent meeting was called in the ops room and when she arrived, she found the Founder in a very dark mood.

“Last night, Doctor Jedikiah Price tried to sabotage the very organization he labored all these years to build,” said the Founder, as he paced around the room.

_Oh, crap. No_, thought Sierra. Jedikiah must’ve found out that she’d used the Machine to speak with Roger and tried to destroy it, only to fail miserably and now Ultra was going to be gunning for his head and then they’d find her father’s. This was bad.

“He assaulted two of our employees, one human and one of my kind,” continued the Founder. “No one here is safe from his deranged reprisals. I had hoped that we would be able to forget about your former superior and his brutal regime.”

“To be fair, sir, those who forget history are doomed to repeat it,” said Sierra, respectfully.

“Fair point indeed, Miss Jameson. Now, that being said, I had hoped that we could recommit to the study and protection of paranormals. But he’s left us no choice. I want Doctor Price brought to me and brought to justice! Dismissed!”

And with that, everyone returned to their business and some organizing a tac team as well as a search for Sierra’s uncle.

“Sierra, please come to my office,” whispered the Founder.

Sierra nodded. “Right away, sir.”

_John, the Founder just call open season my uncle. Jedikiah tried to break in and destroy the Machine but he messed up, said Sierra. He could lead them straight to my dad’s body. Have Cara_
and Russell watch the kids. I need you to protect Jedikiah and my father if this goes south.

I'm on it, replied John.

Sierra bit back a sigh of relief as she joined the Founder in his office. The man seemed on edge, and who could blame him? But at the same time, his face was softening and he also seemed apologetic if not sympathetic.

“Listen, I just wanted to say that I realize Jedikiah’s arrest might be difficult for you.”

Sierra scoffed. “Yeah, not as much as you might think. The man preyed on me when I was at my most vulnerable, coerced me into joining Ultra. Trust me, there’s not much love lost between us.” Although she and Jedikiah were reluctant allies now, Sierra still cared little for the man as she was having a hard time seeing past all the crap he’d put her through.

The Founder nodded understandingly. “Well, nevertheless, he’s still your uncle. And after losing your father and now—”

“I’d like another chance at that Machine of yours, please, sir,” interrupted Sierra, as politely as she could manage.

The Founder looked pleased at this but still chuckled. “Well, I admire your zeal but if you’re to do so, there’s one skill that you must master, one that only you can master.”

Sierra sighed. Of course he was referring to the one skill that Sierra had never been able to properly control, the ability she’d inherited from her father. “Stopping time, temporal manipulation.”

The Founder nodded. “Now, as I understand, you’ve only stopped time under moments of great emotional duress, never by will. Correct?”

Sierra nodded. “The first time it happened, I was being attacked by McCrane and thought I was going to die. I’ve never been able to control it like I have my other abilities, though not for lack of trying on my part.” Sierra had attempted more than once to stop time when she wasn’t a basket case of stress and nerves but all her attempts had been fruitless. “But what does that have to do with the Machine?”

“You see, the Machine opens a portal to a world in which only our kind can live,” explained the Founder. “Stopping time allows you to pass through the threshold.”

Sierra bit her lip. “If I get there, is it possible for me to come back? To collect a few irreplaceable belongings, I mean?” she added, quickly. She didn’t believe the Founder for one second, but if the Machine could help her reach Roger and bring him home, then Sierra was prepared to take a few risks to herself to do it.

The Founder chuckled as he nodded. “I can’t imagine why you’d want to leave Paradise, even for a few worldly possessions but yes, I believe it will be possible. Are you ready to begin your training?”

Sierra nodded and then a few minutes later, she found herself in the midst of a rather difficult training regime. One that was far more difficult than all the others she’d gone through since she’d first joined Ultra. At that moment, she was punching the living daylights out of a black speed bag while the Founder and Hilton watched.

“You must hone all your powers since they’re all connected. Meaning when you strengthen one
ability—” The Founder grabbed Sierra’s forearm and pulled it down, forcing her to use her telekinesis to keep the small bag swinging. “—you strengthen all of them.”

_I thought you said this was going to be difficult_, said Sierra, smugly.

The Founder positively beamed with delight. “Oh! Two abilities at once. That’s very good! Now, try attacking me and teleporting at the same time.”

_You’ve got it._

The Founder then cried out in pain as Sierra invoked her biological manipulation ability and then simultaneously teleported behind the Founder. Though she was successful in using four powers at once, it had not occurred without a side-effect, namely Sierra’s exhaustion and the churning of her stomach. She clutched the Founder’s shoulder tightly from being to keep from falling to her knees and she cast a warning glance in Hilton’s direction when the blond man was about to run to her side. Hilton was supposed to be training Sierra, not coddling her and if the Founder thought that wasn’t the case, he’d switch trainers on her, which Sierra didn’t want.

Thankfully, Hilton took the hint but he did pour Sierra an ice-water, which he gave to Sierra only after Sierra healed the Founder, after which the Founder began to applaud Sierra’s progress before he helped her to sit on the bench.

_“Four powers at once! Excellent work, Sierra! Excellent!”_ praised the Founder, proudly. “Keep it up but don’t overdo it. Our people can’t afford to lose you.”

Sierra nodded breathlessly as she slowly sipped her water. She hoped she would improve because she didn’t care to feel again what she’d felt just now.

“Well, I have other business to attend to, so I’ll leave you both to it,” said the Founder, smiling as he departed. “I’ll check in later.”

As soon as the Founder was gone, Hilton rounded on Sierra. “Sierra, what the _hell_? Why are you killing yourself when you’ve got a family to think of? And don’t say that’s not what just happened, because I could feel the strain of you using _four powers at once_ and it was brutal. So, ‘fess up and tell me what is so damned important!”

Sierra sighed after taking another gulp of water. “The Founder has a Machine and he needs me for it to work. I can’t explain any further than that, yet, Hilton, I’m sorry. But it’s for my family that I have to do this. Okay? Just trust me.” She wanted to take Hilton into her confidence but she knew now wasn’t the time to do so. The less Hilton knew, the safer he would be from the Founder.

Hilton looked disgruntled at this but he didn’t demand more answers. “Okay, fine. But you don’t have to burn yourself out on the first day. Rome wasn’t built in a single day and you’re not going to master this insanity in one day either. So, I’m going to keep helping you do this but we’ll do it at a slower pace so you can still go home to your son. Fair enough?”

Sierra nodded gratefully at Hilton. “Okay.”

Hilton smiled and patted her shoulder. “Come on, Jameson. You do well enough, I’ll buy the fizzy waters myself tonight if you’re not otherwise occupied.”

“Deal,” agreed Sierra.

And with that, they resumed Sierra’s training.
Meanwhile, Jedikiah was half-asleep, slumped against the railing lining Roger’s cryo-chamber when suddenly, someone teleported into the room. Acting quickly, Jedikiah grabbed his shot gun and cocked it, only to relax when he saw the intruder was John.

“Hey, hey!” said John, quickly, as he held up his hands. “It’s me.”

Jedikiah heaved a sigh relief. “Oh, thank God. Sorry.”

“It’s okay.” John descended the stairs and joined Jedikiah’s side. “Sierra called. Told me about your little break-in at Ultra. What the hell were you thinking?”

“Desperate times, John. Desperate times,” replied Jedikiah. Breaking into Ultra had been foolish, if not completely stupid and reckless on Jedikiah’s part, but he wasn’t about to let the Machine that his little brother had risked death to destroy to become active again.

“More desperate than you think. Sierra’s found out she can use the Machine to reach Roger and bring him home. She’s working on enhancing her powers to make that possible as we speak,” said John. “Now, I did talk to her. She’s onboard. But you have got to stop this insanity and be more careful, okay? The Founder’s put a bounty on your head. Sierra will try and keep them off your scent but she can only work miracles for so long.”

“Fine, but I am not leaving Roger. We swore that whatever happened to us, we’d go together,” said Jedikiah, stubbornly. He knew it was insane to stay, that if Sierra was right, they weren’t safe and they were in horrible danger but Jedikiah refused to ever leave Roger behind. “If Roger ever returns, you’ll be the first person he thanks.”

“I figured you’d say that,” said John. He reached into his pocket and pulled out two wrapped subs he’d swiped from the local Subway. He even showed Jedikiah his gun, which was holstered at John’s waist. “And that’s fantastic, but I’ve just spent the last eight years in hell, hating myself for not saving Roger’s life. So, I will stay and help you guard Roger, but it’s going to take a lot more than apology. We clear on that?”

Jedikiah nodded understandingly as he tore into his sandwich. “Crystal. Make yourself, comfy, kid. We’re in for a long night.”

On that, John could agree.

Sierra groaned as she sank into the couch at her apartment and switched on her favorite game show.

She wanted just a half-hour to herself before she joined her kids at the Lair. Every last muscle and cell in her body was screaming with agony and exhaustion. It’d been a very hard day of training and she was more than ready to relax and let it all disappear for a few hours before it
started up again the next morning.

Sierra?

Sierra bit back a groan. Was she never going to get a minute’s peace and quiet? What is it, Cara?

John just reported in. Jedikiah’s not leaving your father’s side, said Cara.

Yeah, I figured he would. That’s why I warned John about the bounty on Jedikiah’s head. For now, I need them to protect my father’s body. But at least my father’s safe now that he’s got two bodyguards who can kill if it situation demands it, which I really hope it won’t, said Sierra.

I agree. All the same, I’m keeping the kids close by me. I know you want them to be safe, said Cara.

Before she could reply, Sierra’s cell phone then went off with a text from the Founder, asking if he could come to Sierra’s apartment for a moment to speak with her.

Damn it. The Founder’s calling me. Cara, I have to go, said Sierra.

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra closed off the connection and quickly texted back to the Founder. A few minutes later, Sierra felt a teleport and then there was a knock on the door and when Sierra opened it, the Founder was on the other side.

“Sorry to disturb you like this, Sierra, but I had something I needed to speak with you about. But before we go into that, where’s your offspring?” asked the Founder, as he glanced around the room.

“With a friend’s at a sleepover,” said Sierra. “I wanted a little peace and quiet time to myself. You understand.” It wasn’t a lie as Robbie and Charlotte were with a friend, Cara and Russell, and they were sleeping over at the Lair until Sierra could guarantee their safety topside.

The Founder nodded. “Anyway, I wanted to congratulate you on all the progress you made today. The reports Agent Cole gave me were quite promising.”

“Thank you. But I get the feeling you’re not here to pat me on the back,” said Sierra, hesitantly.

Why had the Founder come to her apartment? He never had before.

“You’re right, I didn’t. I came to talk to you about the Tomorrow People, John and Cara. I assume you’re still in contact. The only reason I ask is because I want to formalize our ceasefire,” said the Founder. “The shadow war between Ultra and paranormals is over.”

Sierra nodded. “Of course, sir. I’ll speak with them right now if you’d like.”

“I would but, uh, I would prefer to speak with them myself,” said the Founder. “Convince them of my intentions.”

Sierra bit down on her lip to prevent a skeptical snort. “I understand, but, uh, the last time John was in Ultra, you tortured him and the last time Cara was in Ultra, she almost had her powers stripped. They won’t be very keen to speak with you at Ultra. You should probably meet on neutral ground. I would be willing to host a meeting here at my apartment.”

“That’s very kind of you to offer, Sierra, but unfortunately, I would prefer to meet on my own
turf, so to speak,” said the Founder, gruffly. “And as for John and Cara, they’re not entirely faultless either. John left your father to die alone in the streets rather than save him and Cara orchestrated your uncle’s abduction and interrogation. War is a nasty business, Sierra, and the quicker we put an end to it, the better. I’d like their answer as soon as possible.”

“Of course, sir. Give me an hour to unwind and then I’ll talk with them and get back with you before the night’s over,” assured Sierra.

The Founder nodded, clearly pleased with Sierra’s answer. “That would be excellent, Sierra. But Sierra, there’s one other thing. If I were to discover anyone aiding Jedikiah, helping your uncle evade capture, I would be *supremely* disappointed. Understood?”

Sierra understood the Founder’s thinly veiled threat easily and she nodded before she saw the Founder out of her apartment.

XXX

A few minutes later, Sierra went to the Lair and informed Russell and Cara of the Founder’s demands for a formal meeting to formalize the ceasefire between Ultra and the Tomorrow People. As expected, Cara was completely skeptical and Sierra shared in her friend’s feelings.

“The Founder can’t be that interested in a peace summit if he’s already making threats,” said Cara.

Sierra shrugged. “He wants Jedikiah’s head on a spike. Technically, my uncle did betray him.”

“Tell me you’re not betting on the Founder. I mean, as much as I hate both those bastards, better the devil we know, right?” said Russell.

“I agree, which is why I’m not betting on the Founder. But what I *am* betting on is what’ll happen if one of you doesn’t meet with the Founder, our deaths or worse,” said Sierra. “And honestly, both the Founder and Jedikiah—”

“Can suck it,” replied TIM.

Unaccustomed to hearing such talk come from TIM, both Sierra and Cara stared in surprise at TIM before narrowing their eyes at Russell, who was obviously the culprit.

“I’ve been teaching him slang,” said Russell, shrugging.

Sierra sighed as she rubbed her eyes. “Look, I don’t trust either one of those bastards and I hate going along with the Founder’s crap. But right now, that damn Machine is only way I have to get my father out of Limbo without dying and that son of a bitch is the only one who can teach me how to master it so that can happen.”

“Fair enough, but here’s my question: your father’s in cryo. If we take him out of that, he still has a bullet in his chest. You can’t be in two places at once,” reminded Cara.

“Fortunately, the kids have taken after me in that regard. Given Roger’s current state, I think if Robbie and Charlotte both work together, they should be able to keep my father alive until I can get him out of Limbo,” said Sierra. She’d given it a lot of thought and had decided it was the best
course of action to take. She’d also discussed it with Robbie and Charlotte and they’d both agreed to do as their mother had asked without hesitation. “But in any case, none of that will matter unless I get strong enough to use that damn Machine, so for the time being, I think we should play nice with the Founder.”

Cara reluctantly agreed but she still had her reservations. “His offers still sounds too good to be true.”

Sierra nodded in agreement. “I think so too. And that tracker he injected into Monty? I’m terrified that device does a lot more than just act as a GPS system.” She hoped against hope that she was wrong, but knowing their luck, Sierra’s fears would soon be proven justified.

“Sorry to interrupt, but you have a text from your partner at Ultra. It seems you’re late for... fizzies, as he puts it. Is this some new slang I’m not familiar with?” said TIM.

Sierra cursed. Shoot. She’d forgotten that she’d promised to meet Hilton for a friends outing for fizzy water after training as a reward for all her hard work that day.

“Crap. I forgot. I’ve got to run. We’ll talk more later, guys,” said Sierra. She quickly sent out a text to Hilton, apologizing for running late and then she teleported to the bar where she spent the next hour enjoying a nice friendly outing with her friend.

XXX

Meanwhile, Cara was meeting Astrid at the Noodle Shop after receiving a worrying message. Astrid was sitting at the bar, looking anxious while her plate of dumplings went cold and untouched.

“Hey, I got your message. Is everything okay?” asked Cara.

“No, not really. I’m worried sick about Sierra,” admitted Astrid. “I’ve barely seen her lately and the few times I have, she seems more stressed out and upset than I’ve ever seen her before. I’ve tried talking to her, but Sierra seems keener on shutting me out than opening up. She hasn’t blocked me out this much since she first broke out. What’s going on with her? Do you know?”

Cara sighed and then filled Astrid in on everything that Sierra had been going through the last several weeks, starting with Sierra’s discovery of Roger’s frozen body to Jedikiah’s secrets, to Sierra’s failed assassination attempt on the Founder which had led to Cassie’s death, to the Founder’s new regime at Ultra, to Sierra hiding her children at the Lair for their own safety and protection, Jedikiah’s outing of Sierra’s secret to Luca and Sierra’s plans to use the Founder’s Machine to restore Roger’s life. When Cara finished, Astrid was shocked and on the verge of tears.

“Good God. No wonder she’s been so distant. I’m amazed she hasn’t cracked with that pressure she’s under,” said Astrid.

Cara nodded in agreement. Sierra certainly stronger in more ways that most people gave her credit for and it showed. “I’m sure she doesn’t mean to shut you out, she’s just scared and feels cornered. Hey, did you ever meet one of Sierra’s ex-boyfriends, Hilton Cole?”

Astrid nodded and made a face. “Hilton? Oh yeah. The guy was a total waste of space. Stood her up more than once and was a jerk. I’m just thankful Sierra dumped his sorry ass. Why?”
“Well, he’s Sierra’s partner at Ultra and apparently, he’s changed for the better. More than that, they’re friends now and Sierra trusts him,” said Cara.

Astrid nearly choked on her drink. “Are you kidding me? After all that jerk put her through?” Astrid had spent more than one night with Sierra watching a movie over a bowl of ice-cream after Hilton stood her up on their dates or whenever he’d taken her for granted. “Why does she suddenly trust him?”

“It’s not sudden. Sierra gave him hell the first few weeks he worked with her at Ultra. Nearly killed him from my understanding.”

“Good!” spat Astrid.

“But apparently, this leopard’s changed its spots,” finished Cara. “And apparently, Hilton still loves Sierra and wants to keep her safe.”

Astrid shook her head in disbelief. “How can she trust him?”

“That’s what I’ve been saying.” Cara trusted Sierra’s judgment, but she didn’t trust Hilton. “But you know how stubborn Sierra gets and while she does trust him to some extent, she’s not giving him the full story. Besides, despite my misgivings, Hilton’s done nothing to justify my distrust. Yet.”

“Yet, being the key word there. I mean, what if he’s using her?” asked Astrid, worriedly.

Cara shrugged. “I can’t prove it.”

Astrid’s brow wrinkled as she frowned. “Why don’t you read his mind to find out if his intentions are true? If he’s actually serious about what he says?”

Cara sighed. “It’s not that simple. Hilton’s a very powerful telepath. I’d have to get him to lower his defenses, get him alone and away from Ultra.”

Astrid’s face brightened at this. “Well, I know for a fact that Sierra keeps a spare suppression bracelet on her person at all times for emergencies and you’ve got an underground hideout.”

Cara smiled brightly at this. “Astrid, you are brilliant.” No wonder Sierra liked Astrid so much. The girl was an absolute genius. If this plan worked, then the benefits would be glorious.

XXX

Sierra had just tucked Robbie and Charlotte into bed for the night when Cara suddenly returned to the Lair in full business mode.

“Let’s say I do agree to the summit with your new boss. I mean, it is the best way to test if the Founder’s truce is real, right?” said Cara, briskly.

Sierra blinked in surprise, taken aback by this as she hadn’t expected Cara to consent to the meet. “Uh, yeah. Sure.”

“All righty then, which lamb are we sending to the slaughter?” asked Russell.
“You,” said Cara, without hesitation. “Tomorrow night.”

Russell stared. “How now?”

Cara smiled sweetly. “Aren’t you always begging to go topside?”

Russell became nervous. “Uh, shouldn’t we send someone more expendable? Besides, who’ll watch the munchkins if I go away?” While he knew nobody minded watching Sierra’s kids and several of the Tomorrow People happily took care of them and were close aunt and uncle figures to them, Sierra generally entrusted Robbie and Charlotte’s care to Cara and Russell when neither she nor John nor Astrid were available.

“Irene and Morgan can take over. Besides, I want to let the Founder know I’m willing to meet him halfway,” said Cara. “But I am not sending one of our top lieutenants without some getting some collateral first.”

Russell felt very flattered by this title and immediately became more amenable to the plan while Sierra frowned.

“What kind of collateral?”


Sierra made a face at Cara. She wasn’t stupid. She knew why Cara had picked Hilton but she wasn’t going to argue about it. Instead, she just shook her head and then went straight to Ultra to make the arrangements for the meeting. This was going to be so much fun. Not!

XXX

Back at Roger’s cryo-chamber, Jedikiah was softly chuckling, which made John frown. They were on the run with bounties on their heads and they were guarding a frozen corpse. What could possibly be even remotely funny?

“What’re you laughing at? What’s so funny?” asked John.

“Sorry, I was just thinking about the last time the three of us were together. I should’ve known better than to play paintball with the two of you against me,” said Jedikiah.

John couldn’t help but laugh a little as well as he thought back to that last happy memory he had of Roger and Jedikiah. They’d all had a rare day off from Ultra and Roger had suggested they play paintball, it had been John’s first time and he’d loved every minute of it. Especially when he and Roger had teamed up against Jedikiah and used their powers to slaughter the blond man with blue and yellow paint. It had been a complete blast.

“I remember,” said John, smiling. He made a mental note to take Sierra and the kids paintballing when they were finally free. “But I’m not here to swap memories.”

Jedikiah became solemn. “Yeah, I know.” He then knelt down beside John. “Listen, John, there’s something that you need to understand. We can’t let Roger get put into that Machine.”

“Because he was supposed to be its engine, it’s a weapon, that’s why he left, I know, I know,”
said John, bored. Sierra had already told John about the Machine and her suspicions of its true purpose, which was not a transportation device to the Refuge no matter what the Founder said. “I know.”

“No, you don’t know and you’re not listening to me. This is very important,” said Jedikiah, sternly. “If it looks like Ultra is going to take us, we may need to destroy Roger ourselves.” He took no pleasure in ending Roger’s life for good but Jedikiah would be damned if he let the Founder use Roger like some kind of battery.

John glared darkly at Jedikiah. “You really have gone crazy, haven’t you? First you want me to save Roger, then you want me to pull the trigger on him myself? Like hell. Sierra would never forgive me and I’d hate myself even more. Like you said, we go out together or not at all!”

Jedikiah sighed and made a face. “It is imperative that the Founder—”

“Will you just shut up?!” exclaimed John, in irritated exasperation. “Seriously, just please be quiet. Sierra is working around the clock to protect Roger and so am I. The Founder is not going to get his hands on her father and no one is going to die. Okay? Now, get some sleep. I’ll keep watch for a few hours and then we can swap.”

Jedikiah could see that John wouldn’t be dissuaded and decided to do as he was told. Plus, he was quite exhausted and some sleep would be highly beneficial if he was going to keep Roger safe.

XXX

The following night, after their shifts at Ultra and after Sierra had filled Hilton in on the plan, she found herself riding the subway with him to the Lair. Sierra was using the travel time to prep Hilton on what to expect and how to behave himself.

“Okay, so unfortunately, you won’t be able to meet my kids because they’re having a sleepover at their godmother’s house and John’s busy with other work. But you should be able to meet everyone else and everyone down there’s pretty cool. Just stay calm and don’t be nervous,” said Sierra.

Hilton gave her a look. “I’m not nervous. Are you nervous?”

“Maybe a little,” admitted Sierra. She was trying to be calm but she was bundle of nerves inside. “I know this isn’t your first time behind enemy lines, but this…it’s just a little more nerve-wracking than I imagined.”

Hilton chuckled and smiled sympathetically. “Well, relax. It’s going to be fine, I promise. So, how did you find a bunch of paranormal rebels anyway?”

Sierra smiled softly. “Well, I didn’t. Not exactly, they found me. But before I go into that, I should probably tell you about me and John.”

“Your son’s father?”

Sierra nodded. “A couple months after we broke up, I started breaking out and as you can guess, it was horrendously bad and I thought I was losing my mind. But then John, who was working for Ultra at the time, found me. We discovered had a telepathic connection and he started
talking to me, told me the truth about what I am and what I could do. He even taught me how to control my powers. The next thing I knew, we fell in love and started dating secretly.”

Hilton laughed and looked amazed. “Only you, Sierra. Only you. So, what happened next?”

“Well, even though he was loyal to Ultra at the time, John was determined to keep me away from them because he’d seen the dark side of the organization. When they started getting too close to discovering our little secret, he chose to be a noble idiot and break up with me to keep me safe. He didn’t know I was pregnant at the time because I decided not to tell him. John later decided to try and fix this but then McCrane happened and then John thought I was dead. Fast forward to when Robbie was seven, I found out that Robbie’s imaginary friend Cara, was actually real and John’s lieutenant.”

Hilton gaped and laughed again. “You’re serious? Your son’s imaginary friend was the second-in-command of the Tomorrow People? Oh, that is rich!”

Sierra laughed as well before playfully punching Hilton in the shoulder. “Shut up. Anyway, Cara tried to recruit me to their cause and just when I was about to say no, John returned to the Lair and then we were reunited. It took time, but eventually, we fixed things between us and the rest is now history. That’s my story.”

Hilton whistled low. “Man, your life is beyond anything I could’ve ever imagined, Jameson. So, anything else I should know before I meet your rebel friends?”

Sierra sighed and nodded before pulling out her spare suppression cuff. “I’m sorry, Hilton, but you have to wear this. Cara’s orders.”

Hilton looked annoyed but didn’t protest as he pulled back his shirt sleeve and held out his wrist, allowing Sierra to place it on him, suppressing his powers. As soon as the subway car was emptied, Sierra teleported Hilton into the training area of the Lair.

“Cara,” said Hilton, with forced politeness.

“Hilton,” said Cara, mimicking his tone.

Russell then entered the room dressed in a nice dark suit and slacks. “Down, you two. Ready, Sierra?”

Sierra nodded and then turned to Hilton. “I’ll be back for you as soon as I can. I’ll try to hurry.”

“No, please, take your time,” said Hilton. “No worries.”

Sierra chuckled and then disappeared with Russell to Ultra, leaving Hilton and Cara alone.

“Can I get you something to drink?” offered Cara.

Hilton snorted as he took a seat and held out his hand. “No, thank you. Why don’t we cut the crap and you just take a look at what it is you want to see?”

Cara feigned ignorance. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, please, Cara. Any idiot can see you don’t trust me or my feelings towards Sierra,” scoffed Hilton. “Well, regardless of what you believe, I love her even if she doesn’t love me back and I’ll do anything to protect her. But if you really doubt me, why don’t you quit being so chicken and take a look in my mind?”
Angered by Hilton’s insults, Cara rose to the occasion and immediately took Hilton’s hand, entering his mind. What she saw didn’t please her one little bit. She saw an old memory of Hilton kissing Sierra on one of their better dates from a long time ago and then comforting moment that they shared during superhero mission. While it convinced Cara of Hilton’s love for Sierra, Cara was unable to learn anything more about Hilton’s intentions or his plans.

Hilton grinned at the look on Cara’s face. “What? Don’t like what you see because it’s not the proof you’re looking for? Got news for you: you won’t find it because it doesn’t exist. I meant what I said and I am a man of my word. Ask Sierra.”

Cara faked a smile as she stood up. “How about that drink?”

She was going to need a strong, several strong ones before the night was over.

XXX

When Sierra arrived at Ultra, she dragged Russell straight to the Founder’s office and knocked on the glass doors to get the man’s attention.

“Mister Bathory? I’d like to introduce Mister Russell Kwon, Cara and John’s emissary. I know it’s not what you were expecting but Cara wanted to speak with Hilton herself and John said he had some urgent business that couldn’t wait,” said Sierra, as she gestured to Russell.

The Founder was surprised but fortunately, he regained his composure and smiled.

“How do you do, sir?” asked Russell, politely as he gave the Founder a small bow.

“Pleasure to meet you, Mister Kwon,” said the Founder, as they shook hands. “Before we begin, would you care for a bite to eat? I hate working on an empty stomach.”

At the sight of the expensive fruit, caviar, wine and even fizzy water for Sierra’s benefit sitting on the table, Russell’s mood brightened considerably and he smiled before nodding and helping himself to the caviar. They then got down to business and started off with a tour of the now-reformed Ultra while the Founder did most of the talking as he wined and dined Russell.

“Doctor Price wanted to neuter paranormals because he was jealous of our powers but as you can see, I run a very different organization,” said the Founder. “It was Jedikiah who prevented peace between our camps, but now with him gone, we can move forward. As we are now. Refill?”

Russell smiled as he held out his glass for more wine. “You read my mind, bro.”

The Founder refilled Russell’s glass and then poured himself a small drink. “To putting the past behind us. We will happily forget all previous indiscretions.”

Russell laughed nervously. “What indiscretions?”

“Well, for starters, the time you teleported into the Capital Bank,” reminded the Founder.

“Ancient history and a total accident, I might add. I was still getting the hang of my powers,” whined Russell, as he pouted. He put down his half-empty wine glass. “Look, Mister Bathory, this truce sounds dope but it wouldn’t be the first time Ultra’s pulled a fast one.”
Russell had a good point, but fearing that the alcohol was loosening Russell’s tongue and was going to cause a problem, Sierra quickly intervened.

“Of course, but I’m sure Mister Bathory can offer you some kind of assurance,” said Sierra, quickly.

The Founder nodded. “Of course. I can offer you my word but if it’s not good enough, I can also offer my watch as a token of my good will.”

Russell’s eyes nearly bulged out of his sockets at the sight of the rose gold BVLGARI BVLGARI watch on the Founder’s wrist, currently valued at over ten thousand dollars and he spilled his wine onto his clean white shirt in the process. He whistled low when the Founder slipped it off his wrist and handed it to Russell as though it were no more than common, cheap commodity.

“That is a very generous offer, sir. Now, what’s this tracer I’ve been hearing so much about?” asked Russell, hesitantly.

“Oh, you mean the ticket to the Refuge? The one you’ve been drinking for the last half-hour?” said the Founder, grinning. He laughed when Russell spat out his wine into his glass and pushed it away as he proceeded to cough. “Calm down. I’m joking. You don’t really think I’d waste a perfectly good ’62 Bordeux with electromagnetic compounds, do you?”

Russell chuckled nervous as he shook his head. “No, of course not. But all the same, I think I’d better stick with the fizzy water for the rest of our little chat. Cara would kill me if I tried to drink and drive, so to speak.”

The Founder nodded understandingly and then they resumed their conversation for another half-hour before calling it a night and then Sierra took Russell back to the Lair. When they arrived, Cara swooped in on them like a hawk, her face tight with worry.

“What the hell took you two so long? Oh, my God, is that blood?” gasped Cara, gesturing to the red stain on Russell’s shirt.

“Calm down. It’s a wine stain,” explained Sierra. “He’s not hurt. I was with him the entire time.”

Cara sighed in relief but still looked worried. “What happened with the Founder?”

“The truce seems legit, but I don’t know, something’s still seriously off with that guy,” admitted Russell. “I want the war to be over, but we can’t let our guards down just because the Founder guy wined and dined me and gave me a sick watch, even if a peace offering’s more than Jedikiah ever gave us.”

Russell wanted the war to be over badly. He wanted to be able to go visit his mother, become a hero full-time with Talia, hit some casinos, maybe start a family and really make something out of his life rather than just spend his good years hiding away like a sewer rat. And he was sure that everyone else down in the Lair had similar feelings.

“So, maybe we should give the truce a trial run. Play nice until we have proof otherwise,” said Sierra. “I know it’s not what you want to hear but I am running out of ideas, Cara. I’m reaching the end of this stupid rope I’ve been given.”

“Yeah, Sierra’s right. Tonight, Ultra and the Tomorrow People will soiree, see if former adversaries can rub elbows,” said Russell.
Cara hesitated. It sounded too good to be true. “The last time we all went topside, three of our own died and Sierra nearly died not only healing everyone but also reviving those who’d fallen.”

Russell and Sierra immediately became solemn and somber as they recalled that terrible night when Ultra had ambushed their night of fun and nearly killed them all. Three of their own had perished and in the process of healing the injured and reviving the three who died, Sierra had overused her powers and almost died herself. It wasn’t a fond memory they liked to recall.

“I know. I won’t let that happen again, I promise,” assured Russell.

Cara hesitated again and then after a few minutes’ consideration, caved. “Keep it small.”

Russell grinned. This was going to be so dope!

XXX

An hour later, a small group of the Tomorrow People were having a blast, dancing and drinking and chatting at a popular club downtown. Everyone was enjoying themselves. Well, almost everyone. Cara was alone in a corner, watching everyone have fun while she wished she could join John in guarding Roger’s body.

“Hey, no, no, no. No wallflowers allowed,” teased Sierra. She grabbed Cara’s hands and pulled her out onto the dance floor. “Even if it’s only temporary, this is a celebration and you’re dancing with me. I’ll even embarrass you, I don’t care.”

“I know you will. Oh, Sierra, please, just stop it!” whined Cara, as Sierra performed a series of rather embarrassing dance moves. “Is this what you do at home in front of the mirror?” But Cara ended up laughing when Sierra grabbed Cara’s hand and twirled her and pulled her back in.

“Look, Cara, I know you don’t want to do this, but I am losing my mind and I need just five minutes to pretend that I am just a normal girl having fun with her best friends. So, please, can we just have five minutes of fun? Please?” begged Sierra.

Upon seeing the weariness and stress in Sierra’s dark green eyes, Cara’s face softened and she smiled softly as she nodded, causing Sierra to smile brightly. The two friends proceeded to dance together like sisters and they were having a great deal of fun until the song changed and Hilton tapped Sierra on the shoulder. He had arrived and so had a small team from Ultra, none of them armed but all were paranormals.

“May I cut in?” asked Hilton.

Sierra nodded. “Sure.” They walked away to a separate corner of the dance floor and watched as Cara and Ultra’s team leader begrudgingly shook hands and then Russell started dancing with one of the female team members. So far, it looked like both sides were playing nice. But how long would it be before the niceties came to an end? “Do you really think this truce is going to work?”

“I hope so. Besides, we found a way to make our friendship work. So can they, if this all pans out,” said Hilton, as they danced. “Besides, I’m more concerned about the daggers that your pal Astrid’s been giving me since I arrived. She won’t stop glaring at me.”

Sierra looked in the direction Hilton was glancing at and sure enough, Astrid was at the bar
chatting with Cara while giving Hilton the evil crusty of death look. Sierra chuckled and shook her head. She wasn’t surprised that Astrid hated Hilton as they’d never once gotten along.

“Well, to be fair, you weren’t exactly the nicest to her or me when we were in school,” reminded Sierra. During the time that Sierra had dated Hilton, he hadn’t always been that nice to Astrid and it hadn’t helped that Astrid had slapped Hilton once or twice when Hilton had stood Sierra up on a date. “So, cut her a little slack.”

Hilton chuckled as he twirled Sierra and then pulled her in close. “I have apologized for all that and to her. More than once, I might add.”

“I know, just…be nice and give Astrid a little time. She’ll come around. I did,” said Sierra. Her watch then beeped, reminding her of the hour. “Well, this has been fun but I’ve got to call it a night.”

Hilton pouted. “So soon? But the fun’s barely started.”

“I know but I want to check on my kids and besides, I’ve got to get up early for training tomorrow.” It wasn’t a lie as Sierra did want to see Robbie and Charlotte before it got much later and she did have more training with the Founder in the morning. She just didn’t mentioned that she also promised John she’d be by with a couple of Loaded Italian sandwiches and drinks. People were waiting for her and she hated to disappoint. “So, I will see you later.”

“Oh, come on. You’re telling me that all this—is less interesting that the Founder’s Machine?”

“No, not at all. But the Machine…” Sierra sighed. She wanted to tell Hilton the truth more than anything but she didn’t dare. Not yet. “Let’s just say it holds the key to something very important I’ve been looking for, for a very long time.”

Hilton clearly didn’t understand, judging by the look on his face but his expression softened. “Then if it’s that important, go ahead and go. Just promise me you’ll buy the drinks when it’s over.”

Sierra chuckled and nodded. “Deal.”

If this all worked out well, Sierra would be more than happy to buy the fizzy drinks next time they went out as friends.

XXX

Meanwhile, John had just woken Jedikiah up so the older man could keep watch while John got some sleep when suddenly, Agent Varras from Ultra teleported into the room. Earlier that day, the Founder had gotten a hold of the rundown buildings in Jedikiah’s ownership and noticed that the building they were hiding Roger in was purchased the same year Roger perished. Thinking it was more than just a coincidence, the Founder had ordered Varras to investigate and to bring a tac team too.

“On your knees! On your knees!” ordered the tactical squad leader.
Acting fast, John let out a yell as he sent out a powerful telekinetic surge, disarming the Ultra agents and sending them all flying painfully into the wall. He and Jedikiah then proceeded to beat the living crap out of the agents, knocking them out before John teleported them away before they had a chance to see Roger’s body. As Jedikiah wrestled with Agent Varras, the Ultra agent happened to see Roger’s body and became confused.

“What the hell is this place?” demanded Varras.

Before Jedikiah could respond, John placed his hands on Varras’s head, causing the man to cry out in pain as John erased the older man’s memories clean. Once that was done, John teleported Varras out of the room and then checked for any lingering agents.

“Are you out of your mind? What is wrong with you? Wiping his mind has only bought us a little time! You should’ve killed him!” yelled Jedikiah. He paced the room as he began to panic. “Oh, my God. Let me think. Reinforcements are going to be here any second. You’ve got to call Sierra and your friends now!”

“And destroy any chance Sierra has of using the Machine to bring her father back? I don’t think so!” argued John. “Not to mention the truce? You have no idea what we’ve sacrificed—!”

“What you’ve sacrificed? What do you think I’VE sacrificed?” yelled Jedikiah. They had no idea of what Jedikiah had given up in order to protect Roger and the rest of his family from the Founder. Not a single clue! “I had a life! I made a promise to protect my brother!”

Right on cue, the sound of a helicopter hovering outside the building caught their attention.

“Right, that’s the tactical squad. Call Sierra right now!” ordered Jedikiah.

John raised his hand. “No. Jed, I’ve got another idea.”

It was a risky, dangerous idea but one they would have to take if they wanted to get out of this alive and bring Roger back to them. And it was the only way.

XXX

Sierra softly hummed to herself as she walked to the building where Roger’s body was hidden. A bag of Arby’s was nestled in her hand and it smelled delicious. She knocked on the door.

“John? John, it’s me. I’ve got dinner.”

But no reply came and it was then that Sierra noticed the busted door and her heart skipped a beat. The meal forgotten, Sierra dropped it and quickly ran into the room and her hand flew to her mouth when she saw that not only was her father’s body missing, but so were John and Jedikiah. What’s more, there was blood and bullet casings everywhere and the machines keeping her father alive and frozen were busted.

“No, no, no!” whimpered Sierra, as tears came to her eyes. “Oh, please no.”

*Cara!* she yelled. *I need you to find John and Jedikiah now!*

*Why? What’s happened?* asked Cara, worriedly.
They’re gone, there’s blood and bullet casings everywhere. Something bad happened. My father’s body isn’t here, said Sierra, after she frantically glanced around the room. This was bad. This was seriously bad. Her phone then beeped with a text from Ultra, requesting her immediate presence. I need to get to Ultra. Cara, please get the kids to the Lair and find my father’s body. Please!

I will. Go! ordered Cara.

Sierra then teleported to Ultra and much to her distress, a number of agents were in the infirmary as the Founder watched over them. He scowled when Sierra arrived.

“Look what the cat dragged in.”

Sierra ignored this. “I got your message. What happened?”

“An unfortunate turn of events. Seems your former lover, John, has been aiding Jedikiah,” said the Founder, in disapproval. “No wonder we haven’t been able to find him. Strange bedfellows despite all that’s transpired between them.”

Sierra gaped, feigning shock and thankfully she succeeded. “I swear to God, I didn’t know. John never said a word and I never dreamed he’d be working with Jedikiah after all that bastard put him through.”

To Sierra’s relief, the Founder believed her. “Yes, I thought so as well. Unfortunately, we weren’t able to capture either of them. They escaped with a parcel. What’s more, that chamber was filled to the brim with cryostasis equipment and if the medical equipment’s anything to go by, there was a frozen body in there just now.”

Oh, God, no. Sierra’s worst fears had been confirmed. Ultra had not only discovered Jedikiah’s hiding place but he knew Jedikiah had been hiding a body. It wouldn’t be long before the Founder found out whose body it was and why.

“What? Why on earth would my uncle do that?” asked Sierra.

“That’s what I’d like to know. Now, your uncle’s a desperate man. Who knows what crazy schemes he’s concocted? But I cannot believe that John would jeopardize the ending of a brutal war for the sake of Jedikiah of all people! Fix this, Miss Jameson. Because if you don’t, then the truce is over and I will be forced to go after John and all of his allies in a way that would make the old Ultra seem meek! Do I make myself clear?” said the Founder, sternly.

Sierra quickly nodded. “As glass, sir.”

She silently prayed she could remedy the situation before it got any worse.

XXX

When Sierra returned to the Lair, she found John waiting for her, looking distraught, which did nothing to allay Sierra’s fears. It only worsened them.

“Sierra. I’m sorry, we were ambushed—”
“What happened?” interrupted Sierra, as tears came to her eyes. “My father’s body. Where is he? John, where the hell is he?”

John cupped Sierra’s face in his hands. “He’s here. He’s here. I’ll take you to him.”

Without another word, John led Sierra to the Lair’s makeshift infirmary where her father’s body lay on a gurney. Jedikiah was frantically piling huge bags of ice onto Roger’s corpse, which still had the bullet in the torso.

“Is he…?”

“Still viable?” finished Jedikiah. “Just barely. We have a limited amount of time to resuscitate him and bring him back. For that to happen, we’re going to need to work together. Okay, Sierra? If you truly want this war to end, you need to bring him back and kill the Founder.”

Sierra nodded and ordered Cara to get Jedikiah more bags of ice then she called for her children. “Charlotte! Robbie! I need you here now!”

Immediately, Charlotte and Robbie teleported into the room. They were looking tired and nervous but no less determined to help out however they could.

“Kids, I need you to use your powers to keep Grandpa Roger alive and get the bullet out of his chest. Do you think you can do that?” asked Sierra, softly.

“Yes, Mom,” they said, in unison.

John got the kids a couple of chairs to stand on and when they were tall enough, they placed their hands onto Roger’s body. As Sierra had predicted, they were able to use their shared power of biological manipulation to heal Roger’s torso of his bullet wound and keep him alive, but as Roger’s consciousness was still in Limbo, Roger didn’t return to them.

Russell then teleported into the Lair, drunk as a skunk with Astrid and Hilton on his arms, much to John’s chagrin.

“Russell, what the hell are you doing? Hilton can’t be down here right now!” said John, sternly. Now was not the time for an Ultra agent, especially one whose loyalties couldn’t be proven, to be in the Lair. Especially not with the Founder out for blood.

“The war is over. We’re all hakuna matata with the Founder,” said Russell, drunkenly as John dropped him onto a couch.

Hilton laughed. “I think you mean kumbaya.”

“Wrong movie,” said Russell, grinning.

“Not the point!” said John, sharply. “We have a situation!”

“What situation?” groaned Russell, as he was dragged to Roger’s body. “What the hell is—? Is that Roger’s—? Oh, wait. Jedikiah’s here. Now, it all makes sense.”

“Yep,” said John, shortly. He pushed Russell away. “Go sober up. We might need you.”

Russell nodded and then disappeared.

Hilton, who’d followed them, was completely stunned as he pulled Sierra aside for a chat alone. “That was your father’s body, wasn’t it? How is this possible? I thought he—”
“I know, I know, it’s complicated,” said Sierra, quickly. “I am so sorry. I never meant to drag you into this. You shouldn’t even be here.”

“Hey, don’t worry about it. I can handle myself and if you’re in danger, then I need to be here helping you stay safe,” said Hilton, gently.

“Sierra?”

Sierra and Hilton looked up upon hearing Jedikiah calling her name and then her uncle emerged with Cara close on his heels.

“No, we are NOT doing that!” argued Cara.

Jedikiah held up a hand, silencing her.

“What’s wrong?” asked Sierra, scared.

“Nothing. Your kids are doing a fine job keeping Roger alive but they can’t keep it up forever and I’m worried your father’s been under too long,” said Jedikiah. He looked scared, a look Sierra was not accustomed to seeing on his face. “We can resuscitate Roger’s body but you were right. I need you to guide Roger back before it’s too late.”

“No, it is too dangerous! He wants to kill you again so you can get your dad!” Cara blurted out.


“My father’s consciousness is trapped in a dimensional plane called Limbo and the only way for me to reach it is if I stop time while I have a near-death experience.” Sierra quickly explained. “But the only way for me to do that is to use the Founder’s Machine. I’ll go now.”

Jedikiah grabbed Sierra’s arm, stopping her. “I figured you’d say that, but Sierra…if you do this, if you power up the Machine, everything your father feared will come to pass.”

“I understand. But if I don’t do this, this war with the Founder will never end, my father will die for good and everything we’ve been fighting for will be for nothing,” said Sierra. She didn’t want to use the Founder’s Machine at all. She wanted to destroy it and kill the Founder, but she couldn’t. Not yet. “I don’t have a choice. I’m sorry, Uncle Jedikiah. But I have to do this.”

“Then I’m going with you,” said Hilton, with determination. “I want to help.”

Sierra immediately shook her head. “No. It’s too dangerous. I can’t make you take that risk.”

“I can’t risk losing you!” argued Hilton.

“Hilton, this isn’t your fight!”

“Wrong. It became my fight the day you gave me a chance and let me work as your partner. Besides, that Machine takes a toll on your system and you have to be strapped in to use it. If I don’t go with you, you won’t make it back,” argued Hilton.

Realizing that he was right, Sierra ceased arguing with Hilton and allowed him to accompany her to Ultra. Thankfully, it was mostly deserted thanks to the Founder ordering a full-out manhunt for Sierra’s uncle. Upon their arrival, Sierra used her telekinesis to blow the lock on the door to smithereens. Once that was done, she shoved off her dress shirt and allowed Hilton to hook her up into the Founder’s Machine.
“You sure you know what you’re doing?” asked Hilton.

“I hope so,” admitted Sierra. If she was wrong about this, then everything was going to go to hell and she wanted to avoid that. But if she was right, then everything was about to get much better.

Hilton didn’t like this but said nothing on the subject. “Okay, listen. I am going to keep a TK shield around the door. Nobody will be able to get in.”

“But if someone does, you get the hell out of here and make sure the Founder never finds my family or the Tomorrow People. Promise me, Hilton,” begged Sierra.

If there was one thing that Hilton prided himself on and Sierra admired about Hilton, it was that he always kept his promises, come hell or high water.

“I promise. Just promise me you’ll come back,” said Hilton.

Sierra nodded and then closed her eyes as Hilton activated the Machine. Just like before, albeit with a great less strain and difficulty than last times thanks to her training with the Founder, Sierra was able to stop time just as she reached a point of near-death and then she slipped into Limbo.

When Sierra arrived in Limbo, she found herself in her childhood home.

Roger was sitting in his favorite arm chair with his favorite family photograph hanging above his head. Sounds of Marla and his children’s laughter echoed throughout the house but Roger wasn’t smiling this time. If anything, he looked worried if not completely scared.

“Daddy?”

“Sierra. Stay back. Something’s different, something’s wrong.” Roger opened up his shirt and felt his torso where the bullet had gone in so long ago. “The bullet wound…it’s gone.”

“Yeah, I know. Robbie and Charlotte healed it and are keeping you alive back in the real world,” explained Sierra.

Roger looked confused. “Charlotte?”

“Yeah, uh, it turns out the Founder used mine and John’s DNA to create her behind my back. We were able to rescue her, thank God. You have a granddaughter in addition to a grandson. Who knew?” said Sierra, smiling. “But that’s not important right now. Dad, listen, you need to come with me. We had to bring you out of cryostasis. I know this feels like home but it’s not real. But what is real is that if we don’t leave in the next few minutes, we’re going lose you forever. So, please, come with me while you still can. Please, Dad, we only have a few minutes.”

Roger hesitated but then took Sierra’s hand and let her lead him out of Limbo, but then Sierra fell to the ground, crying out as horrendous pain shot through her body.

“Sierra, what’s happening? What’s wrong?” asked Roger, worriedly.

Sierra groaned she clutched her father’s arm. “It’s the Machine. It was the only way for me to get here but it’s killing me. You have to on without me, Dad. Go before it’s too late.” She didn’t want to die but she didn’t think she had the strength to go on and if she died bringing back her father then so be it.”
Roger looked horrified. “No. No, I won’t let this happen. I am not going to bury you, you hear me? What about all those people waiting for us back home? John? Your kids, Robbie and Charlotte? Your mother? Luca? Astrid? You’ve fought so hard for me, fight for them, to get back home to them.” He had a look of renewed determination on his face as he wrapped Sierra’s arm around his neck and helped her to stand. “Come on, baby girl. You’ve carried me long enough, let me carry the rest of the way. Let’s go home, together.”

