

It feels familiar, this chill. I used to be afraid of heights, but after such a long time—after so many attempts—I think I just *got over it*. The distance from the jagged edge of the roof to the ground doesn't scare me like it used to.

From this position I can see the the city in its entirety. Its thousand bright, bright lights. Luminescent and glistening, like stars. The city is surprisingly beautiful when you're not a part of it.

A slight wind ruffles my shirt . It smells like fall, and rain, and wet asphalt.

Carter sits on the railing next to me, ankles crossed. A coffee cup filled with cocoa sits to her right. She looks untroubled, but then again she always looks like that; A little bit serene, lost in her own thoughts. She blinks up at me with her soft, dark eyes and smiles slightly. She won't join me. She never does.

I wonder if she knows it's futile. Or maybe—Maybe she wants to live. I look away from her.

"In another life, Carter." I say as I salute her. She says nothing back. Just watches as I take a step into the empty night air and plummet. Down, down down. I don't scream. I don't panic. I let gravity free fall me towards a ground that shimmers gold with dew.

This could be the last thing I ever see. Maybe I'll really die this time.

As I fall I let myself remember the lab, the words I repeated to myself to stay sane: *This is it, this has to be it*. They made me a weapon, something sharp, slick. Something ghastly. Forever isn't long enough to forget what they forced me to do, the people they forced me to hurt. I won't live with this soul-wracking shame. This is it.

*This has to be it.*

I hit the ground feet first.

My legs crumble underneath me like origami paper. The rest of me hits the sidewalk with a sound that reminds me of oyster shells cracking. My head hits last, and I black out.

Then I wake.

The fall that should have broken every bone in my body, ruptured every organ and caused blood to splatter the sidewalk like a painting—it only gives me a severe migraine and an ache like I've just ran a thousand miles and back. My arms are shaking. I'm coughing. It takes several minutes for me to catch my breath.

*Or maybe not.*

"Damn it," I whisper, defeated. I hear Carters neat footsteps somewhere behind me. She must've taken the elevator down. "Damn it!" I slam my fist into the ground. The ground that should be covered in blood—my blood.

Instead, there is only a dull ache that fades after a moment.

Carter stands in front of me, one hand in the pocket of her long, caramel colored coat. She has a hoodie on underneath it. I don't know why she wears so many coats. It's not like she can get sick. She's like me.

Immune to everything.

In her other hand she holds her cup of cocoa. She sits on her heels and offers it to me. After a moment I take it. My head feels like it's full of rocks and used flash paper. The aches are starting to fade, but I still feel like death. Only problem is I'm not fucking dead.

She helps me to my feet without a word, just like she always does. I wonder how long she can keep this up before she grows tired. Tired of having to clean up my mess all the damn time.

"Aren't you tired?" I ask.

She looks at me for a moment. "Aren't you?"

"Touché." I take a sip of cocoa before handing it back to her. The sky looks different down here than it did on the roof, darker somehow.

I am tired. Every reckless attempt to kill myself just makes me more exhausted. I want to die, but... I think part of me just wants to be saved.

"Let's go home." I say.

She nods, and we fall into step beside each other. Her heels clicking, click, click. It's almost relaxing.

We get to the bike. I hand her the only helmet, and she takes it. Then the engine drowns out everything. The music, the cars roaring in the distance, my own steady heart, beating. Everything except my thoughts. They continue to roil. They continue to rage.

I don't know why she trusts me enough not to crash. How does she still believe I won't drift us into oncoming traffic, or into the inky ocean like a reckless maniac? Because I am a reckless maniac, and Hell, I don't even trust myself enough not to do that. But I wouldn't hurt her. After everything, I don't want her to die. I think she is worthy of living. Even if I'm not.

We fly through the city, blurring the neon lights and the people, living. Carter's jacket whips around her legs, her dark hair trailing after us like long exposure tail lights.

With her leaning all her weight against me, I hate myself a little less.

I park the bike in front of our little apartment complex. Carter ties her helmet to the seat as I pocket the keys.

"Kael," she says. I glance back at her. She looks pretty, drenched in dew. It catches the neon lights of the city and fills her long hair with stars.

Her hair has always been longer than mine.

"What would it take?" she asks. "To get you to stop."

The question shocks me senseless. She waits patiently for me to compose myself, heels together, hands tucked into her jacket.

"Success," I say. It's a weak attempt at humor. She doesn't smile.

"What else?"

The breeze sends dead oak leaves skittering across the pavement. They look pink as they spiral around her before rolling away. A few stay at her feet.

"An angel, maybe." I'm still joking, but a small part of me is serious.

“Does it have to be a real angel?”

“No,” I say as I bite back a smile. “Just someone who can save me.”

She takes a few neat steps forward, until she’s standing in front of me. She stares at the empty trees with a look I’ve never quite been able to figure out.

“Does this Angel need to be beautiful?”

I tilt my head. “No.”

Even though her skin is dark, and the sky around us is dark, I can see blush the color of rose gold creep into her cheeks. Still, she doesn’t look at me. I wish she would.

“Does she need to be good?”

My laugh is bitter with irony. “No. Just patient. And she needs to love me a whole lot.”

She nods. I can almost feel her tension as she thinks.

“Knock it off,” I say, thumping her forehead with my hand. “If you keep thinking so hard you’re going to hurt yourself.”

“Me,” she breathes, and I wince. I drop my hands.

“Yeah, you. Out of the two of us you’re the one I care the most about. I don’t care about me.”

“I know you don’t.”

I smirk at that. “But you... I care a lot about you.”

She smiles, finally. It fades after a moment.

“You’ve been with me since the beginning; The experiments. The escaping. My first suicide attempt, my thousandth. Every reckless step of the way. I think I would’ve let myself sink to the bottom of the red sea and rot if it wasn’t for you.”

She’s silent for a long time. Too long.

“Carter,”

“I don’t want you to die.”

I flinch. It takes a moment to find my voice, and a moment more to make it light enough. “It seems you’re in luck because I sorta can’t.”

She doesn’t laugh. She looks back at me with eyes that glisten and says, “I’m sorry. That I’m not enough.”

I look at her oddly. Then suddenly, I look at her as the angel that could save me.

“Do you want to be?” I ask.

“Of course.” She whispers.

I think about it for a moment. Death, her, me. The city and its thousand bright lights. The trees with their bare branches and the sky with its single, silver moon. And lastly, I think about living. With a laugh, I take a step forward.

“Okay,” I whisper. I tangle my hands in her hair and kiss her, like I should’ve kissed her all those years ago. The moment she followed me instead of running—I should’ve kissed her then.

A passing older couple pauses to chuckle at us. They say something about youths, and the pretty stars, and the fall rain always making the best beginnings. They don't know that we are both older than them, aged by time that doesn't show on our skin. They don't see what's actually happening.

Two incurable souls being saved.