

CHAPTER THREE

RISE

FAYE DASALIA – ALTO DO MUNDO

I sat in a wooden chair, and I waited. A man in the next room spoke on his cell phone, his voice easy, and certain. Somehow I felt sure he was speaking to her...that physically frail woman with the oversized head and the fish-like face; the woman he answered to, both his leader, and master.

His suite was inside the Alto do Mundo. The third largest structure inside the city, it housed much of its elite. In life I had only seen it from afar, watching it from the rail that took me to work. Once I investigated a murder there. Part of me had always envied those inside, even then.

His apartment suite was big, and very cold. It conveyed his privilege and power to all, no matter where they might look. The design he'd chosen was minimalist, open rooms integrating high-end appliances and electronics, where each line and edge was arranged perfectly. I admired what he'd done, the oasis of order that he'd fashioned away from the chaos of the streets below. My eyes followed the room's flow, and I found comfort in it, even though I knew that it would soon be gone. Very soon the man on the phone would be dead. Very soon the Alto do Mundo itself, and everyone inside it, would only exist as fading memories.

Normally, I'd have never gotten inside but we were a vice of his he'd have brought in, bypassing security. When I arrived, I found the door was open. In the entryway he'd left a cardboard gift box for me, with a note card. The gift box contained a series of items; an elaborate set of silk lingerie, a black wig, and an array of cosmetics. There was a computer printout included, explaining what he wanted.

It should have been humiliating to me; applying makeup to my lips, and nipples, cinching in my waist and pushing up my breasts, then sitting and posing while he took his time. It should have been an affront, but as I sat in the chair I felt nothing. The truth was that I'd hoped I would feel something. I wanted to feel some sense of excitement, even humiliation, but the reality was that I did not. The closest I came was the wanting itself.

What drove me now was purpose, and survival. Not survival in the traditional sense – I'd already lost my life – but my mind was still aware. It knew that it was finite, and that whatever came after was unknown...dark, and empty, and endless.

That unknown was like a void. Beneath my consciousness, and my memories, it yawned like a black hole in the depths of space. With each passing second, it pulled me deeper, away from all that I knew. Any second I might fall across that rim, that dark event horizon, and plunge down through the field of my memories to the one thing left that scared me to my core. Life and death were just concepts, but not that endless unknown. That bottomless void was real.

The man on the phone was speaking Japanese. I tuned my hearing a little as he spoke, and watched the translation scroll at the bottom edge of my periphery:

No. Wherever it came from, it wasn't supposed to be there. I was already out of the building when...

The words passed by over the swell of my breasts. I'd been attractive in life, and I'd known that. Men had stared at those breasts, compelled by their curves, but they were so much meat, now. The blood that moved through them was black, and cold. The veins could be covered up with body paint, but the flesh was not alive.

The man who had me brought to him did not care.

...knew where I was, it was arranged beforehand. I didn't do anything wrong...

He moved past a doorway, through my line of sight. He wore a gold watch, and an expensive suit whose tones matched my lingerie. He glanced at me, and I captured his image. He was a powerfully featured Asian man, with long hair that was thick and luxurious. His skin was smooth, and pampered.

IDENTITY CONFIRMED: TAKANAWA, HIRO.

He moved out of view, and continued speaking. My mind drifted as I watched the words go by.
...should be thanking me; I managed to keep one of them. You only really need one...

The field of my memories stirred like embers, a field of lights that were tagged and catalogued. I could access each at will. I saw images of him at the hotel. During the raid, the agents had let him go. He'd left with something of ours.

My memories were now of two different types; those formed before my death and those formed after. A laser line cut between, and it was there that I found my new purpose. Each second that passed, it was a reminder; in my first living memory, I was five, and for a time my memories had been pure. As my life went on, they became fragmented. Bits and pieces were stolen. They were manipulated, and sometimes changed. I had been rewired by an unseen force, and lived two lives, and not known. Approaching the memory separation between my life and my death, the embers came to contain more lies than truth.

Until my last, when I lay on a sofa and blood pumped out of my chest. I saw the face of the man in front of me, and heard the last words I would hear in my life:

"What a waste."

Too much of my life had been just that; a waste. I'd worked so hard for a shot at moving up, not knowing it was all lies. I'd pushed myself until there was nothing left. I did it because I regretted my choice, and because I was afraid. Once I was dead I didn't want to come back. I'd have done anything to get out of it, but I never got the chance.

The name of my killer turned out to be Lev. Lev Prutsko; the last of four Slavic recruits brought in for key terror strikes. Samuel Fawkes had bought him through a broker, for the price of a new car. He was the closest I had, now, to a friend.

Fawkes' purpose was Lev's purpose, and now mine; preserve the freewill of all humanity. Stop any more people from sharing my fate. It was clear, and absolute. An echo from my old mind latched onto it as a justice to be served.

..and it was complex, like the gears of a clock. It distracted me from that dark void, below.

Yes. Yes. Goodbye.

Mister Takanawa stepped through the doorway, and slipped his cell phone into his suit jacket. I sat still, and did not breathe as he approached and faced me at an arm's length. I couldn't read the expression on his face. Men had stared at me before, but this was unlike anything I recalled. He inspected me like he might a statue, not certain yet what he thought. Only his erection betrayed something more. After a minute or so he came closer, and knelt down in front of me. He moved his face close to mine.

