

GLASS

CHAPTER 1

Glass. Light dancing in it as it falls. Where am I?

Blood. Lots of blood. My blood?

I try to stand. Pain, driving through my side like a truck. Yup, my blood.

I drop back, the pain rushing through me again as I hit the ground. Not getting up anytime soon.

No, can't stay, have to find Joseph and...wait. Who the hell is Joseph?

Can't think, can't remember. Too scattered. Too tired. Too much blood loss.

It must have happened when I fell through the window. Wait, the window?

The window. Big, stained glass, with a hole through it. I'm in a church?

How did I get here? How did I hurt myself?

What's my name?

Thinking is hard, forcing the question through the pain. Name, name, name...Cory.

My name is Cory. I remember that, at least.

I can't celebrate, even if I want to. I hear footsteps, loud and strong thuds. They'll be here soon.

Who are they?

No time. No time. Gotta get my gun.

Gun?

Yes, my gun. A few more memories come leaking back. Hunting rifle. Wooden stock. Mine.

I see it. It's lying a few feet to my left. I grab it, pull it close. I go to aim and...is my arm stuck?

I move it again. I feel it moving, but I don't see...

And now I see too much. See the stump, the ragged end.

My arm. My arm. MyarmmyarmmyarmmyarmmyarmmyarmWHERE THE FUCK IS MY ARM.

Awake again, all in a rush, just like before.

Except it's not like before.

The hard stone underneath me is now a soft bed. The broken window is a wooden door. I'm still in pain, but I'm not bleeding.

I'm not in the church.

I get up, shaky and unbalanced. Something is off, but I can't place it.

I start to fall, throw out my arm to catch myself. Nothing happens, and I collapse. Why didn't I catch...

My arm. My arm is gone.

I remember. The stump, the blood. Ripped away just above the elbow. Gone.

I struggle back to my feet, not looking at it. Not yet.

I don't want to look, but I need to. Need to see if it was real.

I prepare myself for the blood. For the horrible ragged end.

I'm ready.

I turn my head and lift what arm I have left.

No blood, no exposed stump. Bandages, clean and fresh, over the end of what was once my right arm.

Someone took me. Someone patched me up.

More memories. Boots thudding outside the doors. They were coming for me.

They got me.

Suddenly, footsteps. Coming closer and closer.

Gods below, they got me.

And now, as I panic, I start to remember who they are.

-Flashback-

My feet splash in the puddles filling the alley. The water is freezing, and I continue to regret my lack of shoes. I didn't have time to grab anything but my gun. They'd just burst through the skylights, diving at us, screaming their horrible war cries.

Joseph is ahead of me, his machine gun up and ready. As we run past another alley, he turns and fires a burst into it, all without breaking stride. I heard the dying whine of a Seeker as I run by. We're almost at the end of the alley. We're going to make it.

As though it had just read my thoughts (and for all we know, they can), a massive shape fills the end of the alley. Blue-chromed steel and laser sights fill my vision. Joseph reacts first, diving behind a dumpster and pulling me with him. We crouch low, even though it's pointless. The thin metal can't stop bullets, let alone the freakish weapons they use. Just as we're about to lie down and accept it, I see it. Down the side alley, an open door. I grab his head, pointing. He looks up and nods. We get ready to run.

And then the world explodes.

-End Flashback-

I need to get out of here. Now.

I can't fight them off, not unarmed.

Ha. Unarmed. Clever.

The footsteps get closer. They're softer than I thought they would be. Are they trying to sneak up on me?

Like hell. I flatten myself against the wall on the left side of the door.

It opens. I hear a gasp. "Wait, where did-"

I lunge out from behind the door, grabbing him and pulling him in. I toss him to the ground, then stumble. My balance is still off. I need to get used to being lopsided.

No time now, though. He's about to get up. I kick him back down as best I can, and grab the

pistol from his holster, bringing it to bear on his head.

I almost smile. Still got it.

"Wait!" he yells, panic in his voice. He holds his hands in front of his face, as though they can stop bullets. "Please don't shoot! I'm not here to hurt you! I'm not one of them!"

My hand doesn't even twitch. "Nice try," I say, flicking the safety with my thumb. They've managed to look like us before. Hell, some of us even joined them.

"No, really, I'm not...here, just let me-" He lowers his hands and reaches for a pocket. I jam the barrel in his face.

"You think I'm stupid?"

"No, just angry and violent." His hand comes out, clutching a knife. Knew it. I start to pull the trigger. He just shakes his head.

"Look, you can't shoot me anyway." He seems much calmer now.

"Oh really? Why not? Is it DNA locked?" I hoped not. If it was, I'd have to beat him to death and cut his hand off with that knife to use it. Not a fun, or quiet, process.

"No, but I'm not sure how you plan to work the slide with one hand."

Damn. Hadn't thought of that. "Doesn't matter. Put the knife down or I get creative."

"Look, kid, if you just calm down, I can prove to you that I'm not one of them, okay?"

I hesitate, for the first time. I don't have a lot of options here. "Fine." I move well out of knife range. "Prove it."

He gets up, still a little shaky. I guess I scared him more than I thought. He pulls back one of the long sleeves of his shirt, baring a pale arm as his other hand raises the knife. Just as I realize what he's about to do, it happens.

With a grimace, he yanks the knife down his arm. Red blood spurts out. He flinches, but stays steady. He holds it up, showing me the cut as it bleeds.

"See?" he grunts, gasping and sweating from the pain. "Human, just like I told you. And it's not healing, so you know I haven't joined them."

I lower the gun, a little embarrassed. "I...sorry. I panicked."

He staggers to a cabinet, pulling out a fresh wrap of bandages. He ties them around the wound, wincing only a little. I finally get a decent look at him. He's young, about twenty. "It's fine. Didn't cut deep."

"Can I help?"

He looks over at me, focusing on the stump of my arm. "I don't think so."

He probably thought that was funny. It wasn't. "Where the hell am I?"

He finishes tying off the bandage, flexing a little bit to test the knot. "You're at the Mt. Ascel monastery, in the hospital wing."

Mt. Ascel..."How did I get here?"

He shrugs. "Excellent question," he says, lowering his sleeve. "Someone brought you here four days ago. We found you unconscious and bleeding out on the doorstep."

That doesn't make sense. I was in a church in the city, nearly dead, surrounded by...them. "How did they-" Suddenly, pain. The gun drops from my hand, clattering on the floor. I start to collapse again.

In an instant, he's there, holding me up. "You're okay, you're okay. Let's get you back to bed." He settles me back onto the soft mattress. "Rest up. You're still weak, and I bet you were running on adrenaline that whole time."

He's right. I feel exhausted, like I've been running nonstop for months. My memories are still pretty hazy, but right now, it doesn't matter. I feel sleep coming fast. One last question, though.

"Who are you?"

He blinks, surprised. "Oh, I'm Brother Ryan. I've been assigned to help you heal." He heads for the door, but turns back at the last second. "By the way, we never got your name."

"Cory."

"Just Cory?"

Yeah, just Cory, what did he...oh, last name. Right. I try to dig out the memory, but it's not easy. I feel like I haven't used it in years.

Finally, it comes.

"Cory Henderson." The last name feels significant, though I can't place why. Nothing special about it.

He nods. "Good to meet you then, Cory Henderson. Sleep well, and Brigid bless you."
