Chapter Two: 11:15am

Floor number four.

The elevator doors opened with a *ding,* and Emilia and Rowan stepped out onto an immaculate white-tiled floor. The floor matched the walls, the walls matched the ceiling, and the sheer size of the open space matched the egos of some of the people running this entire operation.

This was the nicer part of the lab; it was the only place where appearances mattered. Emilia mainly stuck to the second floor, but she'd been up here often enough to not be fazed by the startling lack of color. She didn't know for sure, but she had a suspicion that the pristine area was the result of cleaners scrubbing and polishing every surface like crazed dentists under the cover of darkness.

The pair approached a room on the left, and Rowan held open the door as Emilia entered before walking in after her. There weren't any empty chairs next to each other, so Emilia walked around to sit on the other side while Rowan found somewhere else. They weren't late, but it was expected that all of them were early, so they were cutting it pretty close.

The only remaining seat was the one at the head of the table. Everyone was silent as they waited, and a tall yet unintimidating figure entered the room, lowering themself into the chair slowly. A handful of people relaxed, but Emilia did not. First impressions were notoriously unreliable.

The first half of the meeting passed in a blur. Most of the team shared their progress on various assignments, debated the use of... something...

Maybe I really should get more sleep.

Emilia shook her head, partially to keep herself conscious but also to dispel the idea. That wasn't an option.

"...clock is very dangerous. We have no way of knowing what this constant experimentation has done to it! As much as I'd like to figure out how we can harness it's power, you're playing with time! It's too risky."

Mark, Emilia registered. He'd never been afraid to speak up during these meetings, but questioning their work was going a bit too far. She hoped he'd be alright.

"We are monitoring its condition very carefully," a reassuring voice chimed in. "There have been no changes."

"So our work is useless, then!"

Emilia retreated back into her mind, leaving the conversation to play out without her.

None of the other scientists had any way of knowing whether or not they were making progress. Truth be told, neither did Emilia, but she knew they were doing *something.* Every time they did another test run, she had a vision. They were never anything clear, just vague flashes or sounds: an outstretched hand wearing a torn glove, footsteps pounding on the floor, someone tumbling to the ground. She used to think that each one was new, independent, but over time it became clear that they were bits and pieces of a bigger picture.

Emilia had thought for a long time about what the visions meant, and why it was *her* that was receiving them. She still had no idea about the latter, but she could take a guess at the former. They were glimpses of what was happening. Or rather, what *would* happen. But once she'd gathered all the puzzle pieces, she didn't like what she saw.

Visions of death, of bloodied corpses and mangled limbs littered the back of her eyelids even when she so much as blinked. But Emilia would endure. She would prove herself worthy of the knowledge she pursued, and remain undeterred by the images. She wouldn't let them haunt her any more than they already did. If she needed to work harder, then she would. What were a few more night shifts, anyway? She knew Rowan would probably be upset with her, but anything was better than sleep. Than closing her eyes again...

Emilia blinked herself back to reality and noticed that people were already beginning to file out of the room.

Back to work.