

In a study room, a hard-cover leather book fell to the floor with a clatter. If Anne wasn't looking through her mother's diaries, she wouldn't know her mother was actually alive.

Literally. Alive.

When her mother had been reported 'missing' for more than a decade.

Missing. Abandoned her child at two years old, in the care of a stranger.

Missing. Disappeared into a mirage of hope and hired dreams.

Missing. *Gone without a clue.*

Oh, that was enough to make Anne hate her.

But she was 'gone', not 'missin'. That made no sense. Her diary had warned that the experiment might result in disappearance, yes.

But after 'The Experiment Starts', the next line—'**Successful**' leered at her.

Which meant she came back, then left again—and when she left, *when she left*, she didn't take Anne.

Was mother really so obsessed with her experiments?

When she left...

The only regret of Anne's life would be that two years old was too young for her to understand. If she had, her mother wouldn't have vanished. She wouldn't have let her. Her parents could have taken her, but *no*. The care of a stranger.

Marie had been kind but stern. "As soon as you can fend for yourself," she had said, "you must leave."

Marie was right. There was no place for weakness in this society of Utopian Perfection. Weakness was love. Love spurned hate. Hate was unacceptable. Hate was intolerable, because hate made humans turn against each other. Kindness was allowed, but never love. Orphans weren't supