

Content Warning: Swearing, Violence, and Death

Chapter 0:

21 Years before Cecilia and Reuben returned to the Bifrost Terminal.

It's time.

He will never return.

Her heart will be forever broken.

She must do what she can if she wants to keep him.

With one hand, I bring Queen Clawdia to the table. Sir Fox-A-Lot sits on the other side. With a finger I brush the cat doll's hair to the side so her button eyes can see him clearly. The toy of the fox knight's body is hard so I couldn't make it sit properly. He was standing but sitting on the chair funny.

I lean Queen Clawdia closer to Sir Fox-A-Lot: "You can't go! This kingdom needs you."

I made the knight stand up, "But I want to go and explore the world."

The Queen stands on the table, "The world will hurt you. Only I will protect and love you. Mwahhhh~!"

I made them kiss. It was fun.

But the knight falls back, "If you care about me, you would let me go."

Before I could finish, someone entered the Nursery. A person as small as me. Papa told me someone like me will be a part of our family. He didn't tell me it was a boy. He has short dark red hair while mine is longer. I could see Mister Patrick standing behind the door, watching us behind the glass.

Then the boy spoke, "Hello. I'm Reuben."

He stands there, his eyes lock on mine. I rush towards him, beaming with happiness.

A friend! Finally someone my age I can talk to!

I watch him fall back. I stopped dead in my tracks. Did I scare him?

I must have. I didn't feel good for doing that so I reached out with my hand.

"I'm sorry! Are you okay?" I asked.

He looks at my hand for a second and slowly reaches for it.

"The Director told me that you would do that. I should have known better."

When I pulled Reuben up, I saw a brown drawing on his wrist and couldn't help but ask.

"Did you draw yourself?"

Reuben looked at his left hand and shook his head.

"It's a tattoo. My parents gave it to me."

I tilt my head at the strange markings, "What's it for?"

Reuben tucked his hand to his chest close, he whispers to me with his head down.

"It's to protect people."

I was confused by his behavior.

"Do you not like it?"

Reuben shakes his head.

"It didn't protect my parents."

Did something bad happen to Reuben's parents? Is it like how my Mama has gone away? I didn't remember too much when my Mama went away. Papa told me it was like losing someone close and never seeing them again. Reuben needs my help.

I went over to my toys, Reuben looked confused when I offered Sir Fox-A-Lot to him.

"Will you protect him? He's my friend. He can be yours too."

He takes the toy and grips it firmly.

"Thank you...Selena?"

I giggle, “Close. It’s Cecilia.”

Chapter 1: Cold Entrance

1 Hour after Cecilia and Reuben returned to the Bifrost Terminal.

“Hmph. Upon further inspection, there are too many of you assigned to this task to be an efficient use of resources. I’ve decided: some of your services are no longer required.”

Before I could have processed those words. Moments flashed across my eyes. Time moved slower than morning traffic. I didn’t even have a second to catch my breath.

What was solid ground soon opened wide, the floor bended and morphed into a sink hole. A dark void enveloping me in a cold embrace. I fell straight down. My last sight was of Reuben, he tried to leap towards me with an arm outstretched.

Then I went to a place where light doesn’t exist. I was falling, my arms and legs outstretched. I screamed but there was no sound. I expected to hear the wind brush past me but everything was silent. Only the ringing of my ears and heart beating was the closest thing to sound.

My vision flashed from endless space to blinding white snow. I fell into a mound of snow, the air has been smashed out of my lungs. I gripped onto the snow as I composed myself. Despite nearly dying, there were words that wounded me even greater.

No. Longer. Required.

The words sound like something my father would say. The last phrase I want to hear on this earth.

Get up. You are not done.

I mustered whatever energy I had left to stand up. Regrets set in immediately when the howling wind blasted me on my face. Ice might as well become my skin.

Even with my best efforts, using my gloves provided no shielding from the frigid temperatures. Where was I? I scanned around and the realization soon settled in. I’m not in the Bifrost Terminal anymore. I don’t know how to get down the mountain.

Is this how I’m going to die? Alone on this frozen rock.

That determination snuffed me out. I saw a lovely patch of large rock standing out amongst the snow bank. My legs dragged me over there and I sat my ass down. Any heat from rubbing my hands and blowing was now my only semblance of comfort.

This blizzard. The damned place. It has come back to kill me when I try to silence the place. To remove the stain from memory and time? It all comes full circle. This place always wanted me dead.

How did I want to die? I think I answered that question myself before and this wasn't it. My answer was likely young surrounded by a bunch of young sexy guys and gals after a good fu-

"Cecilia!" A voice shouts.

Reuben.

I straightened myself to look for him, the blizzard obscured my vision but I saw his figure soon appear when he approached closer towards me. I would have reached out to embrace him. He beckons me to sit still. Reuben reaches towards me and embraces me. Inside, I felt a warmth flush all across my body.

Although I was happy to see him, it dooms me knowing that we're both in the same predicament. It would be more comforting knowing that he was in there than out here with me. I rested my head on his chest then I soon broke off to get back to business, "We have to get out of here."

I looked up to him, he gave a small smile and brushed a strand of my hair across to the side. Despite the roaring wind. Despite struggling to stay upright. He's doing everything to shield me from the pain of mother nature.

"Cain said there was a base camp down here. Not sure how far it is but it's our only shot. Let's go."

Reuben held my hands as he took the lead.

The blizzard was overwhelming. Every step and I became weaker. Camp was not in sight. I held onto hope with just a floss string. We only traveled for less than an hour but I have nothing left.

My knees buckled. Reuben tried to get me up despite being more unmoved than stone, "Please." His voice almost sounded like it was on the verge of tears.

My vision was blacking out and his voice was distant. I should tell him that he should go on without me. Heroic. But I don't want to die alone. I want him here with me.

"Reuben..." I didn't finish what I was going to say when Reuben stood up. Two silhouettes began to approach us. Who were they? My questions won't be answered as I pass out.

A long rest that I yearn soon wraps me. I surrendered and accepted it.

