

## Depaysement. (Prologue)

*Breathe in.*

*Breathe out.*

*Breathe in.*

*Breathe out.*

Nathan sat straight up in bed, scratching his arm again and again, muttering to himself, clothes soaked in sweat.

"It's just a nightmare. It's okay, I'm fine."

The door creaked open. The lights from the hallway outside revealed a dimly backlit silhouette, staring at his direction.

"Hey, I just wanted to check if you were okay," the figure said.

"I'm fine, Ryan. Just having trouble staying asleep," Nathan replied, muttering.

"You want to talk about it?"

Nathan paused for a moment before responding, "No, not really."

"...Okay, if you're sure. I'll be in the kitchen if you change your mind," Ryan replied, turning to shut the door behind him.

"Ry?"

"Yeah?"

"Thanks."

"You're welcome. Goodnight."

The door shut, and the room was once again shrouded in darkness.

## How not to start a day. (Chapter 1)

Nathan feared falling. Not heights so much as the physical sensation of it. Sometimes without warning he'd experience the sensation of weightlessness. He'd hear their voices calling out his name, screaming it, and, desperate not to sink with them, he would try to grasp thin air.

"Nathan? Nathan!"

Nathan's eyes snapped open as he fell out of bed.

"Shit," he cursed.

From behind the door, Nathan could see his older brother's head peek out from behind it, brown eyes peering back at him.

"Sorry, did I-?"

"No, no, It's fine. Just had a nightmare and slipped."

"You know, I'm always up to talk if you want to... Uh, not that I'm forcing you to or anything! It's just that-"

Nathan smiled groggily. "I understand, Ry. You're worried about me, and I get that. Thanks."

"Well, um... breakfast is ready, and Adrienne is also downstairs waiting for you. Be ready in 30, or we'll be late," Ryan said, his figure slowly disappearing from Nathan's view.

"30 what, hours?" Nathan jokingly shouted.

"Minutes!" Came the reply, followed by slight laughter.



Nathan shouldn't be surprised, that was a given. Yet, the question of how Adrienne always managed to show up before he managed to reach the table has always puzzled him, even more so that she had somehow won the hearts of their parents as favourite child, despite only being their neighbour.

By the time he had even sat down, she was already shovelling the last of her meal into her mouth.

Looking at Nathan, she smirked and began snapping her fingers rhythmically, "He's a'coming. Who's a'coming? Nathan is coming, Nate is coming, the star of the show."

Nathan's sigh could be heard from the open doorway to the table, "We get it, Ad. You like musicals."

The black haired girl gave Nathan a snarky smile, her wire rimmed glasses hanging from the bridge of her nose. She was wearing her uniform in a way that was slightly off, but he just never could point out exactly what was wrong with it. There was just the faint feeling that it could not be considered neat at all.

"Ad was about to eat your portion." Ryan remarked nonchalantly.

"And I would have gotten away with it too if it weren't for you meddling kids." Adrienne added, waving around her fork.

"I swear to god, 80% of your vocabulary is all pop culture references. Don't you ever get tired of it?" Nathan huffed back.

"Isn't that the fun of it?"

Nathan gave her a look that questioned why they were even friends before taking a seat at the table.

"If you finish your breakfast in less than half an hour, we can bike to school peacefully and still have 15 minutes left over." Ryan explained, finishing off the last of his scrambled eggs.

Nathan simply nodded and tried to shift his focus to his own food. Ryan meanwhile stood up from the table, taking his and Adrianne's plates to the sink.

The voice from the sink then resumed, "Actually, how did you get into the house, Ad? I could have sworn I didn't unlock the door until after I woke up."

"Well, I might have climbed in through your window." Adrianne said, giving a sheepish smile.

Nathan choked on his toast at her statement.

"You did what?!"

"Surprise!" Adrianne exclaimed.

"How the hell did you-"

"Last one out the door is a rotten egg!" With that, Adrianne bolted to the front door, grabbing her bag and stealing Ryan's house keys as she went.

By the time the two brothers followed her outside, Adrienne was hanging upside down from the tree in front of their house.

"What took you so long?" Adrienne asked, tossing Ryan his keys to lock the door.

"Calm down. We have 15 minutes until school starts." Nathan replied, slowly walking over to his bicycle and getting on it.

"15 minutes is late! We have to leave now!" Ryan exclaimed. He immediately started biking towards their school with little regard for Nathan and Adrienne who, at this rate, weren't even trying to keep up.

"Is anyone going to tell him that reaching school early is not necessarily a good thing?" Nathan muttered.

"Nope!"

Adrienne let out a small laugh before starting to cycle faster, leaving Nathan behind her.



**Please leave a vote and comment. I really appreciate it, thanks!**

## Oh no. (Chapter 2)

"No, no, no-"

A pile of books, which was almost as large as Nathan, fell over, scattering across the floor.

"For fucks sake..." He muttered, scrambling to grab them before another student stepped on them.

Nathan felt someone looming over him, so he sped up and tried his best to look like a person who had his shit together.

As he did so, the presence behind him said, "Damn, Nate. You're already having a rough patch, this early in the day?"

Clicking his tongue, Nathan looked up at the source of his annoyance. A tall, blond student with a sports jacket worn over their uniform stared down at him with an amused grin and a lax posture.

"I mean, I could use a little help if you're not too busy looming over me."

"Alright, alright."

"So, Cubix, why aren't you hanging out with your usual posse? You know, the ones whose only redeeming quality is their proficiency at sprinting to class mere minutes before they start?"

Cubix scrunched his nose, sighing before he replied, "First of all, just because they're jocks doesn't mean they're jackasses. They're good at more than just

drinking. Second, you haven't submitted your report on the science fair project, and Mr. Willson needs it by-

"Tomorrow, I get it." Nathan interrupted exasperatedly.

"Cool," Cubix said to himself, passing the pile of papers and several books he had picked up to Nathan.

"Thanks."

"See you in fifth period."

The school bell rang, dismissing them from the conversation.



Nathan sat in his literature class, rhythmically kicking his bag. He didn't particularly dislike school, but Ms. Anusha was blabbering about topics he had already revised, only asking questions to those who weren't paying attention.

Literature, particularly the analysis of metaphors and symbolism, had never been his strong suit. He fidgeted with his mechanical pencil, doodling simple machines he wished to prove possible. As he doodled, the ticking of the clock grated on his nerves. He felt as though it was taunting him about the remaining hour he still had to spend in school.

Switching his attention to his watch, he begged for the bell to ring; if he had to listen to the lecture, which had become a suffocating lullaby, for even a moment longer, he would stab his pencil into his skull. He was so bored, in fact, he was starting to imagine the smell of smoke.

*Am I finally losing it?*



The ringing of the fire bell pierced through the serenity of the classroom.

*Are you actually kidding me?*

"Alright! Just as we practised, make a line and exit in an orderly fashion," the teacher ordered.

One of his classmates, not listening, immediately rushed to open the door to see the hallway engulfed in flames, grey smoke rushing into the room. The boy immediately slammed it shut, shaking his head.

Nathan's eyes watered as he tried to kneel below the smoke, desperate for cleaner air. He could feel the dry, ashy air irritate his lungs as he inhaled and exhaled, making the coughs he let out burn. In his fear, his nails instinctively found their way to his arms, scratching the skin repeatedly.

*This can't be happening. This can't be happening. This can't be happening agai-*

The quiet girl who usually sat in front of him stood up. She then picked up one of the chairs and used it to smash at the window quickly followed by the shriek of both the teacher and students alike.

The window shattered on the third hit and shards of glass bursted outwards. The smoke was sucked out through the opening, having found another exit.

The creeping panic seemed to recede with the presence of fresh air. Instinctively, he found himself crawling towards the window.

Both he and the girl peeked outside. The drop was a little over 10 feet. He knew that serious injuries or death were unlikely from that height but with his luck, it was always possible.

A name ran through his mind.

*What is going to happen to Ryan? Is he going to be okay?*

He panicked for a moment until he recalled that his brother's lessons were on the lowest floor.

Coughing, he turned around to see more smoke billowing in from under the door.

"We have no choice, just jump!" His teacher shouted, taking the risk before any of the students.

A cold breeze flew in, giving relief, albeit temporarily. Nathan felt like his head was going to explode. Was it always this painful to make impossible choices?

"Come on! We don't have much time!" the girl yelled, and before his oxygen-deprived mind could comprehend what was going on, grabbed his wrist and jumped out the window. Realising a little too late that his bag had gotten snagged on his leg, he started to fall. The clean air cleared out his head only for it to be filled with uncertainty once again.

## Reasons I hate Newton's Third Law

### (Chapter 3)

Now, if reliable sources told you that you could survive a fall of less than 10 feet, would you go barreling off something measuring that height?

No.

Absolutely not, you psychopath.

Nathan, unfortunately, didn't have this luxury; he was falling whether he liked it or not.

It is hard to breathe when your body thinks it's about to die in a few seconds. A frenzied attempt to grab and stop yourself from hitting the ground. Nathan was finding out in the worst way that the loss of control was the most terrifying aspect of it, knowing what's to come but unable to stop it. The scream that tried to claw its way out was still glued tight at the back of his throat.

His left foot hit the ground first, an acute pain shooting up through it. The rest of his body immediately fell back against the tar pavement, wheezing from the impact. His thoughts immediately organised themselves into focusing on one object.

*The watch.*

He immediately tried to move his arm, now an ugly shade of red, to somewhere he could see it. To his relief, his watch had somehow withstood the fall without a scratch.

"Can you stand?" an exasperated voice asked.

Nathan looked up to see that the girl who had pulled him down was dusting herself off nonchalantly. He noticed that both of her knees bled as she provided her hand to Nathan to pull himself up with. He took it hesitantly, legs still wobbly from the shock and pain. As he put his left foot down, he winced from the sharp stings of pain running up his leg.

"Thanks," Nathan said, trying to ignore it.

"Did you twist your ankle?" she asked.

Nathan squinted at her, and she smirked.

"Didn't know you were that weak," she stated, hurting Nathan's ego.

He scowled at her, too mentally exhausted to reply with aggression. His mind tried to rack up names but didn't seem to pick up any. The other must have picked up the confused expression that leaked through.

"Anyways, the name's Kiara. I don't have friends... so...call me whatever you like."

His head still felt like it was full of cotton. He had barely caught the first word of whatever the other had said.

"K-what?"

The girl let out a short sigh before responding, "...Close enough. Now, excuse me while I disappear before Ms Anusha recognizes me and asks me to pay for the window."

Nathan blinked a few times, clearly still confused.

"Well uhh, see ya!" she shouted before disappearing from sight, leaving Nathan's head spinning, foot throbbing, and mind trying to comprehend what the hell just happened.

"I left you on your own for one second, and you nearly die in a fire?!" Ryan suddenly appeared behind Nathan, slapping him on the back.

"Wha-"

Nathan fell forward and was caught by Adrienne, who pushed him back to Ryan. Looking around, he saw that he was one of the few who actually managed to end up in an okay-ish state. There were other students from his block with burns and blood on their uniforms being escorted into a separate area to be accessed first when the paramedics arrive.

Looking back at his brother, Ryan's tie was askew, the edge of his shirt no longer tucked in neatly but the worry in his eyes was already fading despite his earlier attempts to hide it. Adrienne looked unaffected as her class had assumed it was another drill.

"You look... dead on the inside," she said to Nathan.

A short pause followed before Nathan snapped back, "...Real funny," followed by him hacking his lungs out.

"The school is letting us go home, so..." she trailed off.

"I think we should get him to the hospital," Ryan stated, pointing at an ambulance that was coming around the corner.

"Look, I'm fine. I just\_"

"Come on!" Adrienne exclaimed with a mix of anger and worry in her voice, "You've been coughing ever since we found you. You're limping, your voice is hoarse, your eyes are red, and you look like you're going to pass out any moment!"

"Ok, ok. I'll go!" Nathan faltered, just going along with their orders.

At Nathan's assent, Ryan yelled, "Over here!" waving the paramedics over to their location.

*On the bright side, nothing else can get worse.*



"Well, we've given you the basic treatment for smoke inhalation and your ankle, but we'll have to monitor you for the next few days before releasing you home," the doctor said, glancing between his clipboard and Nathan.

"Thank you Dr. Nas."

"You're lucky, you know. Nathan is one of the students whose injuries are on the lighter side. Our hands are quite full, honestly. Have you called your parents?" he asked, turning to Ryan.

"I can only imagine the number of traffic laws they're bending right now," Ryan replied, making air-quotes when it came to the word "bending".

"It's good to have some support on your side, just in case," he replied. "His condition isn't exactly as stable as we hoped."

"I'm fine," Nathan tried to assure them, his speech slightly slurred.

"Let's put that on hold, bud," Adrienne replied, giving a pat on his shoulder.

"Believe me, even I'm amazed how he's still in okay shape," Ryan said to the doctor, before addressing Nathan, "You scratched your arms again."

"Didn't mean to..." Nathan said, looking at his arms and ankle, wrapped in bandages like he was in the process of being mummified.

"Well, I'm going to check on the other patients now. Just... take care of yourself. I'd say that I hope to see you soon, but that'd mean you'd either be sick or injured, and I don't really look forward to seeing you kids around here so often," the doctor said cheerily before leaving the room.



Nathan stared long and hard at the fan spinning above him, bored out of his mind and sick of his family treating him like a fragile museum exhibit.

At least the watch was fine.

The watch itself wasn't anything special. It was grey with a teal cover and a digital interface instead of clockwork hands. He was grateful that it wasn't damaged during the escape from the fire.

His thoughts were interrupted by a certain friend barging into the hospital room.

"Nate!" Adrienne yelled.

A symphony of hushes followed suit along with Adrienne apologising as she slowly closed the door behind her, a mischievous expression still on her face.

Nathan chuckled before asking, "Aren't visiting hours over?"

"They won't know if you don't tell~"

“Shut up.”

Adrienne smirked, saying, "Well, since I'm here anyways... are you up for video games? It's boring playing alone, you know. Join me, Nate."

He returned the smile.

When was the last time he actually sat down to play video games?

He shot a glance to his laptop which laid on the top of other things Ryan helped bring over including novels and late homework assignments. Giving Adrienne a thumbs up, he plopped the laptop onto his lap, handing her the plug to the other. A soft "Yes!" could be heard from her followed by the click of the plug fitting into the socket.

“Who knew you were so easy to influence-” She began jokingly.

He interrupted, "Shut up, Ad. The game's starting."

Nathan cracked his knuckles and got ready as the loading screen popped on. It wasn't the time to think; it was the time to relax.



## Why (Chapter 4)

She held her head between her knees. She could already imagine the screams of her peers, ordering her to make her decision, making her migraine worse. It was getting hard to breathe, harder still to grab the water bottle at the end of her bed.

"4,7,8," she repeated to herself as if it would help. It did, for now.

She laid back onto her pillow, holding a fist facing the ceiling. She flexed her fingers as if grabbing the glow in the dark stars above her, the pain slowly fading as she did so.

She tried to go back to sleep, emphasis on the tried. The night was anything but young, and everything was still. Leaning out of bed, she grabbed the book at her desk. She always did have a habit of late night reading. It helped her deal with the chaos of reality.

Turning the page, she started to read.



“Activate lockdown system,” the speakers rang.

The figure started to panic, resisting the urge to bite her fingers off. In amongst the lines and lines of Chrysalises, she and her assistant were stuck, only having extracted one of the many prisoners still stuck in their cocoons.

She knew her way in and out, but with the extra security and the recently freed, but unconscious person with them, nothing about their current situation was going to be easy.

“What do they mean by a lockdown system?” Zephyr, her assistant, asked, voice dripping with fear.

“Shhhhh, shut up,” she whispered urgently as colour drained from her face. If her understanding was right, they were in grave danger. She looked at the barely awake body she held and then back to Zephyr, finally settling down on an idea on what to do.

“You need to tell me what’s going on before-”

“Zephyr, I have a plan. I need you to bring him back to base, but you need to be quiet. You can't make a single sound.”

“But-”

“Don’t worry. I’m making a detour. I’ll meet you there.”

Unsure on what his mentor meant, he nodded and ran, leaving her behind. It took 2 hours for the realisation to dawn on him that she had lied.



The ping of her laptop alerted her to the beginning of a new day and an email.

The subject line read: You're on thin ice.

All she could do was smile at the title. Her coworkers were not happy with her appointment as one of their own. She knew she didn't deserve it as much as they did.

"It was only a matter of time," they said.

They were right, of course. When were they wrong? The clock would never stop, even when the world collapsed. After all, we weren't gods.



