

Worlds Gone By: Ch. 1

Sid Kincaid stood in the doorway of her office watching the class, willing none of the usuals to notice her. One of the women spotted her smiled and waved. Sid couldn't bring herself to return either. Her stomach churned, and she felt like puking or shitting, or just crawling in a cold grave and giving up. Lucy looked up from the exercise she was leading, whispered to a male student to take over for her. She tiptoed over to Sid and offered a hug. Sid put a hand up to stop her, and closed the door behind them. The small office had a giant window for a wall facing the class, so the privacy was only intended to prevent anyone from hearing them.

"It's great to see you down here," Lucy said.

"No it's not," Sid said, collapsing into her chair. "Being here only makes me feel worse. I wish I could jump in and join."

"I know what you mean," Lucy offered a half frown.

Sid's bile rose, seeing Lucy pity her. Then she felt bad for feeling angry at her friend. It sucked for Lucy, even more so, ever since Sid had cut herself off from communication. There was no winning. Sid hated Lucy acting weird and different around her, treating her like she was a glass vase about to tip over and shatter at the slightest breeze. She hated herself for the mood swings that brought her to hate Lucy for caring. She hated that she couldn't treat Lucy the way she always had, feeling like the world's biggest hypocrite for pushing the blame onto Lucy for changing their friendship's dynamics.

She'd pushed Lucy away, because Lucy couldn't do shit to help her feel happy ever again. And she couldn't stand making Lucy dismayed for failing.

The last happiness Sid would ever feel was over a year ago. She was losing everything she'd worked for in her entire life. Her body, which she'd slaved to perform efficiently and beautifully at Rope Yoga, couldn't do a basic plank without vomiting out her intestines. Her studio, her surrogate child, was being sued by a rich asshole. He'd sustained the injury in question at a previous studio, and come to Edge of the World Yoga for Sid's reputation of correcting those who'd been hurt due to negligence from previous instructors.

Sid wanted nothing more than to leave Edge of the World to Lucy, the studio's Godmother. But it was impossible to pay for lawyers and medical bills. It was inevitable she'd lose the studio in trying to pay fees for a lawsuit she'd probably win.

Worst of all was her brain. If she could lose everything, her health, her business, her friends, as long as she could know it was *her* at the end of the day, her mind and personality, then she could move on, or find a way to discover the silver lining. But even that, the rudiment of her being, was disintegrating. She could feel herself ebbing away. Her mood swings increased, her opinion of people shifted before her eyes. Food had lost its appeal, and enjoyable things her atrophied body was capable of handling, like movies or books, held no appeal. Her mouth even said things her surprised her brain. She would be swallowed up and taken over by the tumor before it killed her. Her body and mind were simply the host to the cancer.

“Lucy,” Sid’s voice squeaked. She could feel tears behind her eyes well up, moments away from releasing themselves. *I can’t do this.* She wanted to apologize, tell Lucy she didn’t mean to leave her before she was actually dead. She wanted to thank Lucy for the help, with the lawyers and taking over and running the yoga classes. Sid wanted to accept her friend’s hug. But she would not allow herself to be seen crying. She didn’t want to hurt Lucy anymore.

Now would be a great time for a mood swing. Away from sad. Anything. Please. She tried willing herself. Her fists clenched. The tears receded. “I’m going to have to cut your pay check.” Her voice sounded hard, even to her own ears. It should have been soft, apologetic, thankful. Warm, friendly, loving. Lucy deserved so much more.

“Of course,” Lucy answered immediately. “We knew this was going to happen. Believe me, we’re all doing whatever we can. All of the people here are willing to do anything they can to help. They’re writing letters defending your practices for the case. The tin can we’re leaving out for donations is constantly being crammed full. They would all love it if they could talk to you once the class is over. Cheer you on.”

“No.”

Lucy looked like she was about to respond, then stopped.

“It... it feels weird,” Sid said. “It feels *wrong* for people to give me money, whether petty cash or donations online, or whatever. We all have bigger problems now. I’m just one person. I’m going to die soon. That’s a fact. But the rest of you, that’s not written in stone yet. You can make it.”

“Believe it or not, Sid, you are my biggest worry.”

“Than you’re an idiot,” Sid dragged herself out of the chair. She left without looking at the hurt she knew would show on Lucy’s face.

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Nothing was stopping Sid’s tears now. There was no way to hide it from the Doctor.

The chemo wasn’t enough. They were going to try radiation next.

That wasn’t the reason for the tears. There was only one reason why she cried. The sheer pain and discomfort. Chemo sucked. Her veins felt frozen, her mind sluggish, her bones sharp as they pressed against her skin.

But the doctor thought she was sad over the news. It was horrible news, but she felt the same as when they’d diagnosed her. Blank.

During her childhood her biggest fears were of becoming weak and helpless. Nothing had been more terrifying than the prospect of fighting her own body as it dried up around her. But when she first heard she had a brain tumor, she left the doctor’s office and went home. There was no banging fists against the wall, no crying herself to sleep, or yelling at God, even though she wanted more than anything to feel bad about it, to feel scared. The fact that she felt nothing about growing weak and sick and then dying was less scary than the fact that she couldn’t muster up a single emotion while knowing she would suffer and lose everything.