Sierra smiled despite her pain and limped alongside her father out of Limbo and into the sunlight.

Sierra gasped painfully as she returned to reality just as the Machine stopped. Her whole body ached like nobody’s business, her head was pounding with the worst migraine she’d ever had, it was difficult to breathe and her nose was dripping blood down her torso, but she didn’t care. She was alive and she’d just saved her father’s life. A little pain was worth it.

Hilton quickly unlocked Sierra’s bonds and carefully lowered her out of the Machine as she clutched him for dear life. She felt very weak and she would need Robbie’s help to recover from this.

“Hey, careful, careful. I’ve got you, Sierra. Just take it easy. I’m going to get you out of here in a sec, I promise,” said Hilton, soothingly.

“Thank you,” she whispered. If it hadn’t been for Hilton, this might not have been possible. He’d taken a huge risk, going up against the Founder for her and she was grateful for it.

“My pleasure,” said Hilton, smiling. “Besides, everyone back in the Lair believes in you and your dad. So do I. How could I do anything less?” He quickly cleaned up the blood and after helping Sierra get her shirt on, he teleported them back to the Lair’s makeshift infirmary.

“Sierra!”

Upon seeing her in her weakened state, John took Sierra into his arms and kept an arm around Sierra’s waist to keep her steady.

“John, I’ll be fine. What about my father? Did it work?” asked Sierra, fearing the worst.

To Sierra’s immense relief and joy, Jedikiah, who’d had his back to her, turned around and smiled happily at her.

“Did it work? Roger’s got a heartbeat and his brainwaves are returning to normal. Have I mentioned how glad I am your kids take after you? They were instrumental in saving Roger,” said Jedikiah, as happy tears slid down his cheeks. “And so were you, Sierra. You did it. You saved him. Now, we just wait until we wakes up.”

“And he will wake up, won’t he?” asked Sierra.

Jedikiah nodded. “I may not know when exactly, but it’s only a matter of time before he opens his eyes. You should be damn proud of yourself, kiddo. And that goes for you too, John. You can breathe again. Roger owes you a lot.”

John’s eyes filled with tears. “I just can’t get my head around it. The last time we spoke, I was holding him in my arms as he begged me to let him die so I could save Sierra from McCrane. I’ve felt so much guilt ever since.” Though John knew he’d been fulfilling Roger’s dying wishes at the
time, John had always hated himself for leaving Roger alone to perish. Now, he had a chance to be free of that guilt and grief after so long.

“Well, considering that both father and daughter are alive, you can finally absolve yourself,” said Jedikiah, gently. “How does that feel?”

John sighed as he shrugged. “I don’t know. Ask me again when he wakes up.”

“Fair enough,” said Jedikiah. “And who knows? Maybe then you’ll finally forgive me.”

John snorted. “Don’t push it.”

After a few more minutes talk in which Jedikiah promised to watch Roger for a few hours so Sierra could sleep, John took Sierra to their kids to be healed of the damage the Machine had done to her body and then together, the four of them fell into a deep sleep, not knowing what tomorrow was going to bring.

XXX

Meanwhile, the Founder was meeting with Hilton.

“You were right. Sierra’s father is alive,” said Hilton.

Unbeknownst to Sierra, Hilton had been approached to act as the Founder’s double-agent some weeks ago. He’d been instructed to gain Sierra’s trust, discover her secrets and report his findings back to the Founder. Sierra had no clue as to any of this as she’d never once read Hilton’s mind and nor had she ever been given reason to suspect that Hilton was anything less than her friend and partner, even if he could be a jerk sometimes.

The Founder grinned, thrilled with this information. “Right on time. And you’re sure Sierra has no idea of the bit she’s got in her mouth? That she has no idea she’s been led exactly where I want her?” The only reason that Sierra had been able to use the Machine to restore her father was because the Founder had guessed her actions and allowed it as he needed Roger for the Machine and his plans.

Hilton proudly shook his head. “None.”

“Excellent. Well done. I’ll let you know when it’s time for our next move,” said the Founder.

Hilton nodded and then hesitantly asked, “Don’t forget our deal. You swear that this will keep Sierra and her family safe?”

When Hilton had been approached to spy on Sierra, he’d only consented after the Founder had sworn up and down that it was the only way to protect Sierra and her family. Although Hilton knew that Sierra was never going to love Hilton, he still loved her very much and it was because of that love that he was willing to do whatever it took to keep Sierra and her family safe. In Hilton’s delusion, he didn’t realize that the Founder was, in fact, playing Hilton like a fiddle.

“Oh, of course, of course,” assured the Founder. “Believe me, Agent Cole, this is the best course of action for Miss Jameson’s safety and her family’s. I’ll keep my word, I can assure you.”
Relieved by this, Hilton nodded and then went home, fully believing that he was doing the right thing for everyone. Especially Sierra.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son and daughter, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

Thirty-six hours followed Roger’s return from Limbo.

Thirty-six agonizingly long and anxiety-ridden hours. Roger was watched constantly in shifts by Jedikiah, John, Cara and Sierra. It had been over a day a half since Sierra had guided Roger home from Limbo but her father still had yet to awaken. When she wasn’t watching Roger, Sierra was trying to find ways to occupy herself so she wouldn’t lose her marbles, such as playing with her kids or running errands for supplies that the Tomorrow People were low on.

At that moment, Sierra was in TIM’s room and was attempting to braid her hair but kept starting over because she couldn’t get three equal strands, which frustrated her more than it should’ve, but it wasn’t surprising given how little she’d slept since she’d returned from Limbo.

“There you are. Want me to help you with that?” asked John, as he poked his head in.

Sierra nodded and took a seat as she allowed John to brush and braid her hair. “You should get some sleep. You’ve barely slept since you came back.”

“I’m fine, John. Besides, I’m used to long shifts,” said Sierra.

“Well, there is a pool going around about who’s going to crash first, me or you, and I’d rather it not be me,” said John, chuckling, as he tied off Sierra’s braid.

Sierra chuckled as she turned to face her boyfriend and then she cuddled up to him. “I know, I should rest, I just…I just feel like if I close my eyes again, this time, it’s going to be another dream. Again.”

John wrapped his arm around her and began gently rubbing Sierra’s arm to soothe her. “He’s going to pull through, Sierra. I promise. Also, not to add to your stress, but have you told Marla and Luca about your dad? I thought you were going to go topside to talk to them this morning?”

Sierra shook her head. “I chickened out. I didn’t know what the hell to say, so I sent Astrid. Cowardly, I know, but I didn’t know what else to do. I mean, how do you even begin to explain to your estranged mother and your not-so-estranged human brother that the man who seemingly walked out on them only did so to protect them or that he was dead for eight years and that I brought him back?” Not to mention, Sierra had no idea how she was even going to begin to explain to Roger about her estranged relationship with Marla. “It’s a lot to wrap your head around and I just…”
“You don’t have to explain, I understand,” said John, gently as he rubbed her arm.

Sierra sighed as she rested her head in the crook of John’s shoulder. “I’m scared, John. I’m scared he’s not going to wake up. If he doesn’t, then what the hell have I been doing all this time?” She’d fought so hard for so many months, not just for their survival and their children’s safety, but her first mission had always been to find and restore her father to their lives. If Sierra had failed in that, then what the hell was she supposed to do?

John opened his mouth to reply but then a loud clamoring of voices and the sight of people running past the door caused them both to stand up in anxiety. Cara poked her head in, looking frantic.

“You two better get in here.”

Fearing the worst, Sierra and John ran in the direction of the gathering crowd only to stop in their tracks when they saw Rogers wearing a loose-fitting shirt and pants, sitting up on his cot, prying off the monitoring equipment he’d been hooked up to. He was not only up and about, but he was also smiling warmly at the sight of them.

“Sorry. Didn’t mean to scare you,” said Roger.

“Daddy,” sobbed Sierra, as she wrapped her arms around Roger. She couldn’t believe this was really happening. All her dreams had not fully prepared her for this moment, all she knew was that she never wanted it to end. She took a moment to breathe in her father’s scent, it was just like she remembered, which made the moment all the sweeter. “You’re home!”

Roger tightened his grip on his daughter as he buried his face in her hair. “I’m home, baby girl. And I’m never leaving you again, I promise.” He pulled back to cup Sierra’s face and he gently wiped away her happy tears. “I am so, so damn proud of you, Sierra. Thank you so much for bringing me back.”

“It was a team effort,” said Sierra. As much as Sierra would’ve loved to take sole credit for Roger’s return, she couldn’t. If it hadn’t been for the Tomorrow People, her family and friends and even Hilton, Sierra never would’ve been able to restore Roger. “Listen, Mom and Luca aren’t here, but they’re ready for you at home whenever you’re ready.”

Sierra had gotten a text from Astrid, explaining that Marla and Luca had been shocked beyond belief about the full story about Roger’s disappearance and his return, but they still wanted Roger in their lives again, despite how much of an adjustment it was going to be. Sierra had also discussed it at length with Cara and John and despite Cara’s misgivings, had agreed to let Roger leave the Lair long enough for him to have at least one family dinner before they took further action against the Founder.

Roger looked thrilled at this, if not a little anxious. “That sounds perfect. But until then, can I finally meet my grandkids that I’ve been hearing so much about?”

Sierra laughed as she nodded. “Yes, yes, of course. Kids?”

Right on cue, Charlotte and Robbie teleported into the room and they looked nervous but excited as they looked at the face of their maternal grandfather for the very first time in their lives.

“Dad, these are your grandchildren, my and John’s kids. Charlotte and Robbie,” said Sierra. “Kids, this is your grandfather. Grandpa Roger.”

“Hi, Robbie, Charlotte. I’ve heard so much about you. It’s great to finally meet you. Wow, you
look so much like your parents did when they were your age,” said Roger, smiling as he shakily knelt down to their level. “Mind giving your old grandpa a hug?”

Robbie and Charlotte smiled and then they hugged Roger tightly as they squealed in delight. This went on for several moments until Roger looked up and spotted John, who had kept his distance and was watching with tears in his eyes.

“John…” breathed Roger. He shakily rose to his feet and walked across the room until he stood face-to-face with John for the first time in eight years.

John’s body shook with grief and fear. “Roger, I’m so sorry. I—”

“No,” said Roger, shaking his head as he touched John’s face. Tears were pooling in the older man’s eyes. “You were only doing what you were supposed to do. You did as I asked, you saved my daughter and you protected our people. You have nothing to be sorry for. The burden my brother and I placed on you is…God, I’m so sorry, John. Can you ever forgive me?”

John’s only response was to pull Roger into a tight, loving embrace that was long overdue and it answered Roger’s question in every way.

When they eventually broke apart, Roger looked around for a familiar face but didn’t see it. “Where’s Jedikiah?”

“Dude skipped out a little while ago. Picked a hell of a time to leave,” reported Russell.

Roger looked disappointed at not having his older brother there but said nothing on it as he turned back to Sierra with a serious look on his face.

“So, tell me how you did it. How did you bring me back? Back in Limbo, you mentioned the Machine. Is the Founder still alive?” asked Roger, concerned.

Sierra regretfully nodded. She hated that their moment of happiness was marred by the threat of the Founder but there was no escaping it. “For now, but thankfully he doesn’t know that you’re back. Dad, if we’re to have any kind of Refuge, simply destroying the Machine and disappearing won’t work this time. We have destroy it and kill the Founder.”

Roger still looked worried but he nodded in agreement. Looking back, Roger’s initial plan to stop the Founder had been foolhardy at best. He should’ve taken further lengths to protect not only his family but also all mankind from the Founder’s lunacy.

“But not right this minute,” said Sierra, firmly. “For now, you need a couple hours to recover and then we’re going to have dinner at my apartment. It’s safe. Not even the Founder will go there without my permission unless he wants a bullet in his head.” Sierra didn’t trust the Founder to keep his word but after she’d installed a new security system and explained the full details about how lethal it could be to intruders to the Founder, she trusted that he wanted to keep his head at least.

Roger sighed in relief and smiled. “That sounds great. Could you do me a favor, though? Pick up the ingredients for my chicken parmesan?”

Sierra smiled as she nodded. Her father’s chicken parmesan had always been one of Sierra’s favorites growing up and she recalled the recipe perfectly. “Sure, Dad. In the meantime, why don’t you spend time with John and the kids and I’ll take you to my apartment when I’m done?”

Roger agreed and then while he started spending time with John and the kids, Sierra grabbed her purse and was about to go topside when she got a telepathic call from Hilton.
Hey, stranger, where’ve you been? I haven’t seen you in over a day, said Hilton.

Uh, busy, said Sierra, as she teleported to an empty alley behind a grocery store. You won’t believe what just happened.

Oh, yeah? Try me.

My dad woke up. He’s spending time with John and the kids as we speak and we’re going to have a family dinner tonight, said Sierra, smiling.

That’s fantastic. Congratulations. Well, I don’t want to keep you from your family, so is there anything I can do for you? asked Hilton.

Well, could you cover for me at Ultra for just a little bit longer, if you don’t mind? asked Sierra, hesitantly. After leaving Ultra to ‘fix the situation’ with Jedikiah, Sierra had begged Hilton to provide her with some cover story to explain her absence. Hilton had, without hesitation, told their superiors at Ultra that Sierra was having a hard time tracking down Jedikiah and the Tomorrow People and that she was also dealing with a family crisis. To Sierra’s knowledge, the cover story had been bought and everything was okay for the moment. And obviously, nobody can know about my dad being back...

Of course, said Hilton, quickly and reassuringly. I did say anything you needed. So, consider it done.

Sierra smiled, despite knowing Hilton couldn’t see it. Thank you so much. I owe you one.

Nah. This one’s on the house. Talk to you later, said Hilton, warmly.

Sierra chuckled and then ended the telepathic call before resuming her shopping.

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Back at Ultra, Hilton’s smile vanished when he heard the Founder’s voice coming from behind him. The older man was scowling and looked far from happy. If that wasn’t enough, he’d clearly heard the entire exchange between Hilton and Sierra.

“How thrilled Sierra must be to have her father back,” said the Founder, with a hint of sneer. “But for us, it’s hardly a cause for a celebration.”

Hilton sighed and resisted the urge to punch the Founder’s lights out. He knew the Founder was unhappy with the situation, but did he have to be so cold? Regardless of whatever threat Roger posed to the plans for the Refuge, Sierra had just gotten her father back after God alone knew how long she’d spent looking for him. Surely, the situation couldn’t be as bad as the Founder was making it out to be?

“Roger Price has been frozen for the last eight years. Do you really think he’s that great of a threat?” asked Hilton, with a hint of weariness in his voice.

The Founder nodded without hesitation. “Your partner, a synergist has only just been able match her father’s powers. She needs to get stronger like Roger or else the Machine will kill her if she’s put into it. And besides, it took me eight years—eight years to rebuild with Roger destroyed.
I can’t afford to make the same mistake twice, not if our plans for the Refuge are to succeed.”

Hilton bit his lip. “What do you want me to do?”

“Get close to Roger and Sierra and bring one, or preferably both of them in,” replied the Founder.

Hilton raised a skeptical eyebrow. How on earth was he supposed to accomplish *that*? Granted, Hilton and Sierra were friends now, but if she even *suspected* that Hilton was working with the Founder, Hilton had no doubt that she wouldn’t hesitate to kill him. So, how was Hilton supposed to accomplish such an incredible feat?

“How?”

The Founder smirked. “Oh, Agent Cole, you’ve got the girl practically eating out of your hands. I’m sure you’ll figure it out.”

Somehow, Hilton sincerely doubted that.

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Later that day after Sierra had finished her errand, she took Roger to her apartment where Marla and Luca were waiting for him. To give her parents some much-needed privacy, Sierra had teleported the groceries into the cabinets and the refrigerator before teleporting herself to her bedroom where Luca sat alone.

After some hesitation, Roger opened Sierra’s front door using the key she’d given him and then slowly entered Sierra’s apartment. To his relief and utmost joy, Marla was sitting on Sierra’s couch. She looked a little older, which was only to be expected given how long it’d been since Roger had last seen her and her eyes were faintly red as if from crying but she was no less beautiful in Roger’s eyes and she was still the woman he loved.

“God, you’re still as beautiful as I remember,” said Roger, softly before he could stop himself.

Marla slowly rose up when Roger entered the room, her eyes wide with disbelief and amazement. “Roger…” she whispered. “…Astrid told me what happened, that Sierra brought you back, but I never thought…”

“I know,” said Roger, softly as he slowly stepped toward her, stopping only when they were at arm’s length. He looked around Sierra’s apartment, amazed at how warm and inviting it was yet it was so much more luxurious than anything Roger had been able to provide. “It’s a lot to take in. Everything’s changed and yet so much has stayed the same.”

Marla nodded in agreement. So much had changed and yet a great hadn’t.

Roger took a deep breath as tears came to his eyes. “Marla, I am so, so sorry. For everything. I know I can’t make up for lost time and you have a whole life that I’m not a part of. You raised our kids by yourself, Sierra’s all grown and has kids now—”

Fresh tears pooled in Marla’s eyes at the mention of their daughter. Although Marla had tried more than once to fix their relationship again, Sierra had closed herself off and refused to let Marla
get close to her again and the two women were still estranged. Though inside, Marla knew she only had herself to blame as it had been Marla’s secrets and lies that had caused the wedge between them.

“Roger, I haven’t been the best parent since you’ve been gone,” she confessed. It broke her heart to admit what she’d done, but Marla had learnt her lesson and refused to have anymore secrets and lies with her loved ones. “When Sierra broke out, I—”

“I know,” said Roger, his voice thick with emotion. It had taken some coaxing, but in the end, John had cracked and Roger had learned about everything that’d happened to his family since Roger had left. It had broken his heart to know of his people and family’s sufferings, especially Sierra’s and he sought to make amends for it. “We’ve both made mistakes with our children.”

Roger was not excusing or looking past Marla’s actions. He didn’t approve of what she’d done but it was not for Roger to punish his wife and he also felt that she’d been punished enough both by Marla’s own guilt and their daughter. Roger also knew that he also carried some blame for the course that Sierra’s life had taken. Roger could’ve explained long before he’d disappeared to both his kids about paranormals and what Sierra and Luca might one day become and it was also due to Roger’s past actions that they were facing such a hard situation with the Founder.

“Even I can’t change the past, no matter how much I want to,” continued Roger, as he hesitantly stroked Marla’s arm. “But maybe together, we can start working towards a better future. And whatever I can do to make it easier for you, I will.”

“Just…be there,” said Marla, as she then pulled Roger into her arms. They shared a tight, loving embrace for several long minutes before they then shared a deep, passionate kiss that was long overdue. “I’ve missed you much. I love you.”

“I love you too,” said Roger, his voice thick with emotion. He held her close again, but then pulled away when Luca entered the living room, having decided he’d waited long enough to see his father. “Hello, Luca. I know this is a lot to take in—”

That was as far as Roger got before Luca punched Roger hard in the face.

“Luca!” admonished Marla.

Roger held up a hand, calming Marla. “No, it’s okay. I deserve it,” he said, as he clutched his aching and now bruised jaw. In all honesty, Roger had expected such a reaction to happen sooner or later as he had caused some seriously hurt feelings with his past actions.

“Damn right you do!” spat Luca, angrily. “That was for leaving. But this—” Luca surprised both of his parents when Luca suddenly pulled Roger in for a tight hug and sniffled against Roger’s shoulder. “—this is for coming back. I’ve missed you, Dad.”

Roger’s heart swelled with joy as he hugged his son tightly. “I’ve missed you too, son.”

They had a long ways to go before things were perfect between them again, but this was definitely a step in the right direction for all of them.
After Luca’s tearful reunion with Roger, he rejoined Sierra in her bedroom, who was lying on her stomach on her bed, pouring over a book.

“I take it things went okay with you and Dad?” she asked, without looking up from her book.

“After I punched him, yeah. I mean, we’ve still got some issues to work out, but we’re cool and he’s started cooking dinner,” said Luca, as he began to pace around the room. “I still can’t wrap my head around this, you know? What am I supposed to tell my friends now? ‘Guys, we should celebrate. My dead dad’s back from the netherworld thanks to my sister, who’s basically a superhero.’”

Sierra chuckled as she closed her book and then leaned on her elbow so she could look at Luca. “I wouldn’t get that specific. What else is on your mind?”

Luca sighed as he stopped pacing. “I just…I want this dinner, I want us to be a family again, but it’s one big mess. I mean, what’re we supposed to talk about, huh? Dad doesn’t know me anymore. Not to mention, there’s the fact that I’m basically a Squib in our crazy-ass family.”

Sierra winced. She knew it could be hard being the only one who was different in the family, but she hadn’t realized Luca was struggling in that regard. She sat up. “Okay, first of all, I know everything’s changed but that’s all the reason to use this dinner to get caught up. Second, don’t think of yourself as a Squib, it’s degrading. Think of yourself as Sokka.”

Luca made a face. “Sokka? Robbie’s favorite character from that cartoon? How’s that supposed to be any better?”

“Because, doofus, Sokka may not have been able to bend the elements like his friends but he was still a badass. He knew swordplay, he was good with navigation and plans, he made everyone laugh and he kept the group together,” explained Sierra. “Does that sound better?”

Luca had to admit that it did and he smiled a little. “Yeah, I guess. But still, I get the feeling this is going to be one awkward-ass dinner.”

“If it’s any consolation, it’s not going to be much better for me either. Mom and I have barely been able to keep things civil between us for ages,” said Sierra. Though Marla had tried to reconcile with Sierra, the younger girl had kept a firm wall up as any trust and closeness they’d once shared had been irreparably shattered. It didn’t help that Sierra had done as promised and kept Robbie far away from Marla as well.

Luca plopped down onto Sierra’s bed and rubbed his face as he groaned. “We need a buffer.”

“Way ahead of you. I called Astrid and she’s joining us for dinner tonight,” said Sierra.

When Sierra had approached Astrid about dinner, Astrid had more than happily accepted as she wanted a chance to see Sierra’s father again as well as participate in a proper family dinner with her best friend. And as Sierra’s best friend, Astrid was going to the perfect buffer in case things turned sour at dinner, which Sierra really hoped would not be the case.

Luca looked relieved and then changed the subject.

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Sometime later, Astrid arrived at the apartment, followed by John, Robbie and Charlotte, all of whom were dressed nicely for the occasion and Astrid had even brought an almond and raspberry cake with melted white chocolate drizzle for dessert that evening.

“Hey, good to see you all. Thanks for coming,” said Sierra, as she gave them all a hug. “Is that your special cake?”

Astrid nodded. “I thought the occasion called for it. Plus, the munchkins begged me to bring a treat of some kind tonight.”

Sierra chuckled. She could easily envision that. “So, ready to meet my dad? Again?”

Astrid nodded again before passing off the cake to John, who took it to the kitchen while Sierra led Astrid to the dining room.

“Dad, you remember Astrid?”

Roger, who was helping set the table, smiled fondly as he shook Astrid’s hand. “Of course. Astrid. What happened to that chubby-cheeked little girl?”

Astrid chuckled. “Well, I grew up.”

“Quite well and very lovely, I might add,” said Roger. “I can’t thank you enough for what you did for Sierra and my grandson.”

“It was my pleasure,” said Astrid, smiling. When Astrid had found Sierra alone and pregnant in that homeless shelter all those years ago, Astrid never imagined doing anything less than helping Sierra out. Sierra was the closest thing Astrid had to a sister and while it hadn’t always been easy, Astrid had loved having Sierra and Robbie live at Astrid’s house very much. “Besides, they’re family and family looks out for each other.”

Roger nodded in agreement. “Please, come sit down.”

Astrid smiled again as Roger seated her and then gradually, everyone sat down for dinner.

Despite an initial awkward beginning involving Charlotte’s introduction to Marla and Luca, dinner quickly progressed in a happy family meal. All tensions and issues forgotten, soon, everyone was getting caught up, talking and laughing over past and current events and complimenting Roger’s chicken parmesan, which was far better than Sierra remembered. It was a delightful family event that Sierra never wanted to end.

When everyone finished their entrées, Roger stood up. “I want to thank you all for this. I know everything’s been weird and I know everyone’s disorientated, including me. But I’m also very happy—no, happy doesn’t even begin to describe it. I am overwhelmed with love and pride for all of you. You’re my world, my reason for being and I am humbled to be back in your homes and your lives.”

