

The morning broke grey and misty over the city. Rin hadn't slept a wink. Her thoughts wouldn't be still, and there were too many of them. Uma betrayed her, Takara promised revenge, and she didn't know why she was in the prison. Besides rebelling against the government, that is.

And she didn't even have her father's cross. She wanted it.

That's childish, she thought, rubbing her hands over her face. *It's like having a baby blanket or a stuffed animal. It's just a thing.* Yet she couldn't explain the comfort it gave her whenever she touched it.

Jesus. The cross reminded her of Him too. Sometimes, anyway. It was probably because of the stories her parents told her when she was little. Those memories were beginning to fade.

The door close to her cell in the hall screeched open. Rin stood and rubbed her clammy hands on her prison pants. *Wait, is that.....?*

Oarson slipped through the door. He glanced back where he came before locking it again. His eyes darted all around as he walked slowly to her cell. "You're Rin Adachi, right?"

She nodded.

He unlocked the cell door and stepped in. "I'm Jax Oarson. I have....." He raked a hand through his hair. "Man, I shouldn't be doing this."

“Doing what?” Rin crossed her arms. She was getting sick and tired of talking to soldiers.

But, she remembered, this one saved the lives of the Outcasts. At least, he didn’t kill them when he had the chance.

He stepped closer and bent down to pull off his right boot. She squinted her eyes at him. He pulled out a small object and held it out, flat in his palm. “I believe this belongs to you.”

Rin’s breath stopped and her hand reached out. “It’s my.....how did you.....why?” She looked down at the dark wood, sliding her finger across it and loving the familiar little chinks and dents in it.

“I had to give it back. I saw how much it meant to you.”

She looked up. “I didn’t think government soldiers gave stuff back.” She knew she should be thanking him instead of snapping with attitude.

His gaze fell to the floor. “They don’t.” He glanced up and rubbed the back of his neck. “I guess that cross of yours reminded me a bit of my past.”

Rin thought he was going to go into detail about it, but there was a faint noise at the other end of the hall and he quickly turned toward the door. Rin followed a couple steps. “Thank you. This cross does mean a lot to me.”

He grinned and locked the cell behind him before disappearing through the hall door.

Rin took another swing with the sledge hammer at the wall. The other prisoners with her were doing the same, but some were carting away the crumbles. She rested the end of the hammer on the ground to wipe sweat from her neck and glance at a soldier nearby, watching them.

“Keep working,” he ordered. She bent to her work again. How convenient that Takara had prisoners to tear down and rebuild the wall around her skyscraper. Only this time, she wanted it bigger.

The hammer slipped out of the hands of the man next to her. He stumbled to his knees and his white hair flopped over his face. Rin dropped her tool to help up his frail frame. “Keep going,” she whispered.

He managed to get to his feet before the soldier noticed. “I’m alright, dear,” he said with a weak smile. He patted her hand. Once she let go of him, he turned back to his work, softly humming.

Shaking her head, Rin bent to pick up the tool. A sharp pain shot through her foot as the cross stabbed into it. It seemed a good idea to hide the cross in her boot, like Jax had, but now she wasn’t so sure.

She tried to concentrate on other things to get her mind off the pain in her foot and the back-breaking work. At least the sun wasn’t out, squeezing sweat out of them. But the air was still unusually warm for an autumn morning in Chicago.

The old man started chanting.

Rin sneaked a glance at the nearest guard. He should be quiet if he didn’t want to draw any attention. She tapped his shoulder and whispered, “Mister, I wouldn’t do that if I were you. They could--”

““The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want....”” He continued, despite Rin’s warning. She tapped his shoulder again, but he just closed his eyes and continued to mumble the verses.

Rin tensed. The guard was looking their way. She turned away; she had no intention of getting in trouble for someone else's mistake.

The guard strode over, wielding a thick baton. "You, there! Be quiet!"

Rin glued her eyes to the wall and her hands gripped the handle of the hammer. *Just be quiet. You won't get into trouble if you just be quiet.* If the soldier hit that man, bones would break.

The soldiers reached them. "I said be quiet!"

"...He guides me along the right paths for His name's sake...."

"Quit yapping, old man!"

The stooped body turned to the soldier and he lifted his face to him. "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me."

Rin gripped the handle harder and it cut into her palms. That was enough for the soldier. He lifted the baton, prepared to strike. He eyes glared crazily at the hunched form, though he looked into his eyes without fear.

Just before the weapon came bearing down, Rin threw the hammer away and leapt in front of the prisoner. "Stop!"

"Move out of the way," the soldier commanded. "He disobeyed and he deserves punishment."

Rin spread her arms out. She hoped he didn't see her trembling. Nothing was stopping him from beating through her to the man behind her. She clenched her hands into fists so her fingers would stop shaking.

"I said move!"

She squeezed her eyes shut and braced. "No."

He lifted the baton higher, like a cobra ready to strike. Rin pictured fangs dripping with venom, but she could do nothing. She made a choice. She would stick by it.

The weapon began its arc down on her. Until.....

Another prisoner lunged into the soldier, colliding with him. They went tumbling and wrestling around the ground. The baton fell forgotten in the rubble.

The two continued to fight, but the prisoner was losing. The soldier was bigger, stronger.....and better fed. Rin was frozen, her arms still held out. *Move! You have to help him.*

Five more prisoners rushed from their positions down the wall and contributed to the scuffle. The soldier managed to break free. He stepped back a few paces and breathed hard. The six prisoners stood ready for more.

The soldier waved his hand at them. “Ah, you scum aren’t worth the effort.” Keeping a suspicious eye on them, he picked up the baton and began walking to the soldiers’ base, in the long building. New guards were heading their way to relive the ones now guarding anyway.