Chapter 2: Jerk

10 Hours after Cecilia and Reuben returned to the Bifrost Terminal.

Dreams are a form of escapism or prison. I never got to see my own dreams. The best way I could describe my ability was holding a mirror and seeing someone's reflection. Everyone except mine.

When I sleep. I don't see anything. The only things I felt in my hands were something small, wet, and slimy. Almost like grapes. That's what I always dream of, grapes.

Light shined on my eyes as I blink and slowly awaken. I woke up wrapped in a warm blanket in a room. Air conditioner. Compact table. Flat screen television. Ugly carpet. This familiar location was the Leviathan Inn that me and Reuben rested at a week ago.

We're off the mountain. We lived. I touched my face a couple times, making sure that this actually was not a dream. I smiled to myself. I grabbed the pillow behind me and embraced it completely.

I heard the sound of a toilet flushing behind the closed bathroom door. A smirk grew on my face as I decided to lay myself on the side for Reuben to see. He'll be getting a lovely view of me when he opens the door.

The door opens and it's not Reuben. It's an anthropomorphic fox where his body appears to share a complexion of a twin popsicle. Orange and blueberry favor.

"What the fuck? Who are you?" I sternly demanded.

The fox gasps, stuttering in his own words, "D-Darius and your friends were out getting stuff. You were out when we carried you down the mountain! I swear!"

Darius. Reuben's code name. I see.

I cough, straightening myself up and nod, "I see...Thank you."

The fox's purple eyes dart across the room before scampering to get a roll of blankets.

"Do you need an extra blanket? The cold really knocked you out."

I shook my head, "One's enough."

He nods, the fox stands awkwardly with the blanket. He puts it away as he sits on a chair in the corner of the room.

"Okay then. They uh...told me to keep an eye on you when they go left so...sorry for surprising you."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Oh! I forgot. My name is Corey."

"Musetta." I answered.

"Oh yes, I know that. Darius said your name while you're...You know what? Forget what I said, I was just trying to make some small talk."

Corey chuckles, casually scratching the back of his head.

I blinked, the whole room was not pink. I glanced at the small table next to my bed and noticed my shades were set aside. The shades fit snug on my face and glanced back at Corey.

"I never saw a person with eyes like yours."

Corey comments.

"I never get rescued by a fox often. Guess we're both surprised."

I smile.

Corey's head tilted akin to a confused dog.

"Don't you mean cat and fox?"

Now it was my turn to think twice.

"Huh?"

Just on cue, the door swings wide open. A short anthropomorphic feline strides in with a couple bags in hand. She instantly locks in my gaze with her one good eye and hollers, “Darius! She’s awake!”

Reuben soon came in afterward, he dropped whatever he had on the ground and rushed towards to see me up close. His calloused hands tilt my chin up and I smiled to see his red eyes glow with joy.

“Hey.” I whispered.

“Are you okay? How are you feeling?” More voices call out, I tilt my head around Reuben’s body and notice that Patrick & Layla have also come back.

“I’m fine. Maybe some water and some snacks.”

My servants revealed a bag of snacks and various drinks for me. I was overwhelmed by the choices- I chose bottled water and chugged it.

I noticed that eye patched cat raised an eyebrow at me, “Wow. You get this treatment often?”

A variety of snacks were laid all around me, “Feel free to have what you want.”

She strides over and swipes a bunch of snacks. The snack bar that I had in my hand was also grabbed. Her hand touched the palm of my hand somehow, she didn’t move for a couple seconds before leaving to sit with Corey. The two would open up snacks and began devouring whatever nourishments they gathered. I wondered about the dynamic of their relationship. The others were not curious but seemed annoyed.

Patrick’s eyes twitched with a tinge of anger but I shook my head. He goes back to the other bags that I didn’t see. There were radios, rope, flashlights, and better winter clothes.

“I’ve been informed that you have lost all your items up there. So we went to a camping store to get the necessary items for you two.”

“Thank you Patty. Darius. A moment with me please?”

I dragged myself out of bed.

We went outside, I took a deep breath of the afternoon cold breeze. A gentler time to spend with than the tormenting blizzard up there.

“So...How are you?”

I finally asked, watching the mundane activities of Origa. A small red car drives around the curves of the icy road. Dragons perching on rooftops. Old people in hand slowly taking their steps up a small flight of stone stairs.

“It’s a miracle that we got out—unlike the others, all I smelled in there was...it was like a combined scent of all negative emotions that lingered in every crack and crevice of the place. I’m afraid that I have my work cut out for me, especially when we met The Entity.” Reuben explains.

“It’s fine. We fucked up. That’s that. Our mission isn’t over; however, we have to try again. There’s got to be another way to get in.” I suggest new plans and methods sprung up in my head.

Reuben grabbed my arm firmly. Pulled me out from my imagination. “Check the television.”

I rushed back. Grabbed the remote. TV comes alive. Switched to the news channel. My eyes widen at the sight.

The news of people going missing at the Bifrost Terminal. It’s national news. Expeditions are being mounted to rescue. Authority and police collaborating. People and press witnessing history unfold. There’s no way for us to get back inside. The discretion needed is thrown out the window.

I gripped the remote in my hand, the thought of chucking it at the screen was tempting but I plopped it and collapsed on my bed. Inside, I felt that the world around me had laid out a death bed for me to be put into. This wasn’t the plan. This wasn’t the plan. This wasn’t the plan. This wasn’t the plan. This. Wasn’t. The. Plan.

“Hey. Are you okay?” Corey would look right above as I lay facing up blankly staring at the ceiling. His perk ears and wagging tail helped with his cheery mood.

An emotion of anger snapped me faster than cracked glass. I didn’t want his comfort. I did not fucking asked. All I want is for his stinking snout of my face. The best reply I could think at the moment was for me to lower my shades to lock eyes with Corey, “You’re too close.” I warned him.

His tail went limp and ears reeled back. Corey swallowed and carefully treaded away to the protection of the feline.

The cat stood up from her chair, beef jerky in mouth with a dagger unsheathed.

“Don’t meh(mess) ih(with) huh(him).”

I put on my sunglasses and turn to see her return her venomous shoot back at me. Probably deserved that one. Again, I signaled for the others to not kill the cat. They rescued us so in return I made sure that they didn’t die.

“I apologize. It’s been a bad day for me.” I grumbly explained.

She swallows her jerky and puts her dagger away.

“Speak for yourself. We also were at the Bifrost Terminal. Then poof! We ended up right next to you two.”

The cat would walk towards the television, hands on her hip as she stares at the screen, “If my father were here, he would be so proud of us and tell us not to give up.”

I saw a tinge of proudness from her before reality set in and she was back with the snarl on her face.

“Which means we’re still not out of the race! We’re just giving a head start for everyone. Y’all can chase your tails in circles forever but soon you all need to snap out of it.”

The cat would clap her hands and I saw Corey stuff whatever snacks he could in his face before opening the door for her. As she steps outside, she turns to face the rest of us.

“Remember us! The De-”

Slam!

Patrick shuts the door. Layla lets out a sigh of relief as she closes the blinds for our room while Reuben puts a finger under his chin to think.

“Does Madderoot Park have an entry way to the Terminal?”

I shook my head.

“I don’t know. Probably not? We would have to explore the inaccessible parts of the Madderoot Park. Which means the underground tunnels and places that haven’t seen the light of day for a century.”

“It’s better than nothing. We can start our journey tomorrow. Right now, we need food and rest. It’s been one hell of a day.” Reuben folds his arms, content with the new plan.

Despite the snacks, my stomach was craving real food.

“Too bad we didn’t reserve at a much more fancy restaurant. I wanted to go to a fine place.”

Layla smiles, stepping up. I raise my eyebrow.

Don't. Don't give me hope.

"I reserved a table for you two at Origa's finest restaurant after you two returned from your expedition."

I jumped and hugged her tightly. She was so caught off guard by it that I almost caused her to fall.

"THANK YOU!!!"

Reuben smiles and looks at Patrick, "Guess she's more happy eating good than being rescued."

Patrick turns away, I could see him containing his own laughter.

Chapter 3: Table for Four

Since this was a formal event, it means that fine dining comes with fine clothes. My wardrobe was limited so I settled on one of my favorite short dresses. A short dress. The sleeves around my shoulders appear as a scarlet mist. Below, the waistline is wrapped with maroon and snow white ribbons altogether. The hemline is puffed up more fluffier than whip cream with some more red underneath.

I enjoyed seeing the clash of red and cotton white on myself, just standing in front of the mirror and swaying side by side almost helped me forget why I was here for a moment. What I couldn't wait more than however was Reuben's attire. He stood tall in an ivory white suit, black tie, with a strong cherry red color shirt underneath. But I could barely see the red shirt since it was so buttoned up. I silently walk up to him and unbutton it for him.

"I prefer to keep it the other way." Reuben suggests.

"It's nice but it's easier to move around if you do it like this." I reasoned.

He doesn't protest. We made our way to our ride.

As we were driven into the heart of the town, the sun had already set over the horizon but the sky still had just a small palette of peaches and indigo. It'll all be consumed by the night sky. The town was alive more than ever, we crossed one street and people were crowded on sidewalks. Many paths. Many destinations to go to. If I lived to be normal, would I be content? It was a small question I ask myself from time to time. My life however requires bigger answers.

The car crawled to a stop as we stepped outside to see the gourmet restaurant. Layla made sure the place was up to my standards and assured me that I'll be having a grand time over there. I walked under a large neon sign of *Dragon's Breath*. Seeing the lime and indigo color together was a calming sight as I entered into the belly of the restaurant.

Compared to the Leviathan Inn that we stayed at, the decor inside was magnificent. I almost felt as if I was transported to another room. The floor was made of granite, it bore a strong resemblance of albino roots spread and grown in every vacant black part of the stone. The area is canvased with clothed tables, hanging spherical lights, and people eating but the atmosphere demanded a respectful quiet ambience and so everyone subconsciously obeyed.

We had a lovely seat at the corner of one of the many dining rooms. I had a good view of the city of Origa below. Just far enough to make out people from a distance. I was admiring the view of the distant twinkling lights from the town when Reuben nudged me. A yellow dragon with a toque blanche smiled as she made her way towards us. Compared to Kazuya, she's a fair bit smaller.

"Welcome. My name is Marie, I am the chef that will be taking care of you folks tonight."

"I'm Musetta. Love the way you design this place, it feels quite outstanding."

"Thank you. We have many guests from around the country visit our beautiful village. Is it your first time visiting Origa, Musetta?"

I nod, Reuben follows suit.

"We're from New Cabotland. There's a rich history here in Origa that we hope to discover."

Her eyes glow brighter than emeralds.

"It's a noble pursuit that you're after. I learned a lot in Shiraval so I aim to give back to my community."

Reuben chimes in

"That's amazing. You bring in people from all over like the Bifrost Terminal."

The dragon chef tries to smile on the topic,

"Yes, that is true. While there are a lot of eyes on that place. It saddens me that people's lives are in danger, especially since that place was abandoned years ago due to similar circumstances."

I saw Reuben's eyes lower down, almost in shame. The chef straightened herself up, trying to

change the subject. A passionate chef like her knows what ingredients to use to make a delectable dish. She can speak up and her words can slice sharper than knives if she wanted to.

“We’ll make sure that your experience here will not just be unforgettable but a place you can come to love. The dishes we’ll prepare are all made and grown here. Enjoy the rest of your night.”

The chef excuses herself and the two of us are alone again.

I lean my elbows on the table, chin resting on my palm as I reveal a goofy smile to Reuben. He looks back and his stoic gaze breaks down to a friendly chuckle, “Yeah?”

“Nothing. Just remembering the good times we had.”

“Just the good times?” Reuben clarifies.

Before I could think about what he said, a loud unruly laughter erupted behind me. I turn to see a large man showing another man a gold ring for him to examine.

“It was like stealing candy from a baby! Traded it in for some broken junk that I had in the back.”