There wasn’t a single dry eye in Roger’s audience and Roger was among them as he smiled.

“Let’s all raise our glasses,” said Roger. He quickly wiped his eyes before using his telekinesis to lift up everyone’s glasses off the table. “Here’s to family.”

“To family,” murmured everyone in unison, as they clinked their glasses together.
After everyone took a sip of their drinks, Marla cleared her throat. “Well, I’m going to get that delicious cake that Astrid brought us. Anyone want a slice?”

Everyone raised their hand, asking for at least a small slice and Luca rose up to help his mother dish it up. While this was happening, Sierra took Roger onto her apartment’s balcony for a private chat. She hoped that she was mistaken or overreacting, but something about the way Roger had spoken during his toast had caused her to become afraid. And while that was happening, Astrid excused herself to the powder room so she could call Hilton and give him a piece of her mind as she couldn’t bear to hold her tongue any longer.

“Wasn’t expecting a call from you, Miss Finch. I thought you hated me,” said Hilton, when he picked up.

“Oh, that hasn’t changed. Listen, Hilton, this partnership/friendship thing you’ve got going on with Sierra had better be real,” warned Astrid. “Sierra’s my best friend and she’s a special girl—”

“I’m aware,” interrupted Hilton, annoyed.

“I’m still talking,” said Astrid, harshly. “She’s got a lot going on right now. She needs someone she can trust and rely on and if that happens to be you, then great. But if that’s not the case—”

“I’m in love with her,” interrupted Hilton, firmly. “And I would do anything to protect her, even if it meant I died in the process. Does that answer your question? Because I’ve got to get back to work.”

Without waiting for a reply, Hilton hung up the phone and he ignored Astrid’s attempt to call him back. Astrid was agitated. Part of her wanted to believe that Hilton was telling the truth about being on their side and while Astrid had no doubts as to Hilton’s feelings towards his ex-girlfriend, Astrid could not shake the feeling that something was seriously wrong with Hilton.

Meanwhile, Roger was taking in the view from Sierra’s balcony and loving every minute of it. “Wow. Quite a view you’ve got here, Sierra. Also, can I just say that your children are amazing? You must be so proud of them. You’ve done a wonderful job raising them.”

“I am, thanks. But that’s not what I wanted to talk to you about. Dad, the way you were talking in there…are you going to leave again?” asked Sierra, fearful of his answer. Was Roger going to be stupidly noble and take off again, thinking it would somehow keep them all safe from the Founder?

Roger’s face softened as he shook his head. “No, honey, of course not. If there’s one thing that John and I have both learned, it’s that running off doesn’t exactly work like it’s supposed to. But I am going to have to lay low until we figure out a way to stop the Founder and his plans. So, I might be camping out at the Lair for a while.”

Roger wasn’t stupid. It was only a matter of time before the Founder found out that Roger was alive and kicking again. When that happened, countless innocent lives, including that of Roger’s family, would be in terrible danger.

Sierra sighed in relief. “Good. Because if you did try to take off, I would’ve killed you.”

Roger laughed as he hugged his daughter. “I know. But there’s no need for that because I’m never leaving you again, I promise.”

Sierra tightened her grip on her father as she buried her face in the crook of his shoulder. Though she was grown women and a mother of two now, she still desperately needed her daddy
and was unwilling to let him go again.

“So, what do we do? What’s the plan?”

“For now? Let’s just go back inside, smile and enjoy the evening while it lasts,” said Roger. “Then tomorrow we’ll face the music. So, let’s go back inside. This is the first dessert I’ve had in a very long time, you know.”

Sierra chuckled as they walked arm-in-arm back into the house, unaware of the danger they’d just been in not a moment ago.

Unbeknownst to Sierra, Hilton had been watching from a distance with an extraction team, prepared to capture both Sierra and Roger but after witnessing the tender moment between father and daughter, Hilton had been unable to go through with it and called it off. He knew he was risking the Founder’s wrath by doing so, but Hilton didn’t give a damn. Whatever happened in the future, Sierra deserved at least one happy night with her family and Hilton was going to make sure she got it.

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The following day, John found himself being shaken awake by a distraught-looking Charlotte. And it was no wonder that she was upset as things in the Lair were not very happy or peaceful due to some dissention in the ranks.

Natalie, a blond and buff anti-homo sapien paranormal and her very small circle of acolytes, were growing angry and impatient over Roger’s lack of immediate action since his return to life. For all of John’s glowing reviews of Sierra’s father, Roger had yet to meet Natalie and her group’s expectations. She was causing quite a ruckus, despite Cara and Russell’s attempts to quell it. It didn’t matter that Roger had only just returned to life and needed a little time to formulate a plan against the Founder, the fact that Roger hadn’t immediately leapt to action was a heinous crime in the eyes of Natalie and her followers as it seemed to them that they’d waited years for nothing.

“Hey, what’s the matter, Charlie?” asked John, sleepily.

“People are losing it in the Lair, talking about leaving, going off on their own. It’s mostly Natalie and her scary group, but that’s not important. Why’re they so unhappy? I love it here,” said Charlotte, in dismay. While she had spent quite some time at Sierra’s apartment, the Lair was the home that Charlotte loved the most and she couldn’t understand why others didn’t share her feelings.

John’s face softened as he sat up and then pulled Charlotte in close. “I know you do, sweetie. But the man they thought was going to lead them hasn’t done anything yet, so they’re feeling hurt, angry and maybe a little lost.”

“But you, Mom and Cara are the real leaders, aren’t you?” asked Charlotte.

John sighed. How could he make his daughter understand? It had been everyone’s dream that the as soon as Roger came back, he would lead them all to a better life on that same day. That hadn’t happened and people were upset over that, even though Roger had the right to take a little time to himself and his family. “Grandpa Roger’s the one they think or thought was going to come back and save them from this life. The fact that he hasn’t done that yet, even though he needs a
"They only believed in Grandpa Roger because you and Mom did," interrupted Charlotte. "You and Mom, you’re my heroes, Daddy."

John felt very touched by this and he kissed Charlotte’s head. She was right in that regard, but even Charlotte couldn’t change the truth of what was happening.

Meanwhile, Roger was tracking down his absentee brother and found him drinking alone at the only bar that was still open. Jedikiah was downing his third shot of whisky and was about to order another when Roger placed a twenty dollar bill on the counter and flipped over the empty shot glass.

"I think you’ve had enough," he said.

Jedikiah smiled and pointed to the glass. "That was for you."

"Oh, awfully nice of you. Know what would’ve been nicer? If you’d been there when I woke up from the dead," said Roger. While Jedikiah had a lot of groveling to do for what he’d done to Sierra while she’d been under Jedikiah’s employ, Roger still cared about his brother and disliked that Jedikiah had skipped out on their reunion.

Jedikiah chuckled and smiled while still keeping his gaze on the bar. "Man…eight years, though, Roger. I just couldn’t look you in the eye. Not after all I’ve done. Hell, if it weren’t for me, none of this would’ve happened." It was Jedikiah who’d discovered the Founder in the first place and arranged their meeting and it was Jedikiah who’d insisted on agreeing with the Founder’s offer to create Ultra and it was Jedikiah who’d been so blind as to the Founder’s true character. In a way, it was all his fault.

Roger squeezed his brother’s shoulder. "It’s in the past. Besides, Bathory would’ve found us one way or another. Let’s just be thankful things aren’t worse than they are."

"I know." Jedikiah sighed. "I really wanted to bring you back sooner, Roger."

"I know but you didn’t have the means." Roger knew that it didn’t matter how much Jedikiah had wanted to bring Roger back. It hadn’t been possible without Sierra and she hadn’t been able to do what had to be done all that time ago. "Look, I’m not happy with what you’ve done but I’m letting you off the hook, regardless, Jed."

Jedikiah pulled a face and shook his head as he finally met his brother’s gaze. "Ah, don’t do that! The truth of the matter is, while you were gone, I was the powerful brother for once and I liked it. I know that’s a horrible thing to admit but—"

"Jed, I knew what I was getting into when I did what I did that night," admitted Roger. "Okay? I knew there was a chance that Sierra wouldn’t take after me but I didn’t care. I knew I was looking at a one-way trip if it meant keeping her and the others safe. And while I don’t like what happened to her while she was at Ultra, I’m still thankful that you did everything you could to protect her and her kids from the Founder. I’m also thankful you brought me back to them. So, thank you."
Jedikiah smiled at this and squeezed Roger’s hand. He felt comforted that Roger had forgiven him and they were okay. “You’re welcome. So, what’s next for you?”

Roger sighed as he rubbed his eyes. “I need to find a way to take down the Founder and his Machine, but I don’t know where to start. So, I’m going to be camping out at the Lair for a while.”

Jedikiah looked alarmed. “You’re going underground?”

“Just temporarily. Besides, I have to. As long as I’m around, the Founder has a terrible weapon.”

“No, you can’t disappear now. The Founder’s grooming Sierra to take your place!” said Jedikiah, as he shook his head.

“She’s just a young girl,” protested Roger, as he frowned. He knew Sierra had used the Machine to bring him back, but surely the Founder wasn’t going to use Sierra like he’d tried to use Roger? Sierra was too young and she was still coming into her full powers.

“Do I have to give you a refresher course in genetics?” said Jedikiah, in exasperation. “Sierra’s your synergist daughter and that alone makes both her invaluable to the Founder’s twisted plans. And if she fails, then her son’s next in line to take her place as soon as he’s old enough. And if that’s not bad enough, your former friend has already beta-tested your daughter in the Machine!”

“What?!” hissed Roger, horrified. He knew that Sierra had used the Machine to bring him back to life but he hadn’t dared imagine that the Founder had actually used his daughter like a battery.

“Is the Machine active?”

“I don’t know,” said Jedikiah, shrugging.

“Did it work?” pressed Roger, urgently.

“I don’t know! I’ve been in exile from Ultra!” said Jedikiah, helplessly. An idea then came to his mind and his face brightened. “But I do know how we can find out. Come with me.”

And with that, Jedikiah took Roger to his apartment and quickly began booting up ALICE while Roger took a good, long look at his brother’s home.

“Still going for a minimalist vibe? No girlfriend, no pets? Please tell me you picked up a hobby at least,” said Roger, shaking his head at the décor.

“Been a tad busy, Rog. And FYI, I do have a girlfriend. Her name’s Morgan and she’s pregnant. So, can we just—aha!” Jedikiah smiled when ALICE lit up his laptop.

“Hello, Jed. What a nice surprise.”

Roger laughed. “Your roommate’s a computer? Should’ve guessed.”

Jedikiah didn’t look up from his laptop. “Yeah, you’ve got me. Hey, Alice, can you initiate protocol one-three-five-nine, please?”

“Why does it feel like we’re being naughty?” asked ALICE, as she began obeying her orders.

“Well, because we are,” admitted Jedikiah as Roger laughed again. “Wouldn’t want the Founder secretly spying on us, now would we?” He punched in a few keys. “Now, I want all field data pertaining to this project.”
“Your partner’s so-called Machine?”

“We’re not partners anymore, luv,” said Jedikiah, as he feigned a British accent.

“Downloading all data to your drive now. That does feel naughty. And speaking of which, I suppose I shouldn’t share this either but agents have been dispatched to your location. ETA, two minutes,” said ALICE.

Roger looked alarmed but then the files finished downloading just in time for the two brothers to make their escape to the Lair. When they arrived, they immediately uploaded the memory stick into TIM and looked over the files. They prayed that their fears were unwarranted but their prayers went unanswered and moments later, an emergency meeting was called.

Sierra looked puzzled as they looked over the footage. “I remember this. It’s the first time I used the Machine. When the Founder said it could amplify my powers, I thought maybe it could lead me to you, Dad.” She frowned when she saw two men, one dressed in black and the other white, enter an empty room. “Who’re they?”

“Test subjects,” replied Jedikiah. “What you’re looking at now is one is footage of the Founder’s facilities reserved for sensitive experiments. Those two rooms are connected remotely.”

Sierra frowned when the man in white ceased moving. “Why isn’t the one in white moving? What’s wrong with him?”

“He’s human,” said Roger, grimly. “The other one’s a paranormal like us, only far more cruel.”

Sierra’s hand flew to her mouth as she then watched the paranormal turn the human into dust with a mere flick of his hands. It didn’t take her long to realize what had happened and how and when she did, she was greatly upset.

“Wait, I did that? No, that’s impossible. I wasn’t even trying to kill! I was only trying to reach you in Limbo!” said Sierra, distraught. She sounded like she was trying to convince herself more than anyone and she was failing miserably. Sierra had taken a life once in self-defense once before and she’d only tried to kill the Founder to protect everyone else. She’d never killed someone in cold blood like this before. “I didn’t… I couldn’t… I’m not a murderer!”

“It’s not your fault, Sierra. You didn’t know. But for future reference, it isn’t murder if the human isn’t alive,” said Jedikiah.

“What you just saw is a fraction of what the Machine will do at full power with me in it or you or either of your children,” said Roger, gravely. “I’m sorry, Sierra. Looks like you take after me after all.”

Sierra felt sick to her stomach. “Oh, God…I didn’t know. I swear, I didn’t know.”

When she’d agreed to beta-test the Machine, Sierra had had no way of knowing what would happen to the outside world when she did. She’d only thought of rescuing her father from Limbo and because of her shortsightedness and her foolishness, an innocent life had paid the price.

“It’s not your fault, Sierra. This is on the Founder, not you,” assured Roger. “And I promise you, we’ll stop him and make him pay.”

Sierra nodded in agreement as her hand clenched into a fist. “Yeah, we will.”

If she had to put a bullet in the Founder’s head herself, then by God, she would. One way or
another, the Founder had to be stopped and she was not going to let him use her or her father to commit genocide. She just wouldn’t!

XXX

Back at Ultra, the Founder was in a foul mood and he was taking his mood out on Hilton, who, kind of did deserve it as it was Hilton who was partly the cause of the Founder’s foul mood.

“See, first you fail to apprehend Roger and Sierra when they were in your sights and now it appears there’s been a break-in at Jedikiah’s former home where someone has accessed our intranet!” raged the Founder, furiously.

It was a credit to his training that Hilton managed to maintain a calm, cool composure. “Not sure I heard the question.”

“Well, I wonder if your emotions haven’t compromised you, Agent Cole,” said the Founder, coolly. “I’m not an idiot. I’ve seen the way you look at Sierra. You’re clearly in love with her.”

“I am in love with her, I won’t deny it. But my feelings are irrelevant as Sierra doesn’t love me back and nor have I ever been in the habit of allowing my emotions to cloud my judgment as my record clearly states,” said Hilton, coldly. “Besides, I was on my way to deliver new intel but if you think I should be taken off the next mission—”

The Founder rolled his eyes. “What’s your information?”

“Roger knows that you’ve rebuilt the Machine and that you want him or Sierra in it. He also told Sierra that he’s planning on hiding out until he can come up with a plan to kill you and destroy the Machine forever,” reported Hilton.

Upon hearing this, the Founder immediately rose up and stroked his facial hair thoughtfully. “If this is true, then we’re not dealing with a man who’s running away. He’s going to come straight to us, Agent Cole, are going to set the trap.”

If this plan worked, then all the Founder’s hard work and planning would finally be successful.

XXX

Back in the Lair, Roger started putting together some equipment and weapons with Sierra, Jedikiah and John’s help while Cara watched.

“What’s all this?” asked Sierra.

“Supplies,” said Roger, not looking up from his work.

Cara scowled. “Mind giving us a head’s up on what that plan is?”

“I’m going into Ultra to sabotage the Founder’s secret project and then when time comes, we’ll kill him.” Roger despised the idea of taking a life or asking John or Sierra to do it but there was no
choice. As long as the Founder drew breath, he was always going to pose a threat not just to their family but to the lives of humanity as well.

“Right because that worked out so well last time,” said Cara, sarcastically, thinking back to both Roger and Sierra’s previous failed attempts to stop the Founder.

“Cara, not now,” warned Sierra, making Cara fall silent. Even though neither plan had worked all that well, it didn’t change the fact that the Founder’s plans had been delayed because of them. They still had a chance to win for good. Besides, Roger had destroyed the Machine.

Roger held up a hand, signaling that it was okay before giving Cara a remorseful look. “I know what I did to all of you. I’m sorry. But there’s no other way, there’s too much at stake.”

“Which is why I can’t let you destroy the Machine alone,” said Sierra. “Dad, I don’t need to remind you that the Founder wants you in the Machine. Hell, he’ll be happy either one of us, but I digress. You can’t go near it, not without backup.”

Roger sighed as he held up the doohickey that Sierra had used to locate her father. “It is bound to me. This is a piece of it. It’s tied to my DNA, it’s inside of it, which means that no one else can get near it without triggering the alarm. If I teleport in, they’ll detect me.”

“All the more reason for me to go with you. Need I remind you that thanks to your serum, I’m the only one of us who’s immune to D-chips and power suppressants? If this goes south, every D-chip in Ultra will be switched on and then I’m your only way out of there,” reminded Sierra, sharply. “Dad, I’m not moving on this.”

Roger could see that Sierra couldn’t be dissuaded, so he ceased arguing on the subject and it was lucky that he did, for right then and there, Russell popped his head in and reported that they were having another fire involving Natalie that had to be put out.

So, with great reluctance, John, Cara and Sierra went to explain the situation to everyone down there in the Lair. Needless to say, Natalie decided to take advantage of the situation by stirring up even more trouble than she already had.

“So, let me get this straight: Roger came back and now he’s blowing up our ticket to the Refuge?” said Natalie, incredulously. “I’m sorry, isn’t that what we’ve been waiting for this entire time?”

“The plans have changed. When the Machine is turned on, humans are killed. The Founder plans on using the Machine to commit genocide of literally half the planet,” said John. Everyone except for Natalie and her small circle of goons gasped in horror and this and looked sickened.

“Who cares?” snapped Natalie. “We’ve been offered a damn truce and if the cost of that is the lives of some stupid saps, then who gives a damn? Russell went into Ultra and lived to tell the tale! So, why the hell can’t we?”

It took all of Sierra’s restraint not to lash out at Natalie. How could she be so coldhearted about this? Had she not heard what John had just said? The Founder planned to commit genocide! How did Natalie not care about that?

“Natalie, we need to stay unified,” said Russell.

“In this gutter? While our leader’s off starting another war without the Founder? I don’t know about you guys, but I’d rather stay unified in the Refuge!” said Natalie.
“There is no Refuge, you stupid, blond idiot!” yelled Sierra, in frustration. “No Promised Land! This is the only world there is! But the Founder wants to use me or my father like a damn battery for his Machine so he can kill every man, woman and child on the damn planet! That’s billions of innocent lives! Are any of you prepared to live with that?”

Unsurprisingly, only Natalie and her small circle were. Everyone else shook their heads and backed away at this. Regardless how much they wanted the war to end, it wasn’t worth the cost of innocent lives, especially since many of those lives were their human friends and family they wanted to see again someday.

“They are not innocent, they’re human. Which means, their lives are worthless,” said Natalie, coldly.

Sierra shook her head. She wasn’t going to get through to Natalie, so she wouldn’t waste her breath. “If that’s what you want to believe, fine. But I care and I’m not going to let this happen.”

“Well, you can’t keep me here either,” said Natalie, coldly. “I’m going topside. I’m going to make my peace with the Founder before your father, our so-called Messiah, blows us all to hell! Who’s going with me?” Natalie’s acolytes, which were just three other people, followed and then three of them left for Ultra.

It was then decided that Russell would follow them and keep an eye on the trio so that they wouldn’t give up the plan or Roger to the Founder. The situation had just gotten worse and their timetable just moved forward. This was not good.

XXX

The following morning, Sierra went to Ultra to keep her cover up and to try and to learn of anything that might interfere with their plans to destroy the Machine. As she skimmed through some files on computer in the ops room, she frowned to see people on the loading dock carrying boxes out of the room where the Machine had been. That couldn’t be good.

“Hey, pretty girl.”

Sierra nearly jumped a foot and then smiled when she saw Hilton. “Hilton, hi. Sorry, it’s been a while. Thanks for covering for me.”

Hilton smiled. “Not a problem. So, how was dinner?”

“Great. Just great. But right now, I’m more concerned with this,” said Sierra, gesturing to the screen. “What the hell’s going on?”

Hilton hesitated and then sighed before pulling Sierra aside to a corner. “Look, I only just found out and it’s supposed to be classified but I can’t lie to you. The Machine’s being relocated.”

Sierra was horrified. “What?” she hissed. “Why?”

“Because the Founder’s afraid.”

“Of what?”
“Jedikiah. He thinks he wants to destroy it.”

Damn it. This was not good. Sierra bit her lip. “Hilton, you didn’t tell him about my dad, did you?”

Hilton quickly shook his head. “No, of course not.”

Sierra sighed in relief. Good. That was one less problem to deal with. “Do you know where they’re taking the damn thing?”

Hilton nodded and then quickly told her before departing to deal with other business.

As soon as he was gone, Sierra called to her father to tell him of the news. *Dad, bad news. The Machine’s being relocated but I know where. It’s a black site near the Port. The plan is to move the Machine to a barge somewhere. We have to intercept it.*

*Copy that. I’ll meet you there. I need you to shut down the perimeter,* said Roger.

*Copy that,* said Sierra.

She silently prayed that this plan would work.

XXX

Though he knew it was a risk, Roger had spent the night with Marla in their old home. It was a night that Roger hadn’t wanted to end but he knew it had to. The Founder had to be stopped one way or another and soon, before it was too late.

“Are you leaving again?” asked Marla, sleepily from the bed. “You just got home.”

Roger, who’d been sitting on the bed, tying his shoes, sighed and shook his head. He then cupped Marla’s face and tenderly kissed her.

“I don’t want to leave, Marla. All I want is to lie in bed with you, shoot hoops with Luca, spend time with Sierra and play with my grandkids. But none of that will be possible until the Founder’s out of our lives,” said Roger. He didn’t want to do this. He wanted to be done with the war and lead a quiet life with his family again but it wouldn’t happen. More to the point, if the Founder wasn’t stopped, Luca would die and Roger refused to let his son perish when he could stop it.

“I know,” said Marla. She was understanding but there were still tears in her eyes. “I’m not so naïve to think that everything would go back to normal right off the bat when you came home. We were never normal.” She smiled a little when Roger chuckled at this. “Maybe if I’d embraced that from the start, things would be different, especially between me and Sierra.”

Roger’s eyes stung with tears as he held his wife close. “No. It wouldn’t change where we are now. But Marla…that reckless girl out there who’s trying to save the world? She doesn’t just take after me. She takes after both of us.” He then tenderly kissed his wife once more. “I spoke to Luca already, but I’ll be back, I promise. Just promise you’ll be here waiting for me.”

Marla nodded. “I promise.”

Silently, they both hoped they’d be able to keep those promises. But who knew with the
When the time came, Sierra teleported into the Ultra facility and wasted no time in taking down the guards using her powers and martial arts skills. When the guards were knocked out and tied up, she proceeded to the security office and deactivated all the D-chips in the building and disabled the security alarms.

*Dad, D-chips are all down. You're clear to go. But make it quick,* said Sierra.

*Copy that,* said Roger.

Roger then teleported into the building carrying a duffle bag of explosive and went for his target which was not in the eye of the security cameras. But when he reached the cargo container supposedly housing the Machine, his blood ran cold when he saw that not only was the Machine not there but the inside of the doors were lined with D-chips. It was a trap and had Roger not checked first, he would’ve surely been caught in it.

When the sound of a tranquilizer gun being cocked hit Roger’s ears, he slowly turned around to see Hilton Cole, Sierra’s partner, standing behind him aiming the weapon in Roger’s face.

“Who the hell are you?” asked Roger.

“Hilton Cole, your daughter’s partner and your captor,” said Hilton. “In the name of the Founder, I’m taking you into Ultra’s custody.”

“You don’t want to do this, kid,” warned Roger. “Sierra’s told me all about you. I know your story. If you truly care about her, you’ll walk away and help us take down the Founder.”