School was temporarily out until repairs were done. News reporters were swarming, trying to interview students, but, thanks to their parents, Nate and Ryan had an easier time than others keeping their peace and quiet. Although school was out, this didn't stop teachers from continuing online and assigning unholy amounts of homework. However, this didn't stop students from zoning out or falling asleep during lessons like they normally would, either.

Even after being released from the hospital with a mostly clean bill of health, Nathan's life never eased, not one bit. He was still constantly receiving emails from school regarding updates he didn't really care all that much about. He flopped onto his bed, kicking his feet along to the beat of the Kahoot theme song booming out from his laptop. A chime then alerted him to his phone.

**From: Adrianne, 4:00 pm:**

Are you going to join me in the match? ;]

Nathan stared at the text. Had Adrianne finished the assignments? He was pretty sure they had until the weekend to submit it, and she was usually one to procrastinate.

**From: Nathan, 4:05 pm:**

I don't know. Are you going to finish Ms. Kath's report?

He chuckled to himself as he hit the send button. She would probably be cursing in anger to his response if it wouldn't wake the whole neighbourhood up.

**From: Adrianne, 4:05 pm:**

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**From: Nathan, 4:07 pm:**

I was planning to stop by Morii cafe for a walk. The doctor said I could walk short distances now anyways

**From: Adrianne, 4:08 pm:**

Did you know its name has a meaning?

**From: Nathan, 4:09 pm:**

Nope, never thought of it

**From: Adrianne, 4:10 pm:**

Everything has a meaning, ya know? You just have to look hard enough. (´▽`)

It was a really vague way to end the chat, but that was always her style. Nathan remembered once asking her if she wanted to be a philosopher, but she only smiled and shook her head.

He shrugged the thought off before grabbing his sling bag and standing to get ready to head out.



Ludwig Aurea smiled widely, slipping his phone back into his pocket. To his peers, he was not the most popular, with a tall stature and cold demeanour. He was well known as a man more interested in the results than the process, no matter what it took to achieve them.

He heard a knock on the office door and called for the person on the other side to come in.

"Did you see the news, sir?" his assistant asked, handing him a cup of coffee.

He had. He wasn't expecting to see a familiar face from the news, especially one who was presumed dead.

"I did."

"Do you want me to arrange an appointment?"

"Of course. If there is even the slimmest chance that he inherited the blueprints or prototype, Prometheus Inc. will use them to enter its golden age."

"As you wish, sir. I don't mean to overstep but upper management has been... displeased with your actions thus far. I'd be careful about crossing their boundaries."

"No need to fret. I've only ever done what's best for the company."

(Chapter 5)

It all seemed as though it was yesterday.

The man had hair the colour of honey and dark eyes so cunning and sharp they could cut stone. The woman had pitch black hair with warm eyes that shined like copper in the light. The young boy at their side donned T-shirt and shorts. He had his father's cunning eyes and his mother's hair, which shimmered with gel, but somehow still managed to be messy. He shied away from Nathan, deciding to hide behind his mother. The man walked closer to Nathan and spoke.

"Right! Right, um... may I have a hot chocolate please?"

The waiter flashed a smile, "Right away."

Nathan popped his earbuds back on and hit shuffle. The corner seat was inconspicuous, but the lighting and the wall that hid the seat from the rest of the cafe made him feel safe, snug even.

That was until someone else pulled up the chair opposite to him.

"Good evening."

Nathan was taken aback. It wasn't every day that a stranger sat at the same table as him.

"Good evening?"

The man handed him a business card that had his name, "Ludwig" printed on it in bold letters along with the words, "Prometheus Inc." below it. Exchanging greetings, there was confidence in the stranger's smile, one who knew exactly what he was doing.

Nathan didn't like that the stranger was intruding on his alone time, and he wanted to get away.

"Um, sir. I'm sorry about this, but I was just about to leave and-"

"But your order just arrived."

Right on cue, the waitress brought over a mug of hot chocolate and a glass of iced coffee.

"Miss, I'm afraid I didn't order the-"

"The coffee is for your father. He ordered it on the way in."

"My dad? He's-"

"Thank you for the drinks. Oh, I think that table over there is trying to get your attention, dear."

Nathan didn't even have a chance to escape. He was backed into a corner.

"Have a sip. It's going to get cold if you don't."

Nathan deflated back into his chair. He was terrified. He could make a run for it if it weren't for the fact that his legs were frozen and his ankle wasn't fully healed.