“Who would even do that?”

“A stupid runt betraying her father’s legacy to gamble on nothing but hopes and dreams. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’ll be right back.”

The grizzled large man left. He pockets the gold ring back into his coat before heading off somewhere.

I blinked a couple times and returned back to our own conversation. Gaze shifted back to Reuben.

“What were we talking about again?”

“I think you wanted to talk about some fond memories?” Reuben reminded me.

Did I say that? I kind of forgot but I’ll roll with it, “Sure...I think when we're young. Do you remember you allowed me to draw a funny tattoo on you?”

He raises his eyes. A snicker escapes his mouth. “Do I remember? It’s seared into my brain!”

“For like a couple days! You had it until my dad wanted you to get rid of it.” Shrugging off my shoulder to exaggerate.

“You drew Goku on my back and you told me that to warn everyone that I have his powers.” Reuben explained.

I rolled my eyes, cringily smiling at how dumb it was, “I didn’t know that’s how your magic works like that.”

“It’s fine. One of the funniest memories I remembered having with you and Krisàlis.” In a nonchalant manner.

I took off the rose tinted shades and still saw red, “I’d rather we shift our focus to something more present. Understood?”

Reuben’s shoulders sank. Despite the defeated demeanor, his eyes widens and becomes fully alert.

A familiar bold voice chimes in, “I agree! If we can’t communicate and trust one another. We might devolve into animals and tear each other apart.”

At the edge of my eyes, the purple markings from her brown fur gives it away easily. I put my shades back as the feline would sit and take a chair and sit with us. With her one good eye, she leans confidently on the table as the both of us recline back by her entrance.

So many thoughts ran through my mind. Why is she here?

“You’re probably asking why I’m here.” She states, “I’m here because you two owe me and my brother a huge favor. You’re both going to help us get back into the Terminal.”

“I’m sorry but we can’t help you. We’re just reporters and journalists. We thought there was a story over there.” I informed her, the prepared lies ready to serve to her.

“Yeah, yeah. Darius said something similar. But isn’t it weird that you don’t have any credentials on you, isn’t it?” She ponders.

“We lost everything when the Entity removed, I’m sorry but you’re going to have to believe us..” I bluntly replied back.

She narrowed her good eye, “Your hands are softer than a baby’s bottom when I felt it earlier. You dine at fancy restaurants often. Your employees pamper you with snacks. Call me crazy but everything about you screams nepo baby more than anything.”

I scoff, “Even if I was, why would I need your help?”

“You’re a rich gal. Money however can’t buy experience. I’ve searched for treasures for my whole life. You need someone like me and my brother to help you find a way back to the Bifrost Terminal.”

Reuben sits up, “How about you take your business elsewhere? This table is reserved for just the two of us.”

Her head rolls back on the top rail of the chair, “God. Are you two this tight-lipped? At least let us join you for dinner. Corey is outside, at least treat us to something nice for rescuing you.”

I sigh deeply, I give Reuben the go-ahead. He would step away to reach out to the staff if they can make a sudden change of plans. A table for four. She gets under my skin more annoying than moles uprooting someone’s lawn.

We all sit together, Corey and Reuben on opposite sides while I get the front row seat of the stubborn cat. I can handle the two-colored fox better than the latter. Reuben appears wary more than anything else. Eyepatch was playfully spinning the steak knife from the utensils like a bottle.

“Thank you for taking us in. I’m sure my sister means well even if her approach is a bit...unorthodox.” Corey beamed.

I give a cheerful grin. A practiced smile that I learn to show, “Ah, well your sister strongly insists. I obliged. Eventually.” My neck turns towards her.

“I feel quite welcome, *your grace*,” She claps her hands together, “Now, down to brass taxes. Have you two heard of Madderoot Park?”

I used to believe that I was always in control of the situation. Yet when someone seems to be two steps ahead of knowing you and your plans. You ask yourself if you lost your edge.

I tried to speak. Instead I stammered, “W-what? No.”

“Thought so.” She smugly smiles, “You know what I hate about people like you? You just can’t help yourself, can you?”

I could feel the color drain from my face. She knows that I'm a Madderoot. The chances of me being outdone by a stray cat should be one out of a billion, but never zero.

The cat tilts her head almost like what she just said was harmless fun.

"Well, I hate to break it to you. When we get to the treasure first. The Defiants are going to rise back up in the ashes and you two are going to hear our names for the rest of your lives."

I kept a poker gaze. Despite not saying she does, I fear that any microexpression could tip her off. She's caught me off more than once.

The troublemaker pulls out something familiar. A gold ring. It glistens under the light and a warm wholesome expression lights up on her face. I stared long at it, the ring was too familiar but the name escapes the tip of my tongue.

"My father told me that the Bifrost Terminal is full of wonder and adventure. That there are endless possibilities on the other side. But people like you plan on keeping it all for yourself. No, it won't happen. You'll help us get inside and everyone should be able to prosper."

Oh.

This.

This is perfect.

I grumbled to myself, something barely audible for her to hear.

"Speak up." She calls out.

"Cain Salvatore mentioned expelling spirits for a *big reward* but all we saw was potential real estate worth ten figures or more. Figured once we got a judge to issue a court order in case people resisted, we could legally claim this place."

The cat puts two and two together, "You're from...the government."

I sadly nodded. Her fur unfurls. Fists tighten.

Corey was a little confused, "What does that mean?"

"It means that this fat pig needs to get her face punched in!" She winds up a punch as Reuben was about to intervene but I raised my hand up. Both freeze in place.

"If you do that, you will be living the rest of your life in a five by five foot hole in solidarity. Is that the future you want for you and your brother? *Captain Sheri?*"

I spin my steak knife with the blade pointing at her.

“The way I look at it, you’re a criminal on the run but I think we can strike a deal that’s better for the both of us. Lives are on the line, you help us rescue those people in the Bifrost Terminal. We’ll offer you a pardon for you and anyone who collaborates in this operation. Time is of the essence.”