Her mood swings would occasionally make her feel these emotions, but that wasn’t *her* feeling those things. Even back at The Edge of the World, it had been easy to treat Lucy like shit, because the real Sid only cared about the girl on a mental plane. Other than mood swings, she had no emotions about Lucy one way or the other. And that frightened Sid.

The Doctor stepped out of the room to give her a moment. He was replaced by a different man.

Sid cleared her eyes to see a man of impressive stature, a thick, broad shouldered body wearing a well fitted green overcoat that was somehow familiar to her. He was balding, and had a plain face with a large, unattractive, hook nose. Sid placed him in his mid to late forties. The tan, simple yet appealing face, and hard worked body gave her the impression

he was a born, raised, and current farmer. But he stood with too much formality and purpose to still be blue collar.

He smiled, which wrinkled up to his eyes with authenticity, and offered her his hand. "Captain Barkley," he said. "Miss Janet Kincaid?"

"Sid," she corrected, and shook his hand.

"You been watching the news lately?"

The question was as unexpected as the man's arrival. "Not when I can help it."

"Never a field of daisies," he said. "Not that it was ever intended to be. I'm old enough to remember when it used to be either coverages of political campaigns or mass shootings." He pulled up a stool and sat facing Sid. He looked serious but not stern. "Do you know who I'm with?"

She did recognize the overcoat. More so when she noted the insignia on the shoulder. "Those mercenaries. Galvarino Corp, right?"

The Captain chuckled to himself. "My boss's would want me to point out the term is 'Private Military Company'. But, yes, you're right. We build weapons and kill for money."

Sid blinked at him. Her question was too obvious to be asked out loud.

"Brain tumor, inoperable," there was no tone of condolence. He was stating the facts. "But you might live for a while longer."

So she was going to have to ask after all. "Do you want something from me?"

He reached into his coat and pulled out a folded piece of paper. He thumbed it half open to glance at a portion of it. "You, of course, took the Hashim-Gellert test in high school. You did decent, scoring a seventy."

Sid shrugged. "I still don't get what the point of that test was."

"Seventy, according to Galvarino, who came up with the test, is the lowest passing score. It means your mind has an aptitude for intuition, which is the word you're *told* it's assessing."

What isn't spoken, but is very much the truth, is that 'intuition' is code speak for 'psychic,' or 'extra-sensory.'"

Sid had heard people conjecture that was what was really being scored with the mandatory test.

"We have our reasons for administering these tests. But seventy isn't very attention grabbing to us. What is, is a score of eighty-seven to eighty-nine. Which is what you scored a week ago-

"When I took the test online while I was home sick and bored," her mind felt a little less groggy. It moved, trying to make sense of the mercenary's appearance here, and what her score on the test meant. "So I'm... psychic?" She wasn't even sure what that meant.

"It's uncommon, if not downright unlikely for a person to get a better score than their first run through, which is why we only have people take the test once. You're special, Sid."

She sighed. *Oh*. "Where do I sign?"

"Hmm?"

"You want my brain after I die, right?" Sid said.

The Captain scratched his head, and chuckled once to himself. "Well, yes, but that's not why I personally drug myself all the way down here. The Hashim-Gellert is a, what would you call it? A strainer? A threshing; it's the prerequisite. I want to recruit you."

Sid squinted at him, trying to see if he was joking. He *had* to be joking. But he wasn't. She laughed in his face. "What? Recruit me for what?"

The Captain grinned. "Fighting. Killing. Our new weapons system requires humans with extreme reflexes to operate. A high 'H-G' score is a rare thing, and we want people like you more than anything."

"You want me for testing your experimental weapon... because I'm expendable."

"Well, not exactly. You're thinking we mean to use you like a guinea pig; that part of the testing is complete. Not that it makes so much of difference, but I really do want you to

fight. I want to train you up, and turn you into a killer. After that, then you'll be tossed into the fray, into the real danger."

Sid nodded. "Because I'm expendable."

He shrugged. "You're an asset. You're expendable, but as much as I am. I'm still on active duty, so I'm out there risking my life still. The gig pays pretty well, too."

"I'm going to die anyways." Sid looked at her hands. They felt numb. She couldn't imagine beating a toddler in a fist fight, let alone facing off against a monster. "I'm in."

The Captain's eyebrows raised. "Seriously? I expected I'd have to convince you. I thought you'd say you couldn't do it because of your health."

"Would you have made the offer in person if you didn't already have some work-around on that front?"

He shook his head.

"Also, even if I can't do anything, I'd like to die trying something. To go down swinging. Seems better than just dying for no reason."

He chuckled, a dry cough-like noise, as he stood up. "Ya, I get you. Before we leave, could you sign this confidentiality agreement?"

"Before we leave? Am I going with you now?" Sid took the paper as she asked.

"Thought you'd want to go as soon as possible, once you heard," he looked over to see that she'd signed the document. "We have highly advanced medical technology. We're going to cure you."

Sid found herself wishing she felt something from hearing that she would live. "Should've opened with that."

"Couldn't," Captain Barkley opened the door and began leaving. Sid followed after, and he glanced back to say, "I didn't want to recruit someone whose aim was to benefit themselves. First and foremost, I want a warrior."