Hilton gripped his weapon tighter as he scoffed. “If I truly care about her? If? You crazy old coot, it’s because I care about her that I’m doing this! You’re the one who’s crazy and doesn’t give a damn about Sierra! Do you have any idea what kind of hell she’s been through all because of you? The Founder’s told me all about you and I’ve read your file. You’re a paranormal terrorist bent on destroying any chance our kind have of regular lives! You need to be locked up for your own safety as well as our own!”

“Is that what he told you? Hilton, listen to me. The Founder’s lying to you. He’s using you—”

“And you’re not using Sierra?” interrupted Hilton, angrily. “The only reason you even know about this place and got in here was because of her! And your sole purpose for coming here was to destroy the Machine, our way to the Refuge! How’s that supposed to convince me you’re not a threat?”

Seeing as he wasn’t getting anywhere, Roger changed tactics. “Hilton, please. Think about what you’re doing. How do you think Sierra’s going to react when she finds out you’ve betrayed her? She’ll never forgive you. She’ll hate you for the rest of your life. Is that really what you want?”

Hilton hesitated and lowered his weapon for a split second before resuming his defensive stance and cold, hard look. “Doesn’t matter. She may hate me for a time, but she’ll get past it, especially after I’ve convinced her of the truth of what you are. And more importantly, she’ll be
alive to hate me and maybe one day, she’ll even come to love me.”

Roger couldn’t believe the delusions coming out of Hilton’s mouth and was about to try and disarm Hilton, when Hilton suddenly set off the tranquilizer. The dart hit Roger square in the chest and he went down.

_Sierra, run. We’ve been compromised_… said Roger, just before he lost consciousness.

In the security office, Sierra felt a wave of alarm and panic. Compromised? How could that be possible? And what was happening to her father?

Deciding now was not the time to question, Sierra moved to bolt out of the office like a bat out of hell when Hilton suddenly teleported into the room and grabbed her arm.

“Stop! You can’t go down there!” said Hilton, panicked.

Sierra stared in disbelief. “What the hell are you talking about? What’re you even doing here?”

“I am saving you from making a huge mistake and getting taken down with Roger,” said Hilton.

Sierra couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Fury and heartbreak over Hilton’s betrayal swept over her like a tidal wave and threatened to consume her. “You son of a bitch! You’ve been working for the Founder this whole time, haven’t you? You told him everything, didn’t you? He knows my father’s alive and that’s why you told me about the Machine supposedly being moved! This was all a trap! You chose to work with that bastard over an innocent man?”

“No, Sierra, you’re wrong. It’s the other way around. Look, I know Roger’s your father and I know you’ve been through hell to bring him back but you’re wrong about Roger’s character. He is a terrorist and it’s too late for him. But it’s not too late for you. The Founder will forgive you, you and your family will be safe,” insisted Hilton.

Sierra’s face twisted with rage. “I considered you a friend. I let you into my life. I trusted you. I defended you! And all this time, you were just a Benedict Arnold waiting for the chance to betray me, you heartless bastard! How could you?”

“It’s not like that! My actions are because I care about you, Sierra! I’m doing this to protect you!” protested Hilton.

Sierra let out a bitter laugh. “Protect me? God, you’re deluded! You have no idea what you’ve done! If my father or I are used in the Machine, not only will said living battery die but the Founder will use it for genocide. Every last human man, woman and child will be exterminated!”

Hilton looked horrified and shocked. “What? No, that can’t be true. The Machine’s our ticket to the Refuge so we can all live in peace. No one’s going to die.”

“Really? Check the security footage from the Machine if you don’t believe me,” snarled Sierra. She shoved Hilton off her and then pinned him to the wall by his throat. She ignored his cries of pain as she invoked her power of biological manipulation on him. “I won’t forget this Hilton. So, if you know what’s good for you, you’ll get the hell out of town or I swear to God, the next time I see you, I’ll put a bullet in your head!”

Without waiting for a reply, Sierra then teleported away to Roger’s location. It was lucky on her part that she arrived just as the guards did. She then proceeded to blast them all away with a powerful telekinetic blast and then she teleported her unconscious father back to the Lair. The mission could not possibly have gone worse. The Machine was AWOL, they’d been betrayed and
the Founder knew almost all their secrets.

What else could go wrong?

XXX

Meanwhile, Natalie and her cohorts were at Ultra, getting a tour of the place while they waited for the chance to get injected with the Founder’s trackers. Despite the truce flag and how technologically sophisticated Ultra was, Russell still didn’t like the place one bit. Natalie, on the other hand, felt very differently.

“Sign me up. This place is amazing,” she gushed.

“Yeah, it looks like Steve Jobs redid the Death Star,” muttered Russell, nervously.

Natalie rolled her eyes and scoffed. “Lighten up, will you?”

“Would if I could. Look, how do we know they won’t give us the serum that’ll take our powers?” asked Russell. “Ultra’s not exactly known for their honesty.”

Natalie rolled her eyes again. “Right, because Roger and his stupid daughter kept their promises,” she said, with biting sarcasm.

Before Russell could defend Roger and Sierra, a lady nurse came up to them. “Thank you for your patience. Welcome to Ultra. I assume you’re all here for the tracer? Follow me, please.” She then led them to one of Ultra’s labs generally used for power stripping before preparing a syringe of the tracer. “I know it looks scary. But honestly? The process is no more painful than a flu shot. Who’d like to go first? How about you?”

Natalie, whom the nurse had been looking at, smiled. “You must’ve been reading my mind.”

Russell grabbed Natalie’s arm and pulled her back. “Give us one sec, please, first?” Ignoring Natalie’s look of irritation, Russell whispered into her ear, “This place is lined with D-chips. If something goes wrong, we can’t even call for help.”

Natalie’s irritation vanished as she realized Russell had a good point. She then turned back to the nurse and asked sweetly, “So, what exactly does that shot do?”

“It allows us to track our kind in the event of an emergency. Besides, you don’t want to get lost when we finally make our way to the Refuge, do you?” said the nurse, sweetly.

That was enough to convince Natalie of Ultra’s position. “I’m in.”

“Wait,” said Russell, as he held out his arm in front of her. “I’ll go first.” If this was bad, then they needed to know for themselves and Russell was more than ready to sacrifice himself if that was the case. He pulled Natalie close in again. “If this goes gnarly, I want you to take the others and get the hell out of here. You got that?”

For once, Natalie didn’t argue. Instead, she nodded in agreement and allowed Russell to take the first injection of tracer. Thankfully, the procedure proceeded as promised and nothing out of the ordinary happened. But even so, Russell still couldn’t shake the horrible feeling that something
Later that night, Astrid was enjoying a peaceful meal by herself at the Noodle Shop as she studied for upcoming exams when Hilton walked in and approached her. He was deathly pale and his eyes were red as if from crying but Astrid didn’t care. She was furious with him and it was taking all her restraint not to punch or slap him right then and there.

“Can I sit?” he asked, hoarsely.

“No,” said Astrid, furiously. “In fact, I’d really rather you weren’t here at all. You’ve got a lot of nerve showing your face, you son of a bitch. Sierra told me everything. How you used her and sold her out to the Founder. How can you claim to love her and do what you did?”

Hilton swallowed painfully and looked ashamed. “I know I messed up, Astrid. You never trusted me and you were right. I was wrong about everything—Ultra, the Founder, the Machine…”

“Oh, so you believe Sierra now? Good for you,” said Hilton, sarcastically.

Hilton nodded. “I took her up on her advice. I reviewed the security footage and I hacked into Ultra’s classified files. I know the truth. I swear to God, if I’d known, I never would’ve done what I did.” When Hilton had reviewed the security footage, he’d been sickened and felt as though his entire world had shifted in the worst of ways. He knew he’d done wrong and had only himself to blame. Sierra had warned him more than once about the Founder’s true motives and instead of listening to her, Hilton had allowed himself to be taken in by the Founder’s lies. “I thought I was doing the right thing, not just for both our peoples but also for Sierra. Whatever you may think of me, know that I really do love Sierra.”

Astrid still didn’t look convinced and she narrowed her eyes. “Now that you know, what’re you going to do to make things right with her?”

Hilton wiped at his eyes, which had become wet with fresh tears before he proceeded to write out a telephone number onto a napkin.

“The only thing I can do. But I can’t do it without your help. I’m going to need you to call me at this number. Will you please do that? It’s the only way to help them,” begged Hilton. “Help all of them. Especially Sierra’s kids. They deserve a chance at a better life.”

Astrid didn’t like the sound of the way Hilton was talking and nor did she understand how a phone call was going to fix anything, but she could see his desperation for forgiveness and his love for Sierra in his eyes, so Astrid took pity and grabbed the napkin.

“Oh. I’ll make the call,” promised Astrid. She set an alarm on her phone so she wouldn’t forget. “One hour on the dot.”

Hilton looked relieved and smiled through his tears. “Thank you, Astrid.”

Without further ado, Hilton then left the Noodle Shop, feeling scared but no less determined to do what had to be done. Perhaps by doing this, he might redeem himself not only for his sake but also for Sierra’s and her family’s.
Back at the Lair, Sierra was helping Marla and Luca get accommodated.

After the failed mission, it was decided that the safest place for her mother and brother to be was at the Lair until the Founder was finally out of the picture. It was an adjustment on their part but one they were willing to make if it meant their lives and if they could stay together as a family. Luca personally thought the Lair was awesome and wanted to hang out there more often.

“Dad!” gasped Luca, as the now conscious Roger joined them. He then held his father in a tight hug. “I’m so glad you’re okay. When Sierra said the mission went sideways, I was scared I might’ve lost you again.”

“No, no, I’m okay, buddy,” assured Roger, smiling as he cupped his son’s face. “Your sister saved the day. Besides, I’m not leaving you again, ever. Promise.”

Luca smiled in relief at this.

“Listen, I need to speak with your sister for a sec but then I’ll show you around the Lair. Sound good?” offered Roger. When Luca nodded, Roger then took Sierra out into the corridor for a private chat on what’d happened and what their next step was. “How bad is it?”

“Bad-bad. Dad, we’re back at war. The Founder knows everything,” said Sierra, grimly. “And God knows what else Hilton’s told him. He’s going to come after us and then he’s going to take out every last human being on the planet unless we take him out.”

“Then you are clearly going to need me,” said Jedikiah, appearing from behind them as if by magic. “With the Machine still operational and the Founder more dangerous than ever?”

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but yes. I’m glad to have you on board,” said Sierra. It was insane, given everything they’d been through but Sierra was glad to have her uncle on her side in their new war against the Founder. They needed all the help they could get and what better help could there be than the former SIC of Ultra himself?

Roger smiled and nodded in agreement. “As am I. I’m glad we’re all together for this.”

Sierra opened her mouth to reply but then she received a telepathic call from Hilton and left her father and uncle to take it.

I am so sorry, Sierra. You will never know how sorry I am, said Hilton. Please forgive me.

Sierra forced herself to remain calm and not give into her anger. Forgive you? Hilton, you used me, you lying bastard! You betrayed me! You—

I loved you, said Hilton, his voice raw with grief and guilt. I have never stopped loving you and I thought I was protecting you. And no matter what, my feelings will never change. Good-bye, Sierra.

But she got no reply and fearing the worst, Sierra ran and then teleported straight to Ultra, praying she wasn’t too late.

XXX

Deciding to screw protocol and politeness, Hilton stormed into the Founder’s office.

The older man didn’t look pleased at Hilton’s brazenness and glared darkly at him. “Ah, Agent Cole. Right on time. I was just about to call for you. You know, your failure to capture Roger and his daughter hasn’t at all helped your case. Thanks to your incompetence, we’re in a worse position than ever in this damned war.”

Hilton returned the dark glare and looked unrepentant. “We were already in a bad position. My actions had nothing to do with that. Yours, however, do. It’s because of you that we’ve sold out our entire species. And I’ve sold out Sierra, the only woman I’ve ever loved.”

The Founder rolled his eyes. “I’m sorry for your loss, Agent Cole,” he said, not sounding sorry at all. “But our emotions, especially love, have to take a seat on the back burner if we’re to get anywhere in this war. Besides, I thought you swore to me that your feelings weren’t compromising your work or your position here at Ultra. And if I may also say, we’ve sold out no one. We are merely protecting Sierra and her crazy rebel friends from themselves. I assure you, the end we are fast approaching is for the benefit of our kind.”

Hilton scoffed as he shook his head. “Yeah, you keep saying that. But what you never said was what was going to happen to the humans in the process. I know about the Machine’s true purpose. I know you’re planning on using Sierra or Roger like a battery to commit genocide. You used me.”

The Founder looked unrepentant. “Well, someone’s being doing their homework. Since the game’s up, I’ll come clean. Yes, that is my true plan. But I never used you, dear boy. Everything you did was of your own volition, I might remind you. And as for the humans, well, whatever fate they meet, they brought it on themselves and if one paranormal’s life needs to be sacrificed for the good of our all kind, then so be it. You understood that once.”

“And I still do. Just not in the way you’d like,” said Hilton, coldly, as he reached for the zipper on his leather jacket. “My whole life, I wanted to be a hero and now I’ve finally found a way to be one.”

The Founder looked concerned as he rose up from his chair. “Meaning?”

Hilton slowly began unzipping his coat. “It’s time for you to die.”

At this, the Founder laughed in disbelief, loud and hard. “You must be mad. With the exception of Sierra Jameson and John Young, none of our kind can kill. And that includes you. It’s our most refined quality. So, why don’t you just—” The Founder’s voice wandered off when Hilton opened his coat, revealing the giant bomb strapped to the younger man’s torso and wired to his cell phone, which had just started to ring.

“I’m not going to kill you.” He smirked at the look on the Founder’s face. “I think it’s for you.”

For Sierra, her family and all the Tomorrow People to live, the Founder had to die and if the price of that was also Hilton’s own life, he was more than prepared to pay it. It was what a hero did
and maybe this way, Sierra would no longer remember him with anger and hatred.

Hilton then spun around to see Sierra teleport into the ops room and their eyes briefly met before the bomb then went off, killing Hilton. There was no time to react or put up a telekinetic force-field, and the shockwave sent Sierra flying into the wall behind her as the Founder’s office was engulfed into flames.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son and daughter, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

Sierra’s ears were ringing louder than a church bell, blood dripped from a cut on her forehead from where a glass shard had cut her, her lungs were burning and every cell in her body was screaming in agony as she slowly staggered to her feet. She blinked rapidly several times to clear her vision as she began making her way into the destroyed remains of the Founder’s office. All around her it was chaos. People were running around yelling, debris lay everywhere, half the lights were out and sparkling, and there was smoke everywhere. Sierra ignored all of this as she entered the room, only to collapse to her knees again when she found Hilton’s body.

“Hilton,” sobbed Sierra. “Oh, God, no.”

Suddenly, it didn’t mattered that Hilton had betrayed Sierra’s trust. He’d just sacrificed himself to save their lives and stop the Founder, all for his love for Sierra. Though Hilton had done wrong, he’d willingly and selflessly died a hero’s death, despite believing that Sierra would forever hate him. And even worse, as Hilton had been at ground zero, his body was nothing more than charred skeleton with a few scraps of clothing and the remains of the bomb still attached to it. She couldn’t revive him. How could it end like this?

“That was too close. I almost died. And if you value your life or the lives of your band of rebels, there needs to be a real truce this time.”

Sierra spun around and quickly rose to her feet when she saw the Founder. He was horrendously injured and scarred but he was still clinging to life and judging by the look on his face, still had enough energy for a fight.

Knowing she couldn’t win such a fight in her current state, Sierra then teleported away just as the Founder lunged for Sierra.

When she arrived at the Lair, she was immediately met by her frantic family, who’d been watching the news coverage of the bombing at Ultra.

“Sierra! What the hell happened? Are you okay?” asked John, as he took her in his arms.

“I’m fine. Hilton…Hilton’s the one who set off the bomb at Ultra. He was trying to kill the Founder so he could save us.” Save me, she almost added but did not. Tears slid down Sierra’s cheeks as a wave of grief crashed down on her. “There was just a skeleton left. I couldn’t revive him.” Sierra swallowed painfully as she tried and failed to get the memory of Hilton’s face before he died out of her mind. “I was so angry with Hilton for what he did, but he just selflessly sacrificed
himself for us, for me. How can it end this way?”

John held Sierra close as she tightly clutched his shirt in her hands and shook like a leaf. “It’s not your fault. Hilton made his own choice.”

Sierra took a deep shuddering breath. She knew that, but why couldn’t she believe it? Though she knew Hilton’s choices had been his own and therefore not on her, she couldn’t help but blame herself. Hilton had gotten into his mess because of his love for Sierra, because he’d wanted to protect her. How could it not be Sierra’s fault that Hilton was dead?

“I’m sorry for your loss, sweetheart,” said Roger, remorsefully. “And I hate to ask this, but was Hilton successful? Is the Founder dead?”

Sierra shook her head as she pulled away from John and wiped away her tears. “No. The Founder barely survived the explosion. He’s scarred and heavily injured but he’s still kicking and he gave me a message. If we don’t give him a real truce and soon, the Founder’s going to kill us all. You have to go now. All of you. Pack the essentials, take the kids and everyone else here and leave the Lair.”

With the situation as grave as it was, Sierra needed her friends and family to be safe. Otherwise, she would lose it and everyone would be in a worse state than before. Sierra hoped they would see reason and agree but no such luck.

“What? Go? Are you kidding me?” demanded Marla. “You’ve spent over a year trying to find your father and you almost killed yourself bringing him back from Limbo! We’re finally together as a family. We’re not running. I can’t live like a refugee and I won’t put Luca through that. There is no life for this family, not until the Founder and the Machine are gone forever. We’re staying.”

“Marla, this isn’t a debate!” snapped Sierra, sharply. “The Founder knows Dad’s alive. He needs Dad to power up the Machine. If he succeeds, every human being on this planet is doomed, including Luca. And if he can’t get Dad, he’ll use me or my kids. It’s what that bastard trained me for! I can’t allow that to happen!”

How could Marla be so short-sighted and argue like this? Didn’t she realize the position they were in now? If Roger or her children were used in the Machine, Sierra would never forgive herself. It was all the more reason for them to leave while they still could while Sierra formulated a plan to take out the Founder once and for all.

“All the more reason for us to stay together. Whatever we do, we do as a family,” said Roger, firmly, as he placed his hand on Sierra’s shoulder. “You’ve been fighting so hard for so long to protect us all by yourself. It’s time to put an end to that. Let us protect you now.”

Sierra could see her family weren’t about to be dissuaded so she decided to cease arguing, at least for the time being.

“So, what happens now?” asked Sierra, hesitantly.

“Now,” said Cara, briskly as she entered the conversation at last, “I go see the Founder and have a little chat with the bastard.”

It was high time the Founder knew who he was messing with and what his fate would be if he didn’t stop this pointless war.
A small party consisting of Cara, Russell, Natalie and her three cohorts stormed into Ultra soon after this. The Founder was in a medical room and had his back to them while he was treated for his injuries by one of Ultra’s doctors.

“I see you got my message,” said the Founder, without glancing at them.

“You should’ve frisked me for a bomb,” said Cara, coldly.

“That wouldn’t have been wise, Cara,” said the Founder, scoffing as he turned to face them. The entire right side of his face was a mess of blood, bandages and scars from Hilton’s bombing and his torso was wrapped tightly in bandages that were becoming stained with fresh blood. If that wasn’t enough, the cornea of his right eye was also a red, bloody mess that was quite repulsive to look at. “Oh, I do apologize for my appearance. But if you think I’m hideous, you should see poor, misguided Hilton. What’s left of him, anyway, before his corpse is cremated.”

Cara could not disguise her disgust at the Founder’s attitude. “What do you want?”

“Well, since you’ve asked, I’ve asked you here for one simple reason: I want Sierra or her father. I don’t care which, it could even be both of them, as long as I get one of them taken into custody. Alive. So, you bring either Sierra or Roger to me and we’ll let bygones be bygones,” said the Founder, bluntly.

Cara immediately shook her head and fixed an icy glare on the Founder. “Like hell. If you put either one of them into the Machine, all of humankind will be gone. I won’t be a party to genocide.”

“So, that’s a ‘no,’?” said the Founder.

“That’s a hells no, you bastard!” snapped Russell.

The Founder looked unsurprised by this but still agitated. “Fine then. Since you won’t cooperate peacefully, I’ll bring out the tacks of brass. Bring Roger or Sierra to me and I won’t kill you all.”

Cara was unimpressed. “You’re going to have to try harder than that. Our kind can’t kill and besides, Jedikakah threatened to kill us all for years.”

The Founder smirked. “Yes, yes, he did. But unlike Dr. Price, I actually follow through on my threats. Remember that injection you lot received the last time you were here? It’s a tracer that lodges itself in the cerebellum and allows us to track our kind, but there’s one little detail I neglected to mention last time. It also doubles as a kill switch. Allow me to demonstrate. Doctor, activate Mr. Pellegrino’s switch, please.”

Before anyone could react, the doctor tending to the Founder pressed a button on his tablet and moments later, Pellegrino, one of Natalie’s more aggressive and loyal lackeys, had a sudden nose bleed before his eyes rolled into his head and then he collapsed to the floor, dead as a doornail.

Furious and grief-stricken, Natalie had to be restrained by both Cara and Russell from lashing out at the Founder.

“YOU BASTARD!” she screeched, before collapsing into the arms of Nick, one of her other
cohorts.

The Founder ignored Natalie as he slowly rose up and began putting on his trademark suit. “I’m only going to say this once, so listen closely. For every hour that Roger and/or Sierra aren’t in my custody, I will kill one of you. And if I run out of choices amongst you lot, that threat will extend to the others I’ve injected with this device. Tick-tock.”

The situation had just gotten from bad to worse. What were they going to do now?

XXX

When Cara and her party returned to the Lair and reported in, nobody was happy, least of all Sierra and her father. If anything, they were horrified and disgusted by the new level of lowness that Founder had just stooped down too.

“So, if we don’t turn ourselves in, the Founder starts killing our kind off one-by-one,” said Roger, in disgust. “Just when I thought he could sink no lower.”

“Damn it! I was afraid something like this was going to happen. I knew there was something off about that damned tracer. I knew it!” cursed Sierra, as she ran her fingers through her hair.

Natalie glared at Sierra. “Then why didn’t you do something about it when you had the chance? We’re in this mess because of you. We’re all walking time bombs because of you!”

Sierra glared and resisted the urge to punch Natalie’s lights out. How dare that blond twit blame Sierra for this? This wasn’t Sierra’s fault! “First of all, a hunch isn’t the same as hard evidence. So what the hell was I supposed to do? Second, you and your little gang members are the ones who ignored our warnings about the Founder and decided to get injected! And third, this is NOT my fault! The Founder is our enemy here, NOT me! So, shut the hell up or I swear to God, I’ll kill you right now myself right here and now,” threatened Sierra. While Sierra didn’t actually plan on killing Natalie, she’d had enough of Natalie’s piss-poor attitude and thinly veiled threats and if the risk of her life would be enough to stop Natalie, then Sierra was all for it.

Natalie scoffed. “Oh, please. Except for your boyfriend, our kind can’t kill, remember?”

Sierra’s eyes narrowed as she raised a threatening hand. “Actually, I can.” At this point, Sierra didn’t care who knew she could kill anymore. They were in the middle of a war with the Founder and their members were dropping like flies. Now wasn’t the time for Natalie’s rebellious behavior. “But if you think I’m bluffing, please, feel free to test me.”

Natalie’s eyes widened as she realized that Sierra was completely serious and to Sierra’s immense relief, she backed off without another word.

“All right, enough. Stop it,” interjected Roger, before a worse fight could ensue. “We’re all on the same side here. Don’t you see? This is what the Founder wants, for you to turn on each other so you’ll turn against Sierra and I. So, please, stop.”

“And do what? Sit around with our fingers crossed and hope we’re not the next to drop? Russell got injected too! Don’t you care about him?” snarled Natalie.

“Of course we do, which is why we’re building a strategy and we’ll figure out a way to disable
the kill switch. So, please, keep your damn panties on,” said Sierra, in frustration.

“The Founder has laid out a plan!”

“The Founder just killed your friend,” countered Sierra. “And he can’t be trusted.”

“And you and your father can? You’ve been keeping secrets and it’s the two of you that he’s after, not the rest of us!” snapped Natalie. “Everyone’s going to freak out when I tell them what happened to Pellegrino and what’ll happen to those of us who got the tracer if we don’t cooperate with the Founder.”