“I don’t work with the likes of you. You’re full of shit.” Sheri growled.

“Sheri! She’s right though! It’s wrong for us to leave those people behind if we’re so focused on the Terminal. We have to help them. They might be from the government but they wouldn’t leave them to die.”

Corey pleads.

“They would, I learned more from the streets than their corrupt institutions. They didn’t care when hundreds blinked away during the Incident. Now they grow a spine? I don’t BUY it!” She shouts. Sheri slams her fist on the table then the restaurant goes silent.

Corey closes his eyes, “I want to do fun adventures with you Sheri. But I don’t want to be afraid of my life anymore. Looking back wondering if I’m being hunted. That’s not...living.”

Sheri’s ears lowered, “I’m sorry Corey. I didn’t know...”

“It’s okay. I should have spoken up but I didn’t want to upset you big sis.”

Corey reaches out to Sheri for a hug. The two embrace each other. Sheri looks to me,

“We help you save those people, you give us a pardon?”

“Think about it. You help us, we help you.”

After the food was served, we silently ate to savor every flavor. The food was fun while every bite for the siblings seemed to make their eyes want to pop out. After it was time to pay for the check, Sheri pulled a crimson red wallet to pay for all our meals. They agreed to meet us at the Leviathan Inn early tomorrow morning. As we step outside the restaurant, I see the same loud man from earlier knocked out near the parking lot.

I looked at Sheri, “Trust me. He had it coming.”

We watch the siblings depart as we wait for our ride, Reuben lets out a sigh of relief,

“How...how did you do that?”

“Do what?”

“I thought it was all over but you somehow convinced her of a bigger lie?”

“Sheri knew that we weren’t journalists from the start. That’s what her experience taught her. That’s when I realized that she has an unchecked fury inside her. Sheri wanted me or a reason why she didn’t get to have a taste of the Terminal. I played that part and offered her a deal she couldn’t refuse.”

“What you’re doing... isn’t right.”

“We all make mistakes. It so happens that theirs first will be their last.”

Chapter 4: Fuzz Gone

1 Day after Cecilia and Reuben returned to the Bifrost Terminal.

The early dawn of frozen air kept my senses alive as we stood outside the Inn. Thankfully, Patrick had extra weapons for us that we lost earlier. Pistols and knives. We concealed them on our bodies, a sense of security relaxes me as I stand in the cold breeze. Patrick will stay behind. It’s too bad that we couldn’t fit everyone in the car.

“Remember your training Miss Madderoot, your father would be proud knowing how hard you are in protecting the family.”

Patrick proudly says, standing by my side.

“You were the only one who probably knew my father more than I do Patty. If I may ask, do you think,” I was scared to ask. Hesitant even, “If I could leave and live a normal life like Reuben would that be possible?”

Patrick silently thought about my question, “You can. I won’t stop you. But you have enemies that won’t hesitate to find you if they catch wind.”

It was a stupid question to ask, I instantly wanted to take it back.

“If you had to leave, what would you do?”

“I don’t know Miss Madderoot...”

“Come on, you can trust me.” I looked up to him.

“I had a chance to be a crab fisher with my brother.”

A crab fisher? It's a physically demanding job. I wouldn't last a chance fighting off mother nature, “What happened?”

“He passed away.” There was a struggle in his tone when he brought it up.

I see Reuben pull in the car with Layla inside. Patrick watches as I step inside the vehicle. “I'll be on the radio if I hear anything. Good luck Miss Madderoot.”

I step out and give Patty a tight hug before leaving. We waited at the Inn until the two siblings showed up. Every time I see Sheri step closer, an overwhelming feeling of nausea has crept up in my guts. Do they plan on following along? Or have they decided to change it?

They got closer, I waved to them but they didn't wave back. Why didn't they wave back? I looked back at Reuben. Why isn't he doing anything? Am I overthinking? I hear the sound of the car door open and I tensed up.

Nothing happens, Reuben glances back at the two.
“Rested well?”

“We rested alright. Let's get this show on the road.” Sheri puts on her seatbelt.

I exhaled quietly, my beating heart relaxed. Reuben switched gears and we were off. The ride was silent for the most part, except the sound of Corey playing with the buttons on the car window. The window would go down and the roaring wind rides loudly with us. The window went up and there was awkward road silence.

“So... You two are siblings? You two don't look alike.”
I asked, turning around to face them.

Corey wanted to answer but before saying so, he looked to Sheri for approval. She doesn't mind so she rolls her eyes and stares at the moving landscape.

“Well, technically we're not but we've been through a lot together that it feels that way.”
Corey answers.

“That's endearing. Really. I mean it.”

“Thanks Musetta, are you two...together?”

He asks, pointing at me and Reuben.

“It’s...complicated. What do you think?”

My focus shifts to Reuben.

He joins in on the conversation, “We’re just partners. That’s all.”

“Oh, just business partners! For a moment I thought you were....Ah never mind, forgive me. I shouldn’t assume. Sorry Darius.” Corey chuckles.

Reuben gives me an apologetic look before resuming back, “We’re here everyone.”

The car comes to a halt.

The Madderoot Park up close reminded me again that time and neglect can make the most magical places into a dying corpse. Graffiti and vandalism has turned the park into a ruin. Rust and snow chips away at this place. We parked the vehicle and made our way to the front.

The entrance was chained off, clearly not allowing any trespassers to enter again, “Maybe we can find a hole in the wall?”

Sheri steps up, “Takes too long. Watch this.”

She looks around, sniffing the air before tapping on the ground. The feline wipes away the snow with her feet, Sheri gets on her knee and digs her fingers in the dirt. I thought it was weirdly gross until something sprouted.

Plants from the earth formed, a bean stalk grows and goes over the wall. One by one we climb over it, “Didn’t know you could do that.”

“You don’t know shit about me.” Sheri shoots back.

Many buildings have been vandalized and beyond its recognition. Any rollercoaster or ride appears rustic and prone to collapse at any moment. We persisted onward, I let the two lead ahead. They will take us to the Management Building where staff and backstage employees can operate the theme park but also have connections to other rooms to maintain the park, rooms like Electrical, Security, Archives, and others.