An orange light coursed up each side of his neck, thick, hot lines that branched out before fading. I followed them down below his shirt collar, to the heavy coal that pulsed inside his chest. A thin line appeared in my periphery. It spiked each time his heart beat.

"You're a beautiful woman," he said, so close that I could feel his breath on my face.

Another of them once said those words to me. Later, I'd be told to forget what I'd heard, and I would, like I was told. Every time I heard them it was like the first time; unexpected, and welcome.

Nothing stirred inside me when I heard them now. As best I could interpret he was earnest, but I was not beautiful, nor a woman. I was something different, now.

"I said you are beautiful," the man said again, his eyes narrowing a little.

"Thank you."

He looked into my eyes for a bit longer, their soft, moonlit glow reflected on his face.

He likes that, I thought. It's part of it, for him.

Takanawa was an established pervert, with a taste for well-kept revivor females. It caused him to be careless. This made him strategically useful to Fawkes. He could provide clear access to key places, like the rooms of the Royal Plaza Hotel, and the Alto Do Mundo. His usefulness was, however, at an end.

"May I ask you something?" I said to him softly. His face changed, just a little. It wasn't interaction that he wanted, it was something else, and I was curious.

"One question," he said.

"Why revivors?"

He was known to be suddenly violent, and I was ready for that but he stayed calm. In answer, he just smiled. He moved so close I saw the glow from my eyes reflected there, in his own.

His pupils opened to two dark, glassy spots. It happened when they exerted their power. He was trying to control me, I could see. When he failed, I saw fear creep into his eyes. The heat in his chest pulsed faster, and harder, and the orange glow up the sides of his neck grew hotter as the veins there became engorged. The line monitoring his heart spiked higher. What he saw scared him, but it was more than that. It was exhilaration.

"There's a darkness inside of you," he whispered. "All of you."

He reached forward and took my hands in his own. They were dry, and very warm. He stood, and pulled me up gently to face him. His eyes went back to normal.

"Come with me," he said, and walked past me. When I turned, I saw him cross toward the bedroom. As I followed, I pulled the wig from my head, and let it fall to the floor. Cold air blew across the skin of my bare scalp. When we were inside he turned, frowning as I placed my cold hands on his chest.

"That's wrong," he said. "Put it back on."

I slid my left hand up the side of his neck, running my fingertips through his coarse, black hair. He didn't pull away, but was still frowning.

"You heard me," he said. "Do what I sa-"

My hand split along an invisible seam, and splayed between the middle and ring finger. His body, so alive, jumped. His eyes darted to the cavity, and stared. Fear returned when the blade inside caught the light.

I could have impaled him before he could move, but the blade was not for him. A thin plastic tube shot out from beneath it. The needle locked on the heat inside his neck and plunged into the branching, orange band of light.

By the time he slapped his hand over the sting, the tube had reeled back and my arm had snapped shut. He just stared at me, confused.

"What-"

The toxin acted fast, and paralyzed him. His arms fell to his sides, and he staggered back. The muscles in his face began to loosen.

I stepped in and supported him as he fell. I reached into his jacket and took the gun, then tossed it onto the bed.

"What...are you...doing..?" he gasped, as I eased him back onto the plush comforter. I recorded and transmitted his vitals. The excitement he'd shown before was gone, now. All that was left was his fear.

Subject secured.

Good. Site 1 confirmed secure. Transmitting collection point.

Takanawa could see the gun, out of reach. His eyes locked onto it, but he couldn't move. I watched him try to, and fail, as I sat down on the bedspread next to him. I waited for him to look back up at me.

"Where is the last one?" I asked him. He could still speak, but he tried to shake his head.

"You know what I mean," I said. "We got the other eleven, but you were seen to take one. Where is it?"

"...don't know," he breathed.

"If it's here," I said, "I will leave with that, and nothing else. Do you understand?"

He understood. I could see it in his eyes.

"Where is it?" I asked again.

"...not here..."

I'd search just to be sure, but I believed him. He'd have handed the device off before now. Lev would find out what he knew.

I left the room and changed back into street clothes, then stowed the lingerie and wig in my bag. I looked at myself in the bathroom mirror, and wiped the makeup away.

It had taken time to find myself again, after reanimation. There'd been a disconnect with my reflection, like it was somebody else. At first I thought it was the physical change; the grayish skin tone, or dark veins that showed through. As time passed, though, I saw it was something else.

The memories from before I died and came back, that had defined me in life, had become corrupted, and fractured by the end. The image in the mirror was someone else; Faye Dasalia had been lost long ago. She had been lost before she was ever killed. All that was left of her existed in me. She'd been revived, in me, when Nico woke me. All that she truly was, and ever would be, had only emerged in death. I'd only recently made her face my own. The woman from before was not really Faye. My memories formed from across that divide, and they were not corrupted. I was Faye Dasalia, more complete than I ever had been in life.

Beginning transport.

Acknowledged.

I went back into the bedroom where he lay, his chest rising and falling very slowly. He was awake, and aware. His eyes bargained with me, as I approached him.

"It's time for you to come with me," I said in his ear as I got a grip on him. I pulled the LW suit over us, and lifted his body up. He was frightened, but he didn't need to be.

Whatever answer he'd sought in revivors, he'd understand soon enough.