Rin’s arms went limp and slapped her sides. She heaved in hoarse breaths and swallowed. Her throat felt scratchy.

She turned to the man, the one she’d protected. “Are you okay?”

He smiled, and it reached all the way to his eyes. He chuckled. “Why, of course I’m alright, dear.” Rin didn’t know what he was so happy about.

Rin felt like collapsing. “Well, that was intense.”

“Yes, but at least you weren’t hurt. I knew you wouldn’t be....”

She looked at him. “How?”

He patted her head like she was a child. "I prayed for you. God hasn't failed me yet." He turned, picked up his hammer, and got to work.

"I prayed for you. God hasn't failed me yet." Rin played the words in her head once more as she sat in her cell. Sleep wasn't coming. She sat on her cot and leaned her elbows on her knees, fingering the small cross. How could he say that God hasn't failed him yet, when he's in the Tower's prison? She didn't get it.

She faintly heard the man's humming, though he was several cells away.

He seemed so happy, so secure, despite his situation.

Rin wished she could feel that way.

Jax balanced his rifle against his shoulder as he paced up and down the hallway. His eyes stared rigidly at the door that led to the cells. Rin was in there.

And that cross.

He looked back down the hall to make sure no one was coming. Propping his gun against the wall, he slipped an old photo from his pocket. It was peeling badly and had white creases and bends. He held it close to his eyes to see the tiny picture. His parents. He missed them. He never should've left.

His life didn't turn out the way he wanted it to; at all. He wondered if his parents would accept him back. Somehow, he doubted it. Not after what he did.

But the ache of homesickness was heavy on his heart.

At mealtime the next day, Rin was summoned to appear before Takara. Though she was hungry, she welcomed the interruption from having to eat the slop the prisoners were served. She wasn't even sure what it was.

Four soldiers escorted her to the top floor of the skyscraper, to Takara's office. As the elevator rose, her stomach began to twist. What did Takara want her for?

They reached the floor, exited the elevator, and soon were standing in front of the large double-door entrance to Takara's office. One guard knocked on the smooth surface. A thin nervous girl no older than twenty-two opened the door. She ducked her head and shifted her glasses as the soldiers swept passed with their charge.

The room was very large, and the front wall was covered floor to ceiling with windows. Takara had a perfect view of the city. Near this wall was her long desk and a tall leather chair. Takara sat in this, her elbows leaned on the desk, her fingers steepled in front of her straight nose. One side of her mouth lifted in a grin.

Rin was brought in front of Takara, and the soldiers lined up behind her. Takara slowly stood and opened her mouth to speak. Before she was cut off.

"What do you want?" Rin said, stuffing her hands into her pockets. But then she remembered; the prison uniform pants didn't have any. Embarrassing.

Takara released a breath through her nose as she came around the desk to stand in front of Rin. Takara crossed her arms. So did Rin.

"You have spunk," Takara stated. "That's.....good."

Rin narrowed her eyes. *What is she trying to do?* "What do you want from me?"

Takara leaned against the desk. She picked up a shiny pen and let her fingers play with it. “Do you want to know more about your parents, Rin? What they were really like?”

“I know enough.”

“Oh, please. You mean you know what that rebel Hamasaki told. He doesn’t know everything, you know.”

“He knows about my parents. And what he knows, he told me.”

Takara held up a finger. “Oh, but like I said, he doesn’t know *everything*.”

Rin swallowed. She was right. Taro didn’t know *everything* about her parents. She hoped he knew all the important things.

Takara saw her thinking. She went back around her desk to sit. “I see you wear your mother’s wedding ring.” She gestured to it.

Rin fingered the smooth surface and nodded.

“Do you know what it says on the inside?”

With Him all things are possible. She nodded again.

“Do you believe in what it says?”

Rin bit the inside of her cheek and looked at her shoes. Did she? It was what her parents believed, so why shouldn’t she? But she couldn’t deny the empty feeling when she heard that phrase, because she didn’t know if she believed it or not.

Takara didn’t wait. “Your parents did. Wholeheartedly.” She leaned forward. “That was their mistake.”

Rin looked up.

Takara came around the desk again and encircled Rin's arm with her bony hand. "You see, Rin Adachi, you belong to *me*."

"No," Rin protested as she pulled away. "What do you mean? People can't *own* other people."

"Is that so? Well, maybe your parents thought the same way because they were so careless about what happened to you." Takara glanced passed Rin at the soldiers. "Leave us."

They hesitated. "But..."

"Leave." They did.

Takara rolled a comfy armchair from across the room to Rin. "Take a seat."

Cautiously, Rin sat, squeezing her handcuffed wrists between her knees.

Takara sat on the desk. "You want to know more about your parents, don't you?"

Rin tried to keep her breaths even. She didn't want anything from this woman, even information. Taro told her everything already, didn't he? But, she had a feeling there was more. She slowly nodded.

"I'm sure you know how your parents were arrested, don't you? They broke the law, publicly speaking about their Christian faith. Funny thing is, being arrested didn't seem to upset them much." Takara poured herself a glass of water from a stainless steel pitcher and sipped it. "So, I had to punish them a different way." Takara raised an eyebrow at Rin. She looked at the president sideways. Was she supposed to guess her meaning?

Takara leaned in close. Rin tried not to let her deeply dark eyes make her shudder. "That punishment was you."

Rin recoiled. Puzzle pieces clicked together in her mind. Why the government was always after her. Why her parents weren't there. She tried to swallow, but her muscles only tensed. Cold

sweat broke out on her face and her hands began to tremble. “You.....I was.....taken away from them?”

Takara grinned and grunted as she stood. She took several steps toward the door and called the soldiers back in. “Take her to a lab cell.”