As we entered inside, the place was torn asunder. Paper, chairs, and any furniture not bolted to the ground have been toppled all around. Corey picks up a colorful brochure off the ground and

studies it, “Oh wow! There’s a dinosaur museum exhibit! Maybe we can go there?”

“No.” Me and Reuben said in unison.

The sound of fingers snapping echoed and the rest looked at Laya pointing to a bunch of piled up furniture, “I see a door with some stairs behind all of this. Can you lend me a hand?”

We moved every furniture, the loud metallic screeches and groaning gave us all goosebumps or fur standing on end. Our descent downward got darker and darker. A locked steel door greets us. If no one got through then this is where we venture into the unknown.

“I got this one.” Layla steps forward. She takes out what appears to be a spray gun. A red foamy gel wraps around the door frame.

“I need you upstairs.”

We heeded her words, she pressed a button on the side of her tool and a loud explosive shakes below us.

“Explosive Gel. Just enough to get the door open.”

Our descent into the aftermath of the dusty entrance was met with fits of cough and flashlights turned on. We descended into the long dark maintenance tunnels. I beamed my flashlight at the end of the hallway, I don’t enjoy going down here. It feels disrespectful to be here like opening a tomb. There were many tunnels and other passages that could lead to anywhere in this place. I lagged behind the group to tie one of my shoes.

As they went on ahead, I placed my flashlight down and went down to one knee to redo the knot. Then I felt something. The hair on the back stood straight. Something was behind us. I picked up my flashlight and flash towards where I thought the presence was. Nothing. Was it my imagination? My pulse was beating so hard it was all my ears could hear. I run back to return to the group.

The rest of them were peering inside a door with a glass window somewhere.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“If we want to reach the Utilities Room, we have to go through the Secret History Exhibit. I didn’t get too much from the brochure.” Corey informs.

“Let’s get a move on then. I’ll go find an electric panel.” Layla ushers, unlocking the door.

We walked and illuminated the pitch dark. The exhibit was massive, the area were wide with each wall holding a specific era of history to demonstrate. Dioramas and tableaus laid in array and in the center of different period pieces. Sheri and Corey were gawking at a pirate era area while Reuben was broadly sweeping the area.

We noticed large holes in the ground, they're easy to avoid as long as you don't wander without looking. But as I explored the place myself, I saw a gigantic diorama for a large skeleton. It was an animal with rodent features and large claws. I read the panel for this creature, *"The last Fuzzgon died in 1888 due to deforestation and mass hunting for its skin and meat. Rumors of an Endling Fuzzgon was recently spotted a decade later. The Madderoot family commissioned Pennel to find and return it for an exhibit on the opening night of the Madderoot and Bifrost Terminal."*

The lights in the exhibit flooded the area, it took me a moment for my eyes to adjust. "HOLY SHIT! WE'RE PART OF HISTORY?!"

Curious, I went over to the siblings to know what the fuss was all about. Sure enough, a mannequin in a pirate outfit of centuries old was on display behind glass. Various items scattered on display such as saber, gold coins, and a lantern. A panel next to it read, *"Captain Pennel was a feared sailor in the 17th century. We present one of their outfits that were worn in battle and during the deadliest storms. Including coins, weapons, and keepsakes from their time."*

"Why are you so proud of that title?" I asked Sheri.

She looks at me with a smug grin, hands on her hip.

"Why shouldn't I be? I was born without a nickel to my name until Captain Jeremiah took me in. I will always be grateful to that old man."

I nodded, letting them have their fun. I saw Reuben looking around the place, "Everything alright?"

"No. There are holes everywhere littered across this exhibit. It's like some giant dog or giant mole wanted to turn this place into swiss cheese."

"The sooner we get out then the better." I whispered.

After we finished with our diverted field trip, Layla found the Utilities room, unscathed by the holes, that the siblings talked about. We walked into this large gigantic room where generators and electrical appliances are compacted inside this one area. The sound of that electrical hum is still somewhat vibrant and runs in the air.

“So, what made you believe that this place is going to help us get in there?” I asked, curious how Sheri was able to piece altogether.

She chuckles, leaning her back on the wall as she explains, “You’ll be surprised by the light reading I get at the local library. Bifrost Terminal was too expensive so TITAN—cut a deal with the Madderoots. It’s like the Titanic and Britannic all over again. One made the headlines, the other sank into quiet financial ruin. Guess which is which.”

I’m impressed. She did her homework on that one. Corey was fiddling and examining the intricate machines all around, “This place is...so retro! I think if I just run a diagnostic check and divert any reserve power here to the Bifrost Terminal...we can juice power to the place and open the doors!”

Reuben and Layla shared glances and stared at me, waiting. The room became muted, voice distorted as time seemed to move slowly. Sheri is going to praise Corey. They’re distracted. I recalled asking Patrick about leaving. About having a choice to not do it. Yet his words rung truer, karma will find a way.

“What do you think happened to the Madderoots, Sheri?” I asked.

“Beats me. Probably left and never came back.”

“Well... about that”

Chk-CHK.

Click.

There are pistols aimed at Sheri and Corey. Reuben and Layla have their fingers on the trigger. I smiled, the mask lifted off from me, “We never left.”

Chapter 5: Swallow

Corey’s breathing was erratic. Most likely hyperventilating.

Sheri’s fur bristles in rage. She stands motionless however with a barrel pointed to the back of her head.

“You bastard.” She seethes through gritted teeth.

I shrugged, “Uhh...My father was a Madderoot. I’m not adopted like some stray runt unlike you.”

If looks could kill, she’s stabbing me with that death stare. I walked over to Corey who was seated in front of the control panel, “Hey Corey, how’re you doing?”

“M-Musetta. What’s going on?”

“I’m glad you asked. But first I need to be honest with you, it’s not Musetta. It’s Cecilia. I need your help with something. Do you think you could do that?”

“DON’T LISTEN TO HER!” Sheri shouts before Reuben smacks the butt of his gun on her head. She collapses wincing in pain. Blood drips on the ground.