Upon hearing Natalie’s thinly veiled threat, Sierra’s eyes flared as she grabbed Natalie and pinned her to the wall. “Don’t you dare! There’s no need to start a civil war down here.”

“I’m not trying to start a civil war, I’m trying to keep us alive,” snarled Natalie. She glanced at the time on Sierra’s black wristwatch. “You have fifty-two minutes until the next one of us bites the dust. What if it’s me?”

“Then I’ll turn up at your funeral in my dancing shoes! Look, just keep your damned mouth shut and behave yourself while we figure this out. Or I’ll have you begging for death. Are we clear on that?” growled Sierra as her dark green eyes narrowed.

Natalie begrudgingly nodded and then stormed off when Sierra released her.

Sierra silently prayed that she’d gotten through to Natalie. With the Founder killing them off one-by-one, the last thing the Tomorrow People needed was Natalie and her remaining cohorts starting a civil war that would get them all killed. She hoped Natalie would behave herself, but who knew with that brute of a girl? Sierra forced herself to brush her concerns aside as she then joined Irene and the others in TIM’s room.

“We need to find a way to disable the kill switch. Can you do it, Irene?” asked Cara.

Irene looked stunned. “Me? Are you kidding?”

“You have two PhD’s. Can you create an antidote or something?” asked John.

Irene hesitated. “Two unfinished dissertations and six digits worth of student loans. I mean, I don’t even know how the nano-agent inserts itself into the body.”

“Well, could you do an autopsy on Pellegrino?” asked Sierra. Getting the twit’s body wouldn’t be easy but it’d be worth it if it bought them enough time to figure out how to take down the Founder and his Machine. “Get a sample or something?”

“You said it attaches itself to the person’s cerebellum, as in ‘brain,’ as in ‘I’m not a flipping brain surgeon!’” said Irene, in exasperation. “Besides, why’re we even discussing this? Why don’t you just revive him instead? I know you can.”

“Because if I do, odds are it’ll just reactive the kill switch, which means the Founder will just keep on killing the same person over and over again. And trust me, nobody in the right mind wants that,” said Sierra, in exasperation. Yes, she could revive the victims easily but to what end? So they could just keep on dying? That would be unnecessarily cruel.

“Oh.” Irene looked ashamed for a moment as she closed her mouth. After a minute or so, she spoke again, “Okay, fine. I’ll see what I can do. But it won’t be easy. It took Jonas Salk seven years to make the polio vaccine. I’m not even technically a molecular geneticist. I’m going to need some
“That’s why I’m here,” said Jedikiah, briskly as he entered the room.

“Where the hell have you been?” demanded Sierra.

“Elsewhere, trying to pull the plug on the Founder,” said Jedikiah, grimly. Earlier, he’d slipped away to speak with the one person higher up than the Founder, hoping that if the funding was pulled and Ultra shut down, the Founder’s plans would be stopped. “It didn’t work. He refuses to believe that the Founder’s anything but trustworthy and nothing I say will persuade him otherwise.” He clapped his hands together. “So, how can I help?”

Jedikiah was then ordered to start prepping a lab for an autopsy while John, Cara and Sierra went to retrieve Pellegrino’s body, which, according to TIM, had been dumped in an alley by Ultra and was now in the city morgue.

“So, what exactly did you tell your boss, anyway?” asked Irene, curiously as she filled a test tube with special chemicals.

“Are you insane? What the hell did you tell him, anyway?”

“The truth. I warned him that paranormals were a threat. I mean, this is what evolution is, the more advanced species supplanting the obsolete one,” said Jedikiah, unable to keep the frustration out of his voice as he cleaned the autopsy table.

Irene raised an eyebrow. “A pretty crude reduction of Darwinism.”

“Crude or not, survival of the fittest holds true,” said Jedikiah, firmly. “The Neanderthals died off with the arrival of Homo sapiens and now Homo sapiens—”

“The Neanderthals weren’t eliminated by humans. They made us possible,” interrupted Irene. “I mean, FYI, seventy percent of our dermal layer is Neanderthalic code.”

Jedikiah looked unimpressed as he prepped a microscope. “Yeah, well, you know what? I’d rather be alive than a blueprint for someone else’s skin. Thank you very much.”

Irene rolled her eyes. “That’s what evolution is. Don’t you—oh.” Irene’s voice trailed off and she felt a hot prickle of shame as she realized what Jedikiah was truly worried about. He wasn’t concerned about himself. He was worried about the baby Morgan was carrying. “Oh my God. I’m such an insensitive cow. This is about Morgan and the baby, isn’t it? You’re worried it’ll be human like you.” And if the baby was human and they failed to stop the Founder, the baby would die.

Jedikiah sighed as he tightly gripped the table. “Yes,” he admitted. It took a rare show of courage for Jedikiah to admit his true fears. “I’ve made a lot of mistakes in my life I’m not proud of and I’m willing to die to stop the Founder. But I’ll be damned if I let my child die too. So, please, can we just focus on stopping this son of a bitch?”

Irene nodded. “Sure. And don’t worry, this’ll be our secret.”

No sooner had Irene finished speaking, Cara and her party arrived with Pellegrino’s body and then the autopsy went underway. They worked steadily and as quickly as they could and before long, they discovered that the tracer acted like a mechanical virus and attacked certain cells, which explained how it was able to kill someone from the inside out. TIM was also able to start a search for the tracer’s signal so they could locate the source and shut it down there like taking down a cell tower. Eventually, TIM was able to triangulate said cell tower’s location.
“Sierra, your kids are lurking. Can you find somewhere else for them to play?” asked Jedikiah, not looking up from his work.

Scared of what was happening in the Lair and wanting to help, Robbie and Charlotte had joined Jedikiah and Irene in the lab. So far, there hadn’t been anything for them to do, so they’d been quietly sitting on the couch, reading anatomy books and drawing on a sketchpad. They’d kept out from underfoot and weren’t bothering anyone, so Sierra rolled her eyes and scowled.

“They are not lurking. They’re behaving themselves. So, leave them alone,” said Sierra. “Besides, they’re scared of Natalie and this is the safest place for them for now.”

Jedikiah sighed in annoyance but didn’t argue further.

“I believe I’ve found something of interest for you, Sierra,” said TIM, as he then projected a map onto a screen. “The relay array for the Founder’s network is located within the Long Lake Dam, in the Adirondack Mountains. But I should mention that the facility on lease for the D.O.D.”

Sierra groaned. “Are you serious?” D.O.D. stood for the Department of Defense, which meant the government which meant the odds of getting in and shutting it down were next to impossible.

In spite of the situation, Jedikiah grinned. “How do you think Ultra pays for all its fancy toys?”

John looked regretful as he shook his head. “I know we need to disable to tracker but not like this. This is way too risky, Sierra. We’re talking about the U.S. government for God’s sake. Let’s just see what Dr. Frankenstein and Igor come up with.”

“Which one am I?” asked Irene, curiously.

A blood-curdling scream cut off any chance of reply as Cara, John and Sierra then raced out of the room and into the main living area. A crowd had gathered around Nick, who now lay dead on the floor thanks to the kill switch in his system.

“What happened to him? He just started bleeding and fell down,” said Luca, who looked green around the gills.

“He’s dead because the tracer doubles as a kill switch and unless we hand over Sierra or Roger, the Founder will keep on killing someone every hour,” said Natalie, coldly. “Unless, of course, you revive him, Sierra. So, do it!”

Sierra regretfully shook her head. “No.”

Natalie’s eyes narrowed. “No? What do you mean, ‘no,’? Why the hell not? You have the power!”

“Because if I revive him, the tracker will reactivate and the Founder will just keep killing him over and over again,” explained Sierra, regretfully. Speaking from experience, it was anything but pleasant and not something she’d want anyone to endure, even Natalie and her lackeys. “Trust me, you don’t want to know how it feels to repeatedly die and be revived. I won’t do that to Nick. If we want Nick back, we have to deactivate the tracker. I’m sorry, but that’s my decision.”

Upon hearing this, Russell looked upset but also understanding as did everyone else there but Natalie and her remaining ally, who looked furious.

“This is all on you!” snarled Natalie. “You and your damned father! How many of us have to die before you turn yourselves in?” She looked to the others for support but no one except her
remaining devoted follower so much as looked in Natalie’s direction. Instead, they all moved away towards Sierra, choosing to stand by her.

Russell respectfully covered Nick’s body with a blanket.

Sierra turned to her father. “Dad, go. Take John and Cara with you. Stop this before it’s too late. I’ll hold down the fort.”

After what they’d just seen, there no question in anyone’s mind about what needed to be done. No matter the dangers it posed, they had to break into the facility and deactivate the Founder’s network before someone else died. And with the way Natalie was acting, Sierra wanted Roger as far away from the blond bitch as possible.

Roger nodded and after a brief, loving good-bye to his wife and son, departed from the Lair with Cara and John in tow. For the sake of their people, they had to succeed in this.

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While Roger and his crew were off to the mountains and Sierra rejoined Jedikiah in the lab, Natalie and her remaining ally, Munroe, went off to Ultra to speak with the Founder. The two of them had talked and decided enough was enough. They wanted to be powerful and they wanted to live. If Sierra and Roger wouldn’t cooperate and turn themselves in, Natalie and Munroe would force their hand. But in order for that to happen, they would need help from the Founder as they didn’t know where Roger was and more importantly, they knew they weren’t powerful enough to take on Sierra in combat.

“Well, well, well, what a pleasure to see you again, Miss La Rue,” said the Founder, when they entered his office. “I take it you’ve finally come to see reason?” When Natalie nodded, the Founder narrowed his eyes and asked, “However, I can’t help but notice that neither Sierra nor Roger are with you. Which begs the question, what do you want?”

“We want to live and be powerful and we want to bring you what you asked for but we need your help to do that,” said Natalie.

Upon hearing this, the Founder became intrigued. “Do tell. How may I be of assistance?”

“Roger’s gone off God knows where and we don’t know when he’ll be back. So, I can’t promise we can bring you him but we do know Sierra’s whereabouts. She’s in the Lair. But the problem is, we can’t take her down in a fight. She’s too powerful, immune to suppression cuffs and she can kill us,” explained Natalie. “We were hoping you might have a way to take her down.”

The Founder raised a finger. “Ah, lucky for you, I do have a solution for that little problem.”

Natalie grinned. Maybe they could find a way out of this mess after all.

XXX
Meanwhile, Irene and Jedikiah were still hard at work in TIM’s room when Irene made a
discovery.

“Shut the front door,” said Irene, in amazement.

Jedikiah looked up and Sierra ceased pacing.

“What?”

Irene was practically glowing with joy. “I’ve always suspected that multiple genes working in
tandem create the Tomorrow Person adaptation.”

Jedikiah shook his head and waved a dismissive hand. “No, it’s impossible to identify those
contributing markers. Trust me, I’ve been trying for years.”

“TIM, can you extrapolate a map of those base pairs?” interrupted Irene, ignoring Jedikiah.

“Quite easily,” said TIM.

Said image then appeared on the screen and what they all saw shocked Jedikiah down to the
core.

“Tracer’s going to twelve strands of three different alleles,” he murmured in amazement. “It’s a
magnet.”

“That’s what makes Tomorrow People special,” said Sierra, smiling in amazement. “Nothing
more than a few hundred carefully placed proteins. You did. Oh my God. You did it!”

Jedikiah clapped his hands together and looked as though he might cry with joy. “I’ve been
looking at this for over twenty years and this kill switch device just brings it to us! This is the
invisible ink decoded! This…do you have any idea what this means?”

“The possibilities are limitless!” said Irene, gleefully. “We can identify breakouts in utero! Amplify existing powers, counter bio-weapons! Hell, in theory, after enough years of research, if
enough genes are out of sequence, we might one day be able to transplant powers directly into a
human! Homo sapien becomes Homo superior.”

Sierra’s smile faded at that and she signaled for Irene to drop it before Jedikiah got anymore
ideas. The last thing they needed right now was Jedikiah of all people walking around with powers.
Though he’d done so much for them and was now their ally, Sierra wasn’t sure if she could trust
him with any kind of paranormal power. Granted, he was probably only thinking about his unborn
baby, but did they dare take such a risk?

“But how does this help us disable the tracer?” asked Charlotte, hesitantly. “If we can’t figure
that out and soon, someone else is going to die or worse.”

Charlotte’s words, however much of a buzzkill that they were, rang true. This was an amazing
discovery but still, their findings hadn’t answered the question about the tracer. If John and the
others didn’t knock out the signal or if Jedikiah and Irene failed to find a solution, more innocent
lives were going to be taken.

They couldn’t allow that to happen. They had to stop it and fast.
Meanwhile, after a rather daunting hike through the forest and mountains, John, Roger and Cara found the facility that housed the Founder’s network. It was stone and very high and also heavily fenced. The guards were absent, which was also a bonus for them as it meant one less problem to deal with. They were just about to make their plan and move when a voice startled them.

“Can I help you?”

It was guard, armed to the teeth and he wasn’t alone either. Like magic, he and three others appeared out of nowhere and aimed their guns at John and the others, forcing their hands on their heads.

“Well, I hope so, officer. You see, we’re road tripping and our car broke down a few miles back. We’re just looking for civilization, maybe someone with a cell phone. Can we borrow yours?” asked Roger, smoothly.

The officer didn’t buy it for a second. “This government facility is restricted access only. I’m pretty sure you don’t have it or a broken down car for that matter. Keep your hands on your head and walk that way.”

With great reluctance, John and the others walked down to the guards’ vehicle, which was parked just a couple feet away.

“This goes one of two ways. One, keep your hands up and cooperate with us. Or two, they find your bodies in the icy river,” said the guard.

John made a face. “Yeah, how about option three?”

And with that, John teleported away and reappeared behind the guard, grabbed his gun and disarmed him while Roger and Cara fought the other three. After a brief scuffle, Cara ended up with a grazed bullet injury on her upper arm and all four guards were rendered unconscious before being tied up and placed in their vehicle.

“You okay?” asked John.

Cara winced as she nodded. “It’s just a graze. I’ll be fine. There’s still one guard left inside. He’s got a gun, I can tell.”

“John, take care of Cara. I’ll take care of the guard,” said Roger, firmly.

John nodded and after grabbing the guard’s first-aid kit from their vehicle, began tending to Cara’s injury while Roger took one of the guns and went inside. As he hadn’t taken the serum he’d injected Sierra and Luca with all those years ago, Roger couldn’t kill but the guard didn’t know that. And if it came down to it, Roger could still take the guard down. Hopefully, it wouldn’t come to that.

When Roger found the control room, he found the lone guard sitting by his desk, which had four large computer monitors resting on it as well as a computer tower. He had a gun but it was in a corner out of his reach.

“Hands,” ordered Roger.
Terrified, the guard did as he was told and didn’t even glance in his weapon’s direction. “What do you want?”

Roger nodded his head at the computers. “The telecom array, I want it off. Now.”

“Off? What…but I-I-I have my orders,” he stammered.

Roger then quickly read the guard’s mind and though it pained him, he used the knowledge he gleaned as leverage. “Think of your wife, Eve, and your little girl, Jordan, sitting at home at eleven hundred Briar Patch, Plattsburgh.”

The guard looked petrified and baffled. “How do you know about them?”

“I make it my business to know,” said Roger, coolly as he struggled to conceal his own churning emotions. “Which is why I also know you want to get back to see them again. So, shut it down. Now.”

Realizing he was cornered, the guard did as he was told and shut down the network completely. The system went completely dark. But that wasn’t enough. It had to stay that way. So, Roger ensured that it did by moving the guard out of the way and firing every last bullet in the gun onto the equipment. It was over, the kill switches were destroyed.

_Sierra, it’s done. We shut down the Founder’s network,_ said Roger, as he then left the facility. Roger froze in his tracks when Sierra didn’t reply. Worse still, their connection felt numb, fuzzy at best. _Sierra? Sierra, are you there? Answer me!_

But there was still nothing, which only worried Roger further. Something was seriously wrong with Sierra. He could feel it.

“JOHN! CARA!” yelled Roger, as he ran to them. “We need to get back. NOW!”

“What’s wrong?” asked John, worried.

“Sierra’s not answering. Something’s happened,” said Roger.

Nothing further needed to be said as the three of them then teleported back to the Lair, praying they weren’t too late in stopping whatever was happening.

XXX

Back at the Lair, Sierra had left TIM’s room to meet in a private area of the Lair to speak with Natalie, who’d requested a meeting. Sierra hadn’t particularly wanted to speak with Natalie but the blond woman had been persistent, so Sierra had caved to get Natalie off her back if nothing else.

“Okay, we’re alone. What do you want to talk about?” asked Sierra, warily. If this was about the damn tracker, Sierra was going to blow a gasket. There was still half an hour on the clock and they were doing all they possibly could to stop it. What more did Natalie want, besides Sierra turning herself in?

Natalie grinned a grin that churned Sierra’s stomach. “Oh, not much. Just how much I’m going to enjoy this.”
Sierra frowned in confusion. “Enjoy what? What’re you—?”

Sierra was cut off when something large and hard was suddenly bashed into the back of her skull, giving her a severe concussion and causing her to fall down to her knees. Blood trickled down into Sierra’s hair, pain exploded in Sierra’s skull and her vision blurred as her head suddenly felt heavy with pressure. Unable to focus and use her powers, Sierra was helpless as she was then grabbed from behind by her throat and then a needle containing the Founder’s drugs was plunged into her neck.

Just before Sierra lost consciousness, she saw Natalie’s smug face.

“Like I said, Sierra, I’m going to enjoy this, which is watching you die while the rest of us, especially me, gets to live,” said Natalie.

“You…traitorous bitch…” whispered Sierra, as her vision then faded into darkness.

Pleased with their results, Natalie and Munroe then teleported away to Ultra, unaware that they’d been spotted by Russell too late to stop them.

Natalie and Munroe was positively bursting with glee as they dragged Sierra’s unconscious body through Ultra’s halls and into the specified room that the Founder had requested. He looked nothing if not impressed at their success.

“We didn’t get the guy but we brought you your girl,” said Natalie, proudly as they dropped Sierra’s body onto the floor. “Hope you don’t mind she’s not in mint condition. So, maybe you should stop killing us.”

Out of sheer spite or simply because they were able to now, the traitors had taken the chance to beat Sierra to a bloody pulp, almost literally. She was sporting a number of dark colored bruises, blood dripped down her skin where the flesh had broken, her right eye was a painful swollen mass and several bones had been broken.

“It’s not what I wanted but nevertheless, I’ll take it,” said the Founder. He snapped his fingers and then the two doctors who’d been standing on either side of him, took Sierra away. “Now, regarding those tracers…a deal’s deal.” He took his tablet out of his pocket and loaded up the control for the tracers but all he got was a lost connection message. “Oh, would you look at that? Looks like Roger’s pipped me to the post, taken out my network. The tracers are destroyed.”

Natalie and Munroe exchanged shocked looks at this before grinning in satisfaction. Humans destroyed and the kill switches gone? Two birds with one stone. This was fantastic and it was about to get even better.

“So, what happens now? Can we join you here at Ultra? Lose the Prime Barrier and become even more powerful than we already are?” asked Natalie, eagerly. Surely with such a display of loyalty, they would be greatly rewarded.

But a surprise came Natalie and Munroe’s way when the Founder shook his head. “Oh, I’m afraid not, actually. You see, while all the rest of our species get to survive and thrive, you two will not be joining us as you’re what I like to call a security risk.” Had they merely delivered Sierra or Roger as asked, the story would be quite different but that wasn’t the case. Instead, they’d beaten Sierra to a bloody pulp and something about their attitudes didn’t sit well with the Founder. Rewarded? No, they were too dangerous to be allowed to live.

“What? No, we just brought you Roger’s brat. Doesn’t that make us invaluable to you?”
demanded Natalie. After all they’d done, the Founder was just going to kill them anyway? How could he do such a thing?

“Quite the contrary. Your actions as well as your attitude makes you expendable,” said the Founder, smirking as he departed from the room. “Toodle-loo.”

Before Natalie and her lackey could react, the door slammed shut behind the Founder and locked as the floor then lit up with the familiar blue glow of D-chips. Poisonous gas was then pumped into the room and moments later, the two traitors were dead on the floor. Ultra would soon cremate their bodies and dump the ashes into the river. No tears would be shed for them, for they’d betrayed their people and paid the ultimate price.

XXX

Russell burst into TIM’s room, panicked.

“We’re screwed. Natalie and Munroe just took Sierra to Ultra,” he said, breathlessly. Earlier that day, he’d gone looking for Sierra to get an update on the kill switch situation and reassurance that he’d be okay, only to find Sierra with Natalie too late. “I didn’t get there in time to stop them, I’m so sorry.”

Upon hearing this, Jedikiah and Irene dropped their test tubes, causing them to shatter onto the floor while Sierra’s children stood up like a shot and exchanged terrified, panicked looks.

“We have to go to Ultra. We have to save her,” said Robbie. He grabbed his sister’s hand and was about to teleport away when Jedikiah miraculously stopped them. He grabbed them and pried them apart from one another.

“What? No! Absolutely not!” said Jedikiah, firmly. Sierra would never forgive him if either of her children went to Ultra and were hurt or worse.

“We can’t let her die! She’s our mom!” protested Charlotte, as tears pooled in her eyes.

“I know, but if you go there and get yourselves killed, she’ll die anyway and so will all of humankind!” said Jedikiah, harshly. When the two children flinched, Jedikiah felt a prickle of shame. His face then softened as he knelt down to their level and he lowered his voice. “I’m sorry. But we need to be smart about this. We’ll rescue her, I promise. But not like this and not you two.”

Robbie’s face then lit up with an idea. “Then why not you? Couldn’t you go? Couldn’t you save her?”

Jedikiah sighed as he ran his hand through his hair. “If I had the firepower, maybe but—”

“What if we gave it to you? Would you do it and then allow us to take it back?” asked Robbie, his face and tone unreadable.

“Would you?” asked Charlotte.

Everyone stared at Robbie and Charlotte in puzzlement. What was they talking about? It sounded like pure lunacy.
“Well, yes, but obviously—” began Jedikiah.

Jedikiah was cut off when Robbie and Charlotte suddenly grabbed Jedikiah’s hands and then the strangest feeling overwhelmed Jedikiah. Power such as he’d only ever imagined surged through his body. What’s more, knowledge on how to control said power exploded in Jedikiah’s mind and it took his breath away.

“Robbie, Charlotte…what the hell did you just do to me?” asked Jedikiah, faintly.

Charlotte and Robbie looked unrepentant but nervous as Robbie replied, “We gave you what you wanted. Power. The three T’s of the Tomorrow People and the ability to control them. Promise us you’ll use them save our mom and then let us take the powers back.”

Everyone stared at the child in complete and utter shock if not abject horror.

Suddenly Jedikiah understood why Sierra had always gone to such lengths to protect her son and daughter. It wasn’t just because Robbie and Charlotte were hers or children, it was also because of Charlotte and Robbie’s last and greatest power. He could give a human the powers of a paranormal or he could take them away whenever he chose with a mere touch. That power made Robbie and Charlotte the perfect weapon for the Founder and his plans. What’s more, the kids were trusting Jedikiah with the powers of the Tomorrow People, a trust Jedikiah would not violate.

“I promise you, I’m going to bring your mom back to you. And when I get back, you can undo this,” said Jedikiah, firmly.

One way or another, Jedikiah was going to bring his brother’s daughter home and end the Founder’s plans for good. Even if it killed him.

“Go. Now,” said Charlotte. “Please.”

Jedikiah nodded and with that, he teleported away topside just as Roger and the others appeared.

“Where’s Sierra?” demanded Roger.

Russell filled them in on the situation and also explained about what the kids had just done to rescue her. He finished with the million-dollar question, “…did you know that these two munchkins could give people powers and take them away?”

Roger and everyone else looked shocked while John nodded, unashamedly.

“Sierra told me after we rescued her from Ultra,” he confessed. “I’m sorry we didn’t tell you but Sierra was terrified of what would happen if anyone found out. So, I swore to keep it secret.”