"How do you know me?"

Ludwig's smile only grew wider, "You see, you have something belonging to my company."

"I don't understand?"

"Your father had actually worked on a project under our company. You're a smart lad; you know where this is going, don't you?"

"He did?"

"That's right," he said pointing to Nathan's wrist. "The watch."

"...What?"

"According to the law, this watch, the prototype, belongs to our company as we were its main sponsor. I take it you get what I'm implying?"



Nathan understood what that meant, but it didn't mean that he liked a single aspect of it.

"I'm sorry, but I don't see the reason why a large scale company would be interested in an old digital watch. Thank you for your time, but I'm going to go-"

"Now, now. Don't be stubborn, Nathan," he said, grabbing the boy's wrist tightly, "You wouldn't break the law right?"

*He knows my name.*

"Please, I-"

"Nathan-"

*Stop.*

"It's the only thing I have left!"

Nathan felt a wave of relief wash over when the representative's grip loosened for a moment. Through blurry tears, he saw why. His clothes were completely soaked by the same iced coffee that'd been ordered, now clutched in a familiar raven-haired figure's hand.

"Whoops. Sorry, my hand must have slipped. Well then, if you would excuse us, I already booked my friend for the day."

With that, Adrienne immediately pulled Nathan from his seat and ran out, bringing the dishevelled boy with her.



"Are we far enough?"

Not a lot of people were in the park in the evening. It wasn't a popular place to visit in the first place but it was enough. Nathan and Adrianne took a break on the first bench they came upon, gasping for air.

"How did you know?"

"I know a lot of things Nate. You call it a gut feeling, I say something more. You never questioned it before and you shouldn't start now."

Nathan raised an eyebrow. "First time I heard any ounce of seriousness in your voice."

"Well, we ran a marathon and I had to pull you along. I feel like it's an excusable circumstance."

"True."

"How's the ankle?"

"Throbbing, kind of pushed it too far but... Thanks, Ad."

The edges of her lips curled into a soft smile, "No problem." She paused for a moment before deciding to ask the obvious.

"Hey, Nate? Who was that psycho?"

"Someone who tried to steal my watch 'under the law'," he said using his fingers to emphasise the point.

"You might wanna tell Ryan about this."

"I-"

Nathan took a while to think about this. Their parents were lawyers, they would know what to do. Ryan as well, he did tell him to rely on him more.

"I'll do it at dinner."

"Good. You shouldn't have to shoulder everything alone, I know how that feels firsthand," she said, rubbing her eyes.

"You ok?"

"Yeah, might be dust or something," she brushed it off. The red stains smudged on her knuckles and cheeks told another tale, however.

"Ad?"

"You're... overreacting," she swiftly replied, the trembling in her voice working against her. She reached out to hold Nathan on his shoulder, only to find her fingers phasing through, small sparks of pink and cyan dancing around.

His eyes met hers, filled with fear. "Adrianne, what's happening?"

She only returned it with a wavering smile.

"Fuck."



**Yeah, I have nothing to say. I really thought there was more time.**

## did you lie? (Chapter 6)

Nathan immediately reached for his pocket, ready to call an ambulance when Adrienne swatted at his hand.

"Don't-"

"There's blood! You're bleeding! And, and, your hand... What the hell is going on with that?!"

"It happens, ok? It's...normal."

"Why would it be normal?! Your hand is becoming translucent! I-"

"Nate, buddy. You mind making a scene in a place where there aren't people watching?" she muttered, pointing at an alleyway.

"Huh? I..." he sputtered before letting out a sigh, "sure, let me just..."

Nathan slung Adrienne's arm around his shoulder and brought her over, dragging her along as fast as he could.

"You look like-"

"Hell? I just came back."

"How are you making a joke in this situation?"

"What can I say? I'm just that kind of person."

Nathan gently let Adrienne lean back against the alley wall and ruffled his own hair.

"Ad, bud, stay with me here, ok?"

"Hey, Nate?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm sorry."

"Why are you sorry? Ad, you're clearly not ok, I think you should-"

"No, Nate. I'm really sorry for this."

Before Nathan could even react properly to her statement, she lunged at him and held tight to his wrist.

"Ad, wha-"

One hand on his wrist, she used the other to rip the cover off his watch and immediately twisted the two triangles on the cover to resemble the shape of an hourglass.