Corey’s eyes widened. He’s unable to focus so I turned his head to the control panel.

“It’s okay. She’s fine. Just a bit of blood. Nothing too serious yet. Focus. Hey!”

I lightly pat on Corey’s cheek a couple times.

“You want to help her don’t you? These control panels... You’re the only person who probably knows how to use it. Do you understand?”

Corey was trembling but he takes a deep breath, “What do you want?”

“Shut down all the power.”

I instruct.

“If I do that then those people are...are..I won’t be able to turn it back on.”

Corey pleads.

I groaned, “Reuben.”

Reuben cocks the gun and that sets Corey panicked. I signaled Reuben to halt. He obeys.

“WAIT! WAIT! DON’T DO IT! PLEASE! I’M NOTHING WITHOUT HER PLEASE!”

“Why do you say that?”

“I-I Don’t have anyone! I’m nobody. If you kill her then you’ll have to kill me as well.”

Through the tears, Corey meant it.

“Fine. I won’t kill her but you better make it quick.”

Corey wipes the snot and tears from his face and got to work. I sat beside Sheri to see that she’s bleeding a little bit from the head.

“Why... Why are you doing this?”

“Don’t worry about it. What matters most is that your brother cares about you,”

I point to him, working on the control panel.

“That he is willing to put all those peoples lives at risk in order to save you. Isn’t that... beautiful?”

“Do you feel anything at all? About what you’ve done?”

Sheri grumbles.

“I feel... a little bit bad. But you have to admit, none of this would have happened if you knew when to back off. I mean, you thought you could boss me around because your father was the Defiants is... Ironic. To say the least.”

I explained.

“You’ll pay. You’ll get what’s coming Cecilia.”

“Good talk. Corey, how’s the power situation?”

Corey, points to a big red button.

“You press it. This place and the Terminal will shut down.”

My hand hovered over, I looked at Reuben and Layla.

“Turn your lights on.”

As they do so, I pressed it. The Utility Room would be dark, saved by our lights.

“You two. Get over to the corner of the room. When we leave, I hope to never see you again.” I commanded. My last glance of the two was seeing Sheri with rage and Corey with looks away from me when we shared eye contact.

The three of us closed the door on them as we made our way to the exit, halfway through Reuben stops, “That wasn’t there before.” I looked halfway and saw a hole in the ground. I couldn’t notice the difference.

“What do you mean?”

“I stood there before. Look at the dirt. It’s fresh.”

Reuben points at the dirt pile around the hole. Then my eyes and flashlight looked at something beyond the distance. There was a large figure, as wide as a hippo moving on the ground. It was just pale skinned with large nails. It’s a Fuzzgon. But the pictures I saw showed it to be more adorable and fluffy. This one looks grotesque and viscous.

We stood in silence as I had the light beam to the creature’s face. The hungry and rapid look of the Fuzzgon turns and squeals at the light. Suddenly our flashlights began to flicker and dim out. Reuben and I shook it, weren’t they brand new?

“What the hell?”

Clack. Clomp.

I turned around, with whatever dim light we had. All I saw was a flashlight and a shoe. Layla’s shoe. My eyes scanned around and to my horror, I saw her body being dragged. Her upper torso being swallowed by one of those Fuzzgons. There were more.

I peered at the hole and saw black eyes look back at me.

“RUN!”

Reuben and I didn’t hesitate to sprint towards the way out but the lack of lights was not enough for us to navigate and dodge the holes at the same time. We were in the dark. I heard something large shuffling so I shoot.

BANG!

The muzzle fire from the gun barely illuminated the area. It got the monsters to back off but we don’t have enough bullets.

“We need to run back to the Utility Room.”

I ordered.

“Right behind you!” Reuben shouts.

We shot our way through. I don’t think I hitted my shots but every muzzle fire gave me a general direction of running. Reuben was behind me but he was running through his ammo quicker than I was. I could hear them screaming, scowling, and hissing. It sounded like they came in by the hundreds. We were out of bullets as we barged our way back.

Despite expecting the room to be pitch dark. To my surprise as I was gasping for air, the room was lit by one source, Corey. He was glowing white brighter Christmas Tree with Sheri standing defensively.

“What the hell happened outside?” Sheri shouts.

“Fuzzgons! They ATE LAYLA!” I screamed.

“What?!”

Reuben fills them in on the details,

“They made the holes! Once the power went out, they attacked us!”

“Yeah. We heard the shooting.”

Sheri states.

“They’re fucking large. Larger than bears I think. I don't think our guns did anything.”

I dropped the empty gun to the ground.

“You still have more bullets?”

Sheri asks.

“What? No! I just said-”

Before I could finish, Sheri rushed in to knee me in the stomach. I crumpled to the ground with no air in my lungs.

“That’s what you get bit-”

She didn’t finish her words when Reuben puts Sheri into a chokehold.

“Worth it!” She sputters.

“GUYS ! CAN YOU NOT FIGHT EACH OTHER!” Corey shouts.

THUNK! THUNK! THUNK!

The sound of something large has pressed on the door causing everyone to flee to the corner of the room.

“They’re going to get inside...”

Reuben lets Sheri go.

Sheri takes out of her knives.

“I’ll kill hundreds of them before they get me.”

I take out my radio, remembering to reach out to Patrick.

“Patty! Patty! We need help. Bring flashlights. Flares! Whatever that is bright! We’re trapped down here!”

Static. Then a distorted voice.

“They’re...here...”

“What? Patrick, I can’t hear you!”

...

“...-achians.”

Then the radio goes dead silent.

I dropped the radio on the ground, “God dammit.”

Reuben looks at Corey, “You. If we work together. We can all get out of here alive.”

Sheri stands in between the two, blades pointed at Reubin.

“Bull. Shit. You betrayed us and now you want to work together? Do you think we’re stupid?”

“We’re all going to die if you keep fighting us.” Reuben argues.

“From what it sounds like, those creatures don’t like light. We don’t need you two.” Sheri scowls, fangs bared at him.