Robbie had been three years old when they found out about the power. One night, Astrid’s home was set upon by a paranormal thief and when Robbie had lashed out to protect his mother and in the resulting fight, Robbie had taken away the paranormal’s powers and they’d also discovered he could restore them as well. When Charlotte had been rescued from the Citadel, they’d found out she had all of Robbie’s powers, including that one and had decided to keep it secret for the kids’ sake. As Robbie could not take away his own powers much like a snake couldn’t be poisoned by its own venom, Sierra had decided to keep her powers and not rid herself of them, despite her misgivings about them so that she might be in a better position to protect her loved ones.

“But it doesn’t matter now,” said John, firmly before anyone could speak. “Right now all that
matters is Sierra. She’s in the Machine, which means if Jedikiah doesn’t succeed, every last human man, woman and child is going to die. We have to stop this before it’s too late.”

Everyone agreed with John. The revelation of Robbie and Charlotte’s greatest power could wait. Right now, the Founder had to be stopped and his Machine destroyed. Otherwise, everything they’d been fighting for would be for nothing. But no one voiced the question they were all thinking: what if it was already too late and humankind was doomed?

“Then Jed’s going to need some help,” said Roger, firmly. Though he knew it was suicidal to break into Ultra, Roger didn’t care. Sierra’s life and the fate of every last human being on the planet, including her brother’s, was at stake and Roger would be damned if he didn’t do something to stop it. He had a duty not just as a member of the Tomorrow People but as a father as well.

Without waiting for a reply, Roger then teleported away to Ultra, praying he wasn’t too late.

XXX

Slowly, Sierra came to and when she did, she found that her vision was blurred, every last cell in her body was screaming in utter agony and her head was still in too much of a painful, drugged fog to focus her powers. But she could still make out her surroundings and knew at once that she was in the Machine. It was about to be activated and when it did, Sierra would not be able to stop it nor prevent the genocide that was about to unfold.

“Forgive me. Please, forgive me…” she whispered, to whoever was listening. Though Sierra knew this was all the Founder’s doing, Sierra couldn’t help but feel responsible for what was about to unfold. So many lives were going to be taken because of her power and she couldn’t stop it. But maybe, just maybe she could find redemption in the afterlife.

Sierra was then unable to prevent the bloodcurdling scream that escaped her throat as the Machine activated.

The genocide of humankind… it had begun.
My name is Sierra Jameson.

I’m one of the Tomorrow People, the next step in human evolution. They call our powers the three T’s—telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. There’s a shadow war between my species and Ultra, the secret government agency that hunts us down. The only way to keep my species from going extinct and to protect my son and daughter, is to find my father. And the only way to do that is by working with the enemy.

Alarm bells rang through Ultra louder than a tornado warning siren as Jedikiah stormed through his former facility. Using his telekinesis and telepathy, he took down any guards that stood in his way by throwing them into the walls and disarming them or by causing them to experience horrendous pain in their heads. He took no breaks to catch his breath and nor did he slow down, for he was a man on a mission and nothing was going to stand in his way, so help him.

When Jedikiah reached the room where the Machine was housed, Jedikiah wasted no time in telekinetically blasting the door apart and then he teleported in front of his niece. Already, the Machine was glowing bright blue and sparking with life as it siphoned off energy from Sierra’s life-force and temporal manipulation power, causing her to cry out in pain. If that wasn’t enough to break Jedikiah’s heart, the sight of his niece was. Not only had she literally been beaten to a bloody pulp but her injuries had worsened thanks to the Machine, her bruises had darkened and enlarged, several of her bones were clearly broken if not shattered, her cuts were now bleeding more heavily and looked infected and to top it all off, she was whiter than snow.

“Oh dear God. Sierra!” cried Jedikiah.

Sierra weakly lifted her head and her eyes widened in abject horror as she saw Jedikiah try and fail to telekinetically blast apart her bonds, only to be blasted away by a booby trap that the Founder had set just in case someone was foolish enough to stop his plans.

“You…you have powers,” whispered Sierra, hoarsely. “My kids…?”

“We were desperate to save you and made a deal,” interrupted Jedikiah, as he stood up, undeterred by what’d just happened. “But that’s not important right now. What matters is saving you. I’m going to get you out of here, kiddo.” Somehow, he thought. How, Jedikiah didn’t know but he had to do something. He refused to have Sierra’s blood on his hands. “I’ll try—”

“Stop!” interrupted Sierra. Though her voice was weak and hoarse, it was no less firm, causing her uncle to freeze in his tracks. Tears pooled in Sierra’s eyes as she then said, “I can’t stop the Machine and if you keep trying to get close, you’ll die. But there is one thing you can do to stop this, something the Founder didn’t prepare for. Take your gun and shoot me.”

Immediately, Jedikiah fiercely shook his head. Kill his niece? Let the blood of Roger’s daughter rest on his hands? Jedikiah couldn’t fathom it.

“Kill you? Kid, no. I only have the three T’s. If I do that, I can’t revive you. Roger would
never forgive me and if your kids try to revive you, it might kill them because of their inexperience,” protested Jedikiah. He didn’t know if Sierra’s kids could revive the dead like their mother but he wasn’t about to try it now.

“Then don’t let them,” said Sierra. She didn’t want to die but if it was a choice between her life and countless others, Sierra was willing to make that sacrifice, however much it broke her heart. “Besides, you have to do this. Run the numbers! It’s me or every human that you love! What about your unborn baby? My little cousin? How do you know the baby’s not human? Think of the life you and Morgan could have!”

Tears pooled in Jedikiah’s eyes and he found himself beginning to lose his resolve. He didn’t want to kill Sierra but she had a point. Seven billion lives were at stake, including the life of Jedikiah’s unborn child. How could Jedikiah bear to bury the child he didn’t yet know if it was human as Sierra said? This was the ultimate no-win situation.

Tears streamed down Sierra’s cheeks. “Please, Uncle Jed, please! I don’t want my children to grow up in a world where the Founder wins because of me! Please,” she begged, as she sobbed. “My dad was willing to die to stop him. Don’t let Roger’s sacrifice be in vain. Do it for him and our family, please!”

Realizing there was no other choice, Jedikiah swallowed painfully as he raised his gun. “I’m sorry I failed you, Sierra. I’m so sorry,” he whispered. More than anything, Jedikiah wished he’d never met the Founder and started all of this. He would live with that guilt and regret until the day he died. “Please, forgive me.”

Jedikiah then closed his eyes and with a heavy heart, fired off his gun. The bullet hit Sierra’s heart, causing her to bleed heavily and the Machine’s operations came to a screeching halt just as Roger arrived. It did not take long for Roger to realize what had happened and he immediately looked horrified and grief-stricken.

“My God, Jed, what have you done?” cried Roger, as he then began unstrapping Sierra from the Machine. He cradled his injured daughter in his arms and applied pressure to Sierra’s bullet wound as her breathing grew more ragged with each passing moment.

“I’m sorry, Roger,” said Jedikiah, his voice thick with emotion.

Sierra weakly clutched her father’s arm. “It’s okay. Don’t blame him. I begged him to do it. It was the only way. Like father like daughter, right?”

Tears pooled in Roger’s eyes as he kissed Sierra’s forehead. “You stupid, self-sacrificing brat,” he said, not really meaning it. “Hang on, okay? I’m going to take you to the Lair and we’ll get you fixed up. I promise. I won’t let you die.”

“Neither will I,” said Jedikiah, as he knelt down beside them. He didn’t know if it was possible to save Sierra at this point, but what was the harm in trying?

Before Roger could teleport them all away, the room suddenly became alight with the familiar blue glow of D-chips, rendering Roger and Jedikiah powerless and then the Machine began glowing bright orange, signaling that it was still charging up.

“The Machine…” choked Sierra, as blood pooled in her mouth. “…why is it still charging?”

“Because it already got what it needed from you, Sierra. Your powers!”

Right on cue, the Founder then appeared in the room with a heavily armed kill squad behind
him. The Founder ignored the dark glares that Roger and Jedikiah were giving him as a smug look crossed his ugly face.

“Hello, Roger. Long time no see,” said the Founder, as he grinned a sickening grin. He gestured to the Machine with a proud air. “I will admit, I was skeptical your daughter could pull it off, but she is full of surprises just like you. See this? *This* will be your legacy, Roger. Long after you and your daughter have gone, your *powers* will still live on. Growing, expanding, transforming the planet. And there’s nothing any of you can do about it. With the D-chips online, neither you nor Jedikiah can leave and I very much doubt that Sierra has the strength to teleport the three of you away.”

Sierra glared at the Founder before turning to her father and tightening her grip on his arm. “Don’t listen to him. It may be over for me, but it’s not too late to save them, to save humanity. You can do this, Dad.”

Roger stubbornly shook head as more tears slid down his cheeks. He refused to accept what was happening. No father should have to outlive his own child and how could he even think of carrying on the mission without Sierra?

“No, I won’t leave you behind,” said Roger, as his voice broke. He tenderly stroked back a lock of Sierra’s hair. “Our people need you. Your kids still need you. John needs you. *I* need you. There’s strength in you, baby girl. Strength you can’t even imagine. I believe in you, Sierra. We both do,” he added as Jedikiah nodded in agreement.

A small spark lit up in Sierra’s eyes at this, as though Roger’s words and comforting touch had somehow rejuvenated her just a little. “Then hold on to me, both of you.”

The Founder scoffed in disbelief. “Pathetic. You can’t truly think you can escape me. Fin—”

But that was as far as the Founder got before both Jedikiah and Roger grabbed Sierra and then, using what little strength she had left, Sierra teleported the three of them to the Lair, where the rest of their people and family were waiting for them.

Upon their arrival, they were met with horrific screams and panicked looks.

“Sierra? Oh my God,” gasped John. “What the hell did he do to you?”

Sierra didn’t reply. Instead, her breathing grew fainter as she weakly reached for her boyfriend and took his hand into hers. She was having a hard time keeping her eyes open and she was nearly gone. She could feel it in her bones.

“What happened?” demanded Cara.

“She made me shoot her to shut off the Machine,” explained Jedikiah. “I didn’t want to but there wasn’t a choice.”

Cara looked murderous as did John at this. Jedikiah had shot Sierra? The bastard!

“But it didn’t work,” continued Jedikiah, ignoring their looks. “The Machine’s still charging up. I couldn’t stop the Machine but maybe we can still save Sierra. Where’re the kids?”

“Charlotte, Robbie!” yelled Roger. Sierra’s body suddenly felt more limp in his arms and Roger didn’t need to be a doctor to know that Sierra’s time was almost out. If they were going to save her, they had to act fast. “GET IN HERE, QUICK!”
As commanded, Robbie and Charlotte teleported into the room and without hesitation, they knelt at their mother’s side and used their powers to heal her just as her eyes began to close for good. Like magic, Sierra’s bruises faded, her broken bones healed and her cuts mended. But due to the nature of the Machine, Sierra was still exhausted beyond measure and her eyes remained closed as she continued to slumber in Roger’s arms.

“Why isn’t she waking up?” asked Astrid, frantically. “She’s healed, isn’t she?”

“The kids were able to stabilize her but using the Machine like that drained Sierra’s energy level,” explained Jedikiah, comfortingly. “Not even Sierra’s powers can heal exhaustion. She needs to sleep and regain her strength.”

“Sorry we couldn’t wake her,” said Robbie, remorsefully.

Roger shook his head. “Don’t be. You saved her life. Be proud of yourselves, both of you.”

The kids looked comforted at this but Charlotte still had a question. “When will she wake up?”


Privately, John hoped it was true as the last thing he wanted to do was lie to his kids. Though Sierra was stable, nobody could predict when she’d awaken. If she ever did. And nobody wanted to ask the worst question of all: what if she never woke up?

XXX

After making Sierra comfortable on the couch in TIM’s room with several comfy pillows and weighted blankets and once Jedikiah’s borrowed powers had been removed, Roger and the others regrouped in TIM’s room. They spoke in soft voices so as not to awaken Sierra. Roger was a complete and utter wreck, as was evident by him frantically trying to clean Sierra’s blood off his hands. Though Roger knew Sierra was alright and would most likely awaken soon enough, the trauma of having nearly witnessed his daughter dying in his arms had left him deeply shaken and angry.

“Roger, are you okay?” asked Cara, hesitantly.

Roger shook his head as angry tears glistened in his eyes. “No. No, I am most certainly not okay. Sierra almost died in my arms! No father should have to bury his own children and that’s what I almost had to do! If it wasn’t for Robbie and Charlotte, she’d be dead right now. Do you have any idea how that feels? I can stop time but I couldn’t save my own daughter!”

John gave Roger a sympathetic look and his shoulder a comforting squeeze. “Hey, don’t beat yourself up over this. Sierra’s home now and she’s safe.”

“No thanks to me,” said Roger, bitterly. “And what’s worse, she was willing to die to stop the Machine but it was for nothing. The Machine’s still active. Every last human on this planet’s going to die.”

“That’s not your fault, bro,” said Jedikiah. “You didn’t—”

Roger held up a hand, silencing his brother. “No, this is my fault. I didn’t stop that bastard the
first time like I should’ve, but now I’ll remedy that mistake.”

“How? How’re you going to do that?” demanded Cara.

Roger didn’t reply at first. Instead, he rummaged through John’s strong box and then loaded up John’s spare gun before storming out of the room, alarming them.

“Roger, what the hell do you think you’re doing? You didn’t take the serum you gave Sierra. You can’t kill!” reminded Jedikiah.

“A technicality that’s easily remedied. All I need is the right lab and I’m in business,” said Roger. He was done. He was done playing niece and he was done lying around. Roger was going to take action and make sure the Founder never hurt anyone else ever again. “John, you were Annex. Where did that take place?”

John immediately shook his head. “Roger, slow down. You don’t want to do this. You don’t want to become a killer.”

“Why not?” demanded Roger.

John gave Roger an incredulous look. “Are you hearing yourself right now? You want to be able to kill? Are you crazy? Do you think that’s what Sierra wants for you?”

“NONE OF THIS IS WHAT SHE WANTS!” yelled Roger, making them all jump a foot. Roger had never raised his voice his entire life and to do so now meant serious business. “And it sure as hell isn’t what I wanted. For her, my family or our people! Sierra was willing to kill the Founder to protect us all. It’s a burden I never should’ve placed on her shoulders. It’s high time I did the same.”

“At what cost? If you knew the toll that killing takes—”

“Look me in the eye and tell me you wouldn’t do the same thing if it were Robbie or Charlotte,” challenged Roger. When John was unable to do this and didn’t speak, Roger got his answer. “I thought as much.”

“Roger—” began John.

“Sierra was willing to bear the burden of killing the Founder so no one else would have to. She was willing to do whatever it took for all our sakes. It’s high time I did the same,” interrupted Roger, fiercely. If he’d just injected himself with the serum he’d used on Sierra and Luca and killed the Founder, instead of just running off like a coward, the world wouldn’t be in such chaos and Roger’s daughter wouldn’t have nearly died. “Tell me where the facility is, John. Now.”

John didn’t want to but at the same time, he could see Roger couldn’t be dissuaded so he gave up and told Roger the address. And with that information in hand, Roger began walking away.

“Roger, wait,” said Jedikiah, stopping Roger in his tracks. “I want the bastard dead, you know. But going off half-cocked won’t do you any good. Killing the Founder like this…it won’t stop the Machine. It won’t save humanity. What do you hope to accomplish here?”

“Protection so that this never happens again,” said Roger, firmly. “And maybe revenge, too.” The Founder had put Roger and his family through sheer and utter hell and had almost killed Roger’s daughter. It was high time the bastard paid for his crimes. “I’m sorry, Jed.”

And with that, Roger teleported away to Annex Project headquarters.
After Roger left, John and the others gathered in TIM’s room to assess the situation. From TIM’s predictions, it wasn’t good and was going to get worse before it got better.

“The Machine is akin to nuclear reactor. Only, its fuel is paranormal energy, namely Sierra’s or anyone of her bloodline,” reported TIM. “By my calculations, there’s about two hours before this occurs.”

“Any idea of the affected radius once the Machine goes nuclear?” asked Cara, dreading the answer.

TIM pulled up a map and a large red circle as an example. It was not good. The Machine was going engulf the entire state of New York before spreading to the entire East Coast and then dying. That was all the energy Sierra had given it. It wouldn’t engulf the entire planet but millions of lives were still going to perish and if the Founder got hold of Sierra again or Roger, it would be much, much worse.

“If I were a human, which, thank God I’m not, I’d get as far away from these areas as possible,” said TIM.

“Thanks, TIM,” said John, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

This was bad. This was seriously bad. But what the hell were they supposed to do? Roger had gone AWOL, Sierra was out of commission and although they were powerful, John refused to put his kids in the line of fire, which meant they were seriously outnumbered and outgunned.

“Mom, what’re we going to do?” asked Luca, fearfully.

“You should get the hell out of dodge,” said a hoarse, tired voice.

Everyone spun around to see Sierra, slowly but surely awakening and pushing herself up into a sitting position on the couch. Sighs of relief went around the room at this.

“Oh, thank God,” said John, as he then held Sierra close. “You scared me to death. I thought we had an agreement?”

“Sorry about that,” said Sierra, sounding slightly muffled by John’s leather jacket. She pulled away to tenderly kiss John for a moment before turning back to her audience.

“How’re you feeling?” asked Marla, worriedly.

“Like hell,” said Sierra, truthfully. Some of her strength had returned but she still felt considerably drained of energy and she had a lingering headache from being the Machine’s battery. “But that doesn’t matter now. I may have been out cold but I still heard everything. Mom, you and Luca need to leave town until we resolve this.”

“You want us to run?” said Luca, disgusted.

Sierra’s eyes narrowed. “I want to live. I don’t want you to die! Which is exactly what’ll happen to you if you stay when the Machine goes nuclear. You need to get as far away from the
“city as possible.” She held up a hand, silencing her brother when Luca opened his mouth to argue. “Luca, I almost died trying to stop the Machine and save your asses! I need to know you’re safe when we go after the Founder.” Didn’t Luca understand the situation? If he didn’t leave, he was going to die. Sierra didn’t want to have that on her conscience.

“And just where are we supposed to go while you’re off risking your life again?” demanded Luca.

“Anywhere! Just not here!” said Sierra, in frustration.

“You’re not the boss of us. We’re not—”

“Enough! Stop it, both of you!” interrupted John loudly as he came in between them. Now wasn’t the time for squabbling. They had to stick together and focus, otherwise the war was lost before it’d even properly begun. “God, how did things get so messed up? The whole world’s gone upside-down. Now, the humans are the endangered species.”

Fresh tears glistened in Sierra’s eyes. John was right. How could they be arguing at a time like this? Millions of people were going to die in less than two hours. “And I’m partly to blame. I never should’ve met with Natalie or done any of this. If I’d just killed the Founder when I had the chance—”

“None of this is on you, kid,” interrupted Jedikiah. “This is all on that bastard, okay? We need to focus on stopping him and the Machine while there’s still time. And to do that—” Jedikiah turned to Marla and Luca. “—you two need to leave. Just for a little while.”

“He’s right.” With John’s help, Sierra shakily rose from the couch and stood up. “Mom…” Marla’s face brightened at being addressed as this by her daughter for the first time in ages. “…the Machine goes nuclear in two hours. Can’t you two leave just for a couple of hours? Regardless of the outcome of this mess, you can both come back when it’s over. It’s just for a few hours. Please. I need to know that you’re both safe. I will find a way to stop the Founder and then I’ll find you, I promise.”

“And don’t forget Astrid,” added John. “She’s human and I’ll bet she’ll want some company until this is over. And what about Morgan? There’s a chance the baby’s human and she’ll need to be kept calm while this is happening. Please, guys.”

Sierra didn’t want to part with her family or her best friend but at the same time, it would only be for a short while. And if she was really going to do this, she needed to be able to focus solely on the mission and she couldn’t do that if she knew Luca and Astrid were safe from the reaches of the Machine. What other choice was there?

Marla and Luca both looked as though they wanted to argue about this but upon seeing the pleading desperation and determination in Sierra’s dark green gaze, they relented. So, with heavy hearts, Marla and Luca departed for a hotel in California with Astrid and Morgan in tow. There they would stay until the situation was over.

And one way or another, it would be.

Once they were gone, John took Sierra aside for a private word. “Sierra, just in case we don’t make it through this, there’s something I need to ask you. Something I should’ve asked you a long time ago. Something that’ll give us more of a reason to come out of this alive.

Sierra was confused. What could John possibly need to ask her? But then she realized what it
was when John knelt down on one knee and pulled out a small diamond ring that had belonged to Roger’s mother. Shortly before everything had gone to hell, John had asked Roger for Sierra’s hand and Roger had not only given his full blessing, he’d also given John an heirloom ring for the proposal.

Sierra’s hand flew to her mouth as happy tears pooled in her eyes.

“Sierra Jameson, will you make me the luckiest, happiest man alive and marry me?” asked John.

Sierra tearfully nodded as she held out her hand. “Yes,” she whispered, happily. “Yes, John. I’ll marry you.”

John smiled brightly as he slid the ring onto Sierra’s finger and then he pulled her in for a deep, passionate kiss that she returned. Now they had yet another reason to keep fighting and to come out of the war winners. They had a wedding to plan.

XXX

Meanwhile, Russell had been summoned to Ultra to meet with the Founder. Why, he had no idea. But he had the feeling it wasn’t for coffee and cake. When Russell arrived, the Founder was waiting for him in the ops room, along with Mark Amell, one of the first agents that Sierra had trained when she’d received her promotion at Ultra.

“Ah, Russell. Thanks for coming,” said the Founder. “Allow me to introduce Agent Mark Amell. He was trained alongside Mister Cole and I’m quite pleased to say that he’s become one of our best agents both in skill and ruthlessness.”

Russell didn’t like the sound of that but didn’t show it. “What is this about?”

“Cara Coburn,” said the Founder. “I would like the two of you to retrieve her from the Lair. That is what you call your secret little hovel, isn’t it? Along with John Young, Jedikiah Price, Sierra Jameson if she’s still alive, Roger, and of course, Sierra’s two children. You’ll be accompanied by a squad, of course, should you require the backup.”

Russell couldn’t believe what he was hearing and held up a hand as he gave the Founder a very incredulous look. “Whoa, whoa, whoa, rewind. What? Why in the hell would I do that? Natalie and her band of traitors already gave you Sierra. That was the deal. Besides, what’re you going to do with me if I refuse? The kill switch is dead. You have no leverage here.”

“Oh, don’t I? Look. There are millions of people on this island, Russell. And tomorrow, it’ll all be ours. But if you want to continue to be part of that world, you’ll bring to me those I’ve named and those loyal to them.”

Russell snorted and shook his head. While part of him was worried, he wasn’t about to turn on his friends and people. “No. I’m no Judas. You can’t make me go through with this. I’ll die first. Besides, you haven’t even explained what you’ll do to them.”

“‘Do to them,’? Dear boy, you misunderstand. While Miss Jameson may have been a necessary sacrifice, the others are not. Your friends will inherit this new world right alongside us,” said the Founder. “But if that’s not persuasion enough for you, how about this?” The Founder pressed a
button on his remote and an image of Russell’s mother and extended family appeared on the screen. “There is a kill squad awaiting my command to fire, should you be anything less than cooperative.”

Russell’s face darkened with anger. “You son of a bitch!”

The Founder smirked. “I’m giving you a chance, here, Russell. If you or your friends interfere at this late hour, you won’t like the consequences and Sierra’s sacrifice will have been in vain. So, I ask you…do we have a deal?”

Russell’s hand clenched into a fist as he gave his response while he simultaneously telepathically warned Cara and the others of the situation. Russell would cooperate to a certain extent, but only until his family was safe and they could take down the Founder.

XXX

Winger Pharmaceuticals, White Plaines, New York

While this was happening, Roger was storming the headquarters for the Annex Project. He’d already taken down the guards and now only one lone scientist that was typing information into a laptop stood in his way.

“I’m sorry, all visitors are supposed to—ow!”

Roger telekinetically tossed the scientist into the wall, cutting him off before Roger aimed the gun at the scientist’s head.

“Where’re your brain alteration chemicals kept?” demanded Roger.

With one hand clutching his head, the scientist hesitantly pointed in the left direction with his free hand towards a large refrigerator-like container.