"Ad!"

She then let go of Nathan and held the cover close to her chest, muttering to it as though possessed. Now, Nathan had never been a perceptive person, but he would have known if Adrienne had worn a pendant all along; or the fact that it could glow purple.

Adrianne then slammed the cover onto the wall and it stuck there, emitting swirls of teal light.

"Sorry, you're my last hope right now. I didn't want to drag you into this."

Without any further warnings, Adrianne immediately pulled Nathan in the general direction of where the cover was.

He closed his eyes, thinking it was just some sort of light show and immediately got himself ready to feel the hard embrace of the wall.

*But surprisingly, it never came.*



*Adrianne didn't appreciate her job, not one bit. Most would see it as a blessing but to her and her deceased mentor, it was a curse. Their views were ridiculed of course but most looked up to her mentor. He was one of the oldest ones there before he decided to pass the mantle onto her.*

*A horrible decision, really.*

*There was also the fact that you were not told anything regarding the job beforehand. Her mentor tried his best and she knew that... She hated how their time was cut short. She was still a child, she didn't know the consequences of every action, how severe the rules were and how they were loopholes that no one knew of because the rules were never written down in the first place. Everyone needed to know, everyone needed to remember something that didn't physically exist.*

*Pity.*

*She remembered feeling off in the moment. The buzzing in her head was only getting louder bit by bit. She tried brushing it off to the heavy rain in the morning but it kept coming back. She should have been more careful.*



*"You knew. You knew all along what had happened in the past, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Who- No; What are you?"*

*"I couldn't help you. I'm not allowed to, [REDACTED]."*

*"No, get away from me! You could have prevented everything, you could have  
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Why-"*

*"[REDACTED], calm down."*

*Her arm outstretched towards his with her walking closer but he shoved her back on instinct.*

*"Don't touch that!"*

*He hadn't heard her scream like that before. He looked back at-*



*No.*

*No. No. No. No.*

*This was bad, even Adrienne knew so from the mere few paragraphs she read. And even so, she couldn't do anything. The story was set in stone.*

*"I need to get some fresh air," she muttered, grabbing her hoodie and wallet.*

*She needed to relax. She needed to forget what she read.*

*"Nate's at the cafe. I should surprise him!"*

*Memories of her trip there were...muffled. She didn't remember how long the bike ride was or the road she took to get there but she was there, seething with anger when she grabbed the glass of coffee and dumped it onto the scumbag wearing a suit and tie.*

*"Whoops," she sneered, her usual smirk ever so plastered on her face.*

*In the very next moment she knew, she was already pulling Nathan away, desperate to escape from the hellhole.*

*"Are we far enough?"*

*She was wheezing the air out of her lungs. Sure, she rode her bike daily but it didn't mean she was an athletic person. Nathan on the other hand was not supposed to run in his condition.*

*"How's the ankle?"*

*"Throbbing, kind of pushed it too far but... Thanks, Ad."*

*"No problem."*

*It was then at that point of time, her migraine started kicking in. She sunk into the park bench, letting her head rest on the top rail. The buzzing in her head was at its crescendo. It then spread, from her head to her limbs. She tried brushing off the*



*shaking and numbness in her fingertips to the situation finally sinking in and the itchiness in her eyes to pollen or dust but it was worse than she assumed.*

*They bled.*

*She didn't want to look at him, wanting to hide it but he saw. So she did what she did best, lie.*

*Lie that she was ok, that it was nothing to worry about.*

*It was when she tried to pat his shoulder that the earlier numbness had bared its fangs. She was disappearing.*

*"Fuck."*

*She knew what was happening and yet she kept carrying on in denial. By the time she noticed small shades of pink and blue forming on her palm, she should have known that it was only a matter of time.*

*There was never enough of it.*

*There was something terribly wrong happening and Adrienne knew it. The fact that her existence was physically 'glitching' alone should be horrifying. Things needed to be fixed but she wouldn't be around long to do so.*

*"Sorry, you're my last hope right now. I didn't want to drag you into this."*

*Adrienne didn't think she could forget Nathan's expression when she said that. A myriad of shock, betrayal and fear and she couldn't blame him. He didn't have to suffer her mistakes.*

*She didn't have a choice.*



**No one really does.**