“So you’re going to leave us to die? We spared you.”

Reuben states.

“Just returning the favor DARIUS.”

Corey steps up, “I-I can’t! I can’t do this anymore!

He looks at all of us, “You are all going to sit down and listen.”

Chapter 6: Monster

We all silently listened to Corey.

“I..I’m not as strong as Sheri. I can faint by the sight of blood. Even though you all want to kill each other. I know that all of you care for each other. So I want to try...I want to try to lift each other the way Jeremiah lifted Sheri. How Sheri lifted me. Now I want to lift you two.”

He looks at the both of us.

“Corey...they tried to kill us.”

Sheri reasons but Corey shakes his head.

“I know that! But I also know that they didn’t want to! I tried my best to tell you to calm down but you always get us in more trouble. You’re as flawed as the rest of us.”

His voice became hoarse, it must be taking all of his energy to tell us how he feels.

Corey looks at me, “Cecilia. Please be honest with us, you never wanted to kill us. Right?”

When I lied to you and Sheri. I didn’t feel guilty at all.

When I had the guns pointed at you. I was ready to give them the signal.

You saved me and Reuben on top of the mountain.

This is how I paid them back when we went underground.

“No. Never.”

“Then please tell us why you wanted to shut down the Bifrost Terminal. Why forsake those people?” Corey asks.

“In order for my family to bounce back, my great grandparents turned to smuggling. We are fifteen times richer now than we were a century ago. My father used the Bifrost Terminal to smuggle tens of billions without being caught. If I get rid of the place, all the evidence of our actions will be erased as well. I can start over again. Me and Reuben”

That was the truth.

Sheri was stunned. Corey, speechless.

“T-thank you. That must have been a lot to unpack. Sheri, we can get out together now. Right?” Corey asks her.

“Tch. Wild stuff. You really did whatever it took. I kinda respect that.”

“So what now?” I asked Corey.

“We’re going to get out together, your secret is safe with us. What you did took courage and trust.”

I shrugged.

“I guess.”

We walked in close formation. Corey used his light abilities to guide us out of the way. Reuben and I held hands as we made our way close to the exit. I held my knife close as the Fuzzgons were a breath away from us. When we walked past the pirate exhibit, I went over to take the pirate hat from the exhibit and give it to Corey.

“For you, Captain.”

Corey smiles as we make our way to the door, Reuben was the first one to step in. I was next to step in.

With my knife, I turned around and stabbed Corey. He falls out, the light magic sputtering. Fuzzgons approach hungrily.

“COREY!” Sheri shouts, holding him up.

“I-I’m fine!” Corey groans.

I shut the door behind me and lock it. Sheri punches the glass window of the door, cracking it.

“What can I say? I’ll do whatever it takes to protect my family.”

They screamed at my name as I turn to walk away. Reuben stood there in horror.

“We’re done. Let’s get out of here.”

I could hear them in the background.

“You’re fine! Come on, I got you!” Sheri shouts.

“We need to find another way out.” Corey murmurs.

The sound of hungry Fuzzgons soon follows.

Reuben looked at the rest of them but eventually followed me.

Chapter 7: Power

1 Week before Cecilia and Reuben returned to the Bifrost Terminal

Reuben stepped out of the room. It was only me and Cain Salvatori,
“TITAN is not going to like it. They’ll send people to make sure you fail.”

“I am aware. But I can assure you that no one will be harmed if you let us do our job. I guarantee that by tomorrow, it’ll all be over.”

Chapter 8: Latch

1 Day after Cecilia and Reuben returned to the Bifrost Terminal.

We made it to the surface. I was disappointed not to see any sunshine, only met with dark clouds and rumbling. I checked back on the radio.

I called out to Patty. Nothing.

“Did the old man take a nap on the job? Yikes...”

Reuben was silent.

“Hey Reuben, how are you?”

“...Alright.”

“That’s good. Hey, when we get back, let’s go to a bar and get wasted. Hmm?”

When we made our way out of the Park. There were a bunch of figures standing around the car. All dressed in black. Suits and shades together.

I stood there in silence, my walk crawled to a snail's pace. The only one that seemed to stand out was a woman. A bit taller than me with black and grey umbrella. Her back is towards me so I called out, “Hello? Can I help you?”

Nothing, only the woman turned around. The first I noticed was the blood all over her mouth.
“Hi!” She waves to me.

“You’re Cecilia. Right? You. Guy with red hair. You’re....Reuben? Lovely name.” She giggles.
The moment she smiles, my heart sank to its core. Fangs.

Vampire.

“You’re a Wallachian.”
I gasps.

“You can call me Jessica.” She walks towards me with a whimsical manner.
“Do you know why I’m here? I’ll give you a hint. Starts with a T and ends with an N. Guess?”

“Titan.” I answered.

“BINGO! One point to the Madderoots! Everyone give a round of applause to her!” She yells
with joy.

Silence.

Jessica clears her throat, “Hmmp. We’ll work on that team. So anyways, you’re going to have
to come with us. Unless you want me to put a bag over your head and tie you down. I’m down
for both. Though honestly, the first one is my personal preference.” She smiles as if all of this is
comedy to her.

“Patrick mentioned you were coming. Where is he?”

She points to her mouth.

“He killed some of my guys so I had to... You know... Sorry.”

I swallowed, I wanted to cry and crumbled to the ground but I sucked in some air and stared at
her.

“You’re going to burn for this.”

I’m going to look forward to smelling her ashes.

“Wow! Burn! Alright, that was a nice one. Give me a high five.”
She raises her hand for one, I don’t give.

Jessica high fives herself and black vehicle pulls up.

“So which is it?”

“I prefer the bag over my head and rope.”

I said.

She gives me a thumbs up.

“Respect! You heard them guys, chop chop.”

I was made to kneel and before I was bagged, I got one look at the sky wondering if it'll be the last time I'll see the clouds. A part of me hopes that it rains.

A black bag is put on me.

I heard rumbling and a wet droplet dropped on my bag.

I smiled.