When Roger examined the contents of the container, he was horrified to find that not only were the usual chemicals kept in there along with the ones Roger had used to create his serum, but the key ingredient in the Annex Project, Delophonium-6, was stored there as well in mass quantities. Roger’s horror worsened when he saw the date on the bottles.

“This was manufactured this month. The Annex Project was shut down years ago,” said Roger. “Why?”

“I…I…I just make the stuff. I don’t know why he needed it,” stammered the scientist.

“What?” demanded Roger, dreading the answer.

The scientist hesitated as though he thought he’d be disbelieved. “I never caught his real name. He called himself the Founder.”

Son of a bitch. The Founder hadn’t shut down the Annex Project, he’d continued it behind Jedikiah’s back as a further means of empowering himself and controlling the human race. Whether the Founder had Annexed himself or others, Roger had no way of knowing. But what he
did know was that the situation had just gotten far, far worse than Roger could’ve imagined.

XXX

Meanwhile, Russell was escorting Agent Amell and, to his utmost horror and disgust, a paranormal kill squad to the Lair. He didn’t like the situation one bit and silently prayed that he and the others could pull off the plan to stop the paranormal kill squad before it was too late.

“Mind if I ask you something?” asked Roger.

Amell shrugged. “Go right ahead.”

“Why’re you doing this? I talked with Sierra. She was your friend, said you were a good person with strong morals despite everything that was happening at Ultra,” said Roger. He couldn’t understand why Amell was doing this. From everything Sierra had said, he’d been a good man and yet here he was, acting like Natalie or worse.

Amell’s face darkened with anger. “That was before that bitch turned out to be a traitor and her ideals got Hilton killed!” Amell and Hilton had been close before Hilton’s untimely demise. When Hilton perished trying to kill the Founder, anything good in Amell had been replaced with hatred and a desire for vengeance. “Now she and everyone loyal to her will pay the price.”

“Even if that means killing?” protested Russell. “We’re supposed to be better than that.”

Amell grinned a sickening grin that sent shivers down Russell’s spine. “So? We already are.”

Before Russell could protest, Amell and the paranormal kill squad teleported into the Lair. Amell and his goons stormed the Lair only to be ambushed by Sierra and the others. While they were able to stop the kill squad, Amell escaped in the confusion. He would be dealt with later. Robbie and Charlotte removed the powers of the paranormal kill squad and then their memories were wiped clean before they were dumped.

One problem dealt with, so many more to go.

XXX

Meanwhile, Roger was on the roof of his family’s garage, gazing at the view while he rolled the syringe full of serum in his hands.

It was something of a favorite place of his as it had a nice view of the neighborhood and he’d spent many an hour there with Sierra while she was growing up. Whether it was due to a personal problem or if they just wanted to hang out together, one way or another, they’d always found a way to meet there and be together. Roger deeply cherished those memories as they gave him strength to do what needed to be done, but despite this, his heart was heavy with grief. How could it be that just a day or two ago, Roger was enjoying a happy family dinner and now humanity was about to
Moments such as that dinner were never going to happen again if Roger didn’t act. He wanted to do this. He needed to do this. So, why was he struggling to inject himself? Was it because he feared how his family might see him if he did? Roger shook his head. He couldn’t afford to think like that night. Millions of lives were depending on him, including his human son’s. He had to do this. What other choice was there?

Just then, Sierra teleported in and sat down beside him.

“Hey, Daddy,” she said, smiling.

Roger smiled back but didn’t look up. “Glad to see you’re up and about. How’d you find me?”

“It’s where we always hung out or came if we needed time alone to think,” said Sierra. “I know what you’re doing, by the way. But I won’t stop you.”

“Well, good. Because I—what happened to you?” Roger suddenly became alarmed at the sight of Sierra’s right cheek, which was bruised and scraped.

Sierra sighed. “One of my former trainees from Ultra, Agent Amell, led a kill squad down to the Lair. We stopped them, thank God, but they’d been mutated with recombinant gene therapy, kind of like the stuff you’re about to take.”

Roger sighed at this. “The Founder’s agents can kill? Great. I have to do this, Sierra. The Founder took everything from me. My life, years with my family I can never get back, Jedikiah, the safety of our people and he almost took you from me.” Roger’s voice cracked with grief towards the end of his words but still he didn’t inject himself.

Sierra’s face softened as she touched her father’s face. “I know. But I’m still here, Dad.”

“For now. But how long until the Founder tries to kill you again and succeeds?” said Roger. “If we don’t stop him, Luca, Astrid and God knows how many others are going to die.”

Sierra sighed as she grasped her father’s face and made him look at her. “Do you know why I fought so hard to bring you home? Even when all the odds were stacked against me and it seemed impossible? It wasn’t just because I missed you and wanted you home. It also because I believe in you, Dad. I believe in us. I have for a very long time. Even before I watched your message to me. And it’s not just me. John, Cara, my kids…everyone believes in us because they know.”

“Know what?”

“That together, you and I will be the ones who’ll save all of us,” said Sierra, gently, making her father smile just a little. “But not like this. I was wrong, we both were.” Nearly dying yet again had changed Sierra’s perspective on a great many things, this being one of them. “We won’t win like this, giving up our humanity.”

Inspired by his daughter’s words, Roger didn’t even make the smallest protest as Sierra then took the syringe and capped it before they held one another in a tight, loving embrace. Sierra was right, they weren’t going to win like this. One way or another, they had to be better than that. Otherwise, the Founder had already won.

Following this, Sierra took Roger to the Noodle Shop where Jedikiah, Robbie, Charlotte, Cara, John and Russell were waiting for them. This was their final stand and they were running out of time before the Machine went nuclear and killed millions of people.
Jedikiah immediately hugged Roger. “Glad your daughter talked some sense into you, bro.”

“Me too,” said Roger, gratefully. “We need to shelve the celebrations until later. We have—” Roger checked his watch. “About an hour, give or take before the Machine goes nuclear and time stops for each and every human on the planet. Then it doesn’t stop again.”

“Do you have a plan?” asked Cara.

Roger contemplated this for a moment before answering. “I think I do. There was always one plan I considered just in case the plan to stop the kill switches didn’t work. The Founder’s going to have every man he can spare guarding the Machine. He’s expecting us to teleport in. Stealth mode. But what if we didn’t?”

“If we’re not sneaking in…” began John, in realization.

“We’re storming the castle,” finished Russell, quoting one of his favorite flicks with a smile. “Head on. Full-frontal assault.”

“We draw the Founder’s agents outside Ultra,” continued Cara. “Distracting them. While someone sneaks into the Machine room.”

“That someone being me,” said Sierra, firmly.

Roger raised a teasing eyebrow. “You?”

Sierra gave him a teasing glance. “Hey, you had your shot. It’s my turn now.”

“What about us?” asked Robbie. “We want to help too!”

Charlotte nodded in agreement. There wasn’t so much as a flicker of fear on either of their faces.

John and Sierra exchanged looks and had a silent conversation before replying.

“You stay with Jedikiah and John and when the guards are down, you depower them and erase their memories. Then you go straight back. You stay out of the line of fire and you do as you’re told. No arguing. Understood?” asked Sierra, sternly.

Realistically, she knew she couldn’t keep them from disobeying her as they were quite powerful and were part of the war whether Sierra and John liked it or not, but maybe, just maybe, she could persuade her children to stay out of the line of fire for as long as possible. Thankfully, both Robbie and Charlotte agreed without hesitation.

With their plan agreed upon, it was time to set it in motion and save the world.

XXX

Though one might’ve expected there to be issues with attacking an office building in broad daylight, such as cops, nobody was worried about them. If they failed, the cops would be dead in less than an hour and more importantly, the Founder had apparently pulled some strings to cordon off the block, keeping the area clear, which was a bonus for the team.
The plan was this: Russell and Cara would distract the guards and take them down while John and Jedikiah would be stationed on a nearby rooftop with sniper rifles as a backup. Robbie and Charlotte would stay with Jedikiah and John as per their orders and then depower the guards afterwards. Once that was done, Sierra and Roger would storm into Ultra and take down the Machine. It was a sound plan, but who knew if it would work?

As soon as Cara and Russell approached the front doors of Ultra, at least nine armed paranormal guards teleported out front. Immediately, the kill squad tried to kill Cara and Russell, only for their bullets to hit a wall of telekinetic energy, rendering them useless. A fight then went underway and once the kill squad members were disabled and then depowered with their memories wiped, the pathway into Ultra was cleared.

“Split up. Maximum chaos,” ordered Cara.

Russell grinned. “Title of my memoir.”

Cara made a face but said nothing.

Once inside, Cara made her way to the operations room while Russell faced off against Agent Amell, who’d undergone the Annex Project and was now armed with a gun.

“Dude, you don’t want to do this,” said Russell, quickly.

Amell pulled back the safety of the gun, causing it to click. “Oh, I rather think I do. You’re with that traitorous bitch, which means you need to die just like the rest of the sewer rats.”

“You think Hilton would’ve wanted this? He died trying to stop the Founder!” argued Russell. “He wouldn’t have wanted you to become a killer!”

“Shut up! Hilton’s dead because that bitch, Jameson, got into his head and twisted him!” snarled Amell. “He’d still be alive today if it wasn’t for her! And you know what? I can’t understand why Hilton let it happen or why you’re doing the same! The Founder has offered the world and you want to hand it back to the humans? Why?”

Russell sighed. How could he possibly make this guy understand? “Look, I’m not perfect. God knows I’ve made my fair share of mistakes. But this? Mass extinction and genocide? That’s where I draw the line and that’s where your friend, Hilton, drew the line too. How can you dishonor his memory like this, dude?”

Amell’s face twisted with fury. “Me? Dishonor Hilton’s memory? You idiot, I’m preserving it! And you know what? It doesn’t matter what you think. You can’t stop the Founder’s plan. I won’t let you, you piece of—”

That was as far as Amell got before Russell took advantage of Amell’s monologue to TK him into the wall behind him. With Amell briefly dazed, Russell grabbed Amell’s gun and hit him on the head with the butt of the weapon, knocking him out and giving him a concussion before Russell tied him up tight. One less problem to deal with.

XXX

Meanwhile, Cara had stormed into the ops room, only to find it empty save for the Founder.
“Ah, Cara. I knew you’d find your way here eventually,” said the Founder. “I do hope you’ve said your good-byes to your human family and friends. Made your final piece.”

Cara didn’t reply as the Founder then grabbed her telekinetically and pulled her towards him, choking her in the process as she dangled helplessly a few inches off the ground.

“Is that what you did with Cassie? Made your final peace with her before turning her into your lab rat? Before you sacrificed her to save your own ass?” taunted Cara.

The Founder’s face twisted with rage at this. “Don’t mention my daughter!” he hissed.

Cara refused to be silent. “You sacrificed your own child to save your own ass and for some lunatic genocide. How can you live with yourself?” Cara was not a mother by blood but she’d formed a bond similar to that with Sierra’s children and she couldn’t fathom doing to them what the Founder had done to Cassie.

“It was worth it,” said the Founder. He spoke without hesitation or remorse or guilt, which sickened Cara to no end. “Cassandra’s life in exchange for this planet as it should be. Uncluttered by the millions of pathetic, worthless human lives that will end…right about now.”

**NOW, ROGER, SIERRA!** cried Cara, telepathically.

Cara’s telepathic cry did not go unheard by the Founder, who then tossed Cara into the wall and then the glass doors, injuring her and rendering her unconscious. He then knelt beside Cara’s still form and his eyes darkened still with greater rage.

“You stupid girl. You’ve handed them to me,” whispered the Founder. Sierra and her father may be powerful paranormals but the Founder would be damned if he let them stop his plans for Paradise.

XXX

Upon hearing Cara’s telepathic cry, Sierra and Roger teleported into the Machine’s room just as the device became active and then time stopped for one of Ultra’s guards, permanently. It had begun and unless they stopped it in the next few minutes, millions of lives were going to be lost forever.

Out of desperation, Sierra and Roger joined hands to try and combine their powers before aiming their free ones at the Machine. It was their power to stop time, their shared power and energy that was powering the Machine. With any luck, they could take that energy back and stop the Machine before it was too late. But although they were able to contain the Machine’s energy, it still fought against them and they couldn’t reverse it. To make matters worse, the Jamesons were then joined by an unwanted presence.

“Enough of this nonsense,” said the Founder, as he then blasted them both across the room. “You two may powerful but even you cannot prevent this from happening. It cannot be stopped any more than evolution can be stopped. Don’t you two understand that human extinction is inevitable? But rather than thousands of years of slow decay and obsolescence, this will all be over in the blink of an eye! Now, what could be more humane than that?” As if for proof, the Founder flicked his wrist, causing the human guard to turn to dust.
“You murdered him,” said Sierra, in disgust.

The Founder scoffed and looked bored. “He was never alive! I’m offering you your rightful places as the planet’s apex species!”

Roger’s face twisted with rage. “You tried to kill me, my daughter and my family! Go to hell!”

The two of them then met one another in a telekinetic fight of sorts. They both pushed their psychic energy onto one another, and after a few moments, it came to a standstill with neither one of them winning.

“I never wanted that, Roger, but you left me with no other choice. Besides, have you forgotten that it was your brother Jedikiah, a filthy human who ordered those hits? Who shot a bullet into your own daughter’s chest?” hissed the Founder, as they then resumed their fight.

Sierra then joined in, using her telekinesis to break both the Founder’s legs in two before lifting him up into the air and then slamming him painfully onto the stone floor. Despite this injuries, the Founder persisted and refused to give up the fight. He teleported behind them and used his telekinesis to support himself as well as shield himself from the punches Roger tried to deliver and Sierra’s own deadly touch. He then sent them both flying into the other pieces of equipment, bruising them.

“I may be injured and one of you may be a synergist but the two of you are no match for me,” said the Founder. “And you, Miss Jameson, are certainly no match for yourself.”

Sierra blinked in confusion as she helped Roger to stand. “What?”

“Don’t you get it yet, Sierra? Your powers, your father’s powers, are the Machine! A home without humanity!” roared the Founder. “A Refuge. That is your father’s legacy, your legacy!”

Sierra refused to accept this, as did Roger. Bloodshed and genocide was no legacy and certainly not one that either of them wanted.

“No, you’re wrong!” spat Sierra. “This is no life! This isn’t—”

“THIS IS THE FUTURE!” yelled the Founder. “And we are already living in it! How could you, a mere girl, even one as special as you, hope to turn the clock backwards?”

Upon hearing this, Sierra’s eyes flashed with an idea. She glanced at her father, who nodded in agreement. Roger then lashed out at the Founder with all the paranormal energy he had, sending the Founder flying across the room and further injuring him, keeping the bastard distracted and away from Sierra while she focused her energies on the Machine.

In a move that totally shocked them all, including Sierra, a new power manifested itself in her. With an incredible ease, Sierra invoked her power of temporal manipulation but instead of merely stopping time, she absorbed the Machine’s paranormal energy, her energy and then not only began reversing time, she also opened a vortex that began sucking the Machine and all the contents of the room into it.

“No, wait, Sierra, NO!” roared the Founder, as he struggled to free himself from Roger’s tight grip.

Whilst keeping the vortex going, Sierra grabbed the Founder with her free hand and teleported him into her tight grip. “I am my father’s legacy! And this is yours!” she spat. She then head butted the Founder before tossing him into the vortex.
The Founder screamed as he was tossed into the vortex and his precious Machine followed, piece by piece. When all of the Machine and the Founder had disappeared into the vortex, Sierra closed tightly and moments later, the room was empty, save for her and Roger and nor was there any sign that anything out of the ordinary had happened.

“You did it,” said Roger, smiling proudly.

Sierra smiled as she hugged her father tightly. “No. We did it.” Sierra may have been the one to make the vortex and stuff, but she could never have done it without her father’s help and the aid of so many others. “Come on. We need to check on the others.”

Roger nodded in agreement and then the two of them went outside where they were met by the others, who were overjoyed at their apparent win. Roger was immediately hugged by Jedikiah, Cara and Russell while John immediately swept Sierra into his arms and kissed her soundly while the children hugged Sierra’s legs.

“I love you so much,” said John, when they broke apart. “You did it. You saved everyone!”

“I love you too, John,” said Sierra, smiling. “But you’re wrong there. We did it. We saved everyone, together. It’s over. It’s finally over.”

With the Founder gone and the Machine destroyed, the war between the Tomorrow People and Ultra was finally over for good. Finally, there would be peace and everyone could live their lives as they chose, free of the shadows. Finally, they had won the war. And suddenly, the future looked so much brighter than before.

XXX

The next day, following a celebration of their success, a newly returned Astrid joined Sierra on a walk through the city on a girl’s day out. Even after being told what had happened, Astrid still couldn’t believe it and she kept pointing to one stranger after another in childlike glee.

“He doesn’t know? Oh, that girl doesn’t know?” said Astrid, grinning. “What about those kids? Don’t they know?”

Sierra laughed at her best friend’s antics. “No, Astrid. Nobody knows.” Nobody was ever going to know and while part of Sierra might’ve liked to have her heroics known and have some glory, she knew it was better that mankind never know just how close they’d come to being exterminated.

“Well, I wish they could. You saved all their lives,” said Astrid. “You’re a hero.”

Sierra blushed. “Oh, shut up. Besides, who’d believe a dork like me could save the world?”

“You have a point there,” said Astrid, making them both laugh. “So, totally off-topic but I do get to be your maid-of-honor at your wedding, don’t I?” Astrid had been thrilled when Sierra announced her engagement to John. “Not to sound petty but that’s my job as your best friend, not Cara’s. Right?”

Sierra nodded. “Yes, yes. You get to be my maid-of-honor and Cara will be one of my bridesmaids. I promise. And you can help with the wedding planning. John’s hopeless in that
Astrid beamed at this as she hooked her friend’s arm. “Let’s get some food. What do you think? Italian at Olive Garden or Chinese at the Noodle Shop?”

Sierra was about to reply when John’s voice entered her mind.

*Sierra? You’d better get down here,* said John.

Sierra winced and sighed. “Raincheck? John needs me at the Lair.”

Astrid nodded and then Sierra left for the Lair.

Much to Sierra’s utter shock and amazement, John and Cara were standing in the entrance and scores of people were in the Lair and they were all staring at Sierra as if she was some kind of a goddess.

“Dad, Cara, who the hell are these people?” asked Sierra, quietly.

“Breakouts,” said Cara, smiling.

Sierra blinked. That was a lot of breakouts. She’d never seen so many before in her life. “Who found them all?”

John then smiled. “They found us. What you did at Ultra sent out some kind of telepathic homing beacon. They’re from all over, Sierra, and they just keep coming.”

*Oh holy hell.* That was certainly not what Sierra had expected. Sierra suddenly felt quite nervous. “That’s great but why’re they all staring at me?” she whispered.

John chuckled. “Because they know what you did, what you’ve done to save them. You’re their hero and their leader. They’re here for you.”

*Leader?* Again with the surprises. Granted, Sierra had acted as a voice of authority in the Lair periodically, but she’d never officially been anyone’s leader. And hero? She was still getting used to that title. How the hell was she supposed to do all this? But one look at John and Sierra’s fears vanished. She slid her hand into her fiancé’s and the other into her friend’s and led them down towards their audience.

“No. They’re here for us,” said Sierra. She wasn’t going to do this alone because she didn’t have to. She had her friends and family beside her to help.

“For us,” said John.

“For us,” echoed Cara. “We’re going to need a bigger Lair.”

XXX

*Four months later…*
Four months later, a great deal had changed for the Tomorrow People.

Once they were able to create legal proof of John and Charlotte’s existences, Sierra married John in a beautiful ceremony surrounded by their loved ones as well as their people. Charlotte was now able to attend school and was set to join Robbie in the upcoming school term, something she was really looking forward to.

Ultra as Jedikiah had once known it was no more. Those loyal to Ultra were gone, the ones with powers had had them removed courtesy of Robbie and Charlotte and everyone, both paranormal and human had had their memories altered so there would be no reprisals. Though there were still some regulations in place to prevent exposure, paranormals were now free to lead their lives as they chose and connect with their families.

If that wasn’t enough, the Tomorrow People had found a bigger Lair and then some. They had turned Ultra’s main base of operations into a new Lair/Refuge along with all other Ultra facilities, something that nobody would have ever imagined happening.

“I still can’t believe this. You do know this is insane, don’t you?” said John, not for the first time as he and Sierra walked through the reformed Ultra.

Sierra laughed as she took John’s hand. “I know, you’ve said that before.”

And privately, she had to admit, it still felt weird sometimes—not having to worry about Ultra, Jedikiah, the Founder or the Machine, having her father home with her brother and mother, and having both Sierra and John’s children freely play in the sunshine—but Sierra was willing to take it. They’d more than earned it after all they’d been through.

“But John, seriously, this is perfect. The place that hunted them is now a haven. We’re still funded by the government. Our people can be properly trained and protected. And our enemies are gone. What could be better?”

John was forced to agree but even so, he was still having a hard time wrapping his mind around it all. The place he’d once called home only to end up hating and fearing it, had become a home again for their kind. Present company excluded, as John still lived with Sierra in her penthouse apartment with their kids.

“Speaking of our former enemies, how’s Jedikiah?” asked John,

Following the Founder’s defeat, Jedikiah had decided to try and do better for his unborn child’s sake, who had recently been revealed to be a girl that they were naming Jamie Sierra Price at Morgan’s insistence. He was now living a quiet life with his now-wife Morgan as a college professor, though he was always on standby should he be needed by his kin. They were visited often by Roger, who was now in retirement and living a quiet life of his own with Marla and Luca.

“He’s doing okay. He seems happy with Morgan and the baby,” said Sierra. “And guess what else? He wants you and I to be the godparents."

John laughed in amazement. “Wow. Me a godparent to Jedikiah’s kid. Never would’ve imagined that in a million years.”

“Well, they say our future’s only as small as our imagination,” said Sierra, thoughtfully.

“I like that,” said John, fondly.

Sierra chuckled. “Thanks. I got it from a fortune cookie.”
John laughed again as he tenderly kissed her. “You are the lamest Chosen One ever.”

Sierra mock scowled as she playfully smacked John’s shoulder.

They then both stopped when they came across Jedikiah’s former office. Though it had refurbished, it’d remained vacant for months. His reclining leather office chair looked particularly inviting right at that moment as they’d both been on their feet half the day.

“You know you want to try it,” teased Sierra.

John exhaled slowly and shook his head, refusing to give into his wife’s—God, that felt so wonderful to be able to say—teasing. “No.”

“No?” echoed Sierra, in disbelief.

John gestured towards the chair. “Well, if you’d like to, please.”

Sierra smirked as she did just that, groaning in relief as she reclined in her uncle’s seat.

“How’s it feel?” asked John.

“Pretty damn good, actually,” admitted Sierra.

John chuckled and then gestured for her to move. “Okay, my turn. Get up.”

Sierra playfully shook her head. “Nope.”

“Oh, come on, get up,” said John.

They both laughed as John pulled Sierra out of the chair and then they both laughed harder when John not only slid into the chair, he also pulled Sierra onto his lap. Sierra then wrapped her arms around her husband’s neck and tenderly kissed him.

“I love you so much, John Jameson-Young,” she said, breathlessly, when they broke apart.

John tenderly caressed her cheek. “I love you too, Sierra Jameson-Young.” When they’d married, they’d decided to hyphen their surnames to keep both their names going. “What’s on your mind? You’ve been hiding something all day. I can tell.”

Sierra smiled and called Robbie and Charlotte into the room before replying. “Notice anything about their shirts, John?”

John blinked in confusion and then his eyes widened in hopeful surprise when he noticed that Robbie and Charlotte’s T-shirts read, *I’m the Big Brother* and *I’m the Big Sister* and both children were just about bursting with excitement.

“Wait, Sierra, are you….? Are we….?” asked John, hesitantly.

Tears of joy sparkled in Sierra’s eyes as she placed John’s hand on her stomach, which was just barely swollen. How had John noticed before? “I just found out last night. I’m three months pregnant, John….with twins. This time, you get to be here for everything, the morning sickness, the mood swings, the labor and birth…everything. We’re going to be parents….again.”

A cry of the utmost joy escaped John’s throat and happy tears slid down his cheeks as he then kissed Sierra soundly before the little family all formed a tight group hug. They could not have been a lovelier sight and it could not have been a more perfect ending, no, a perfect beginning to
their story.

_The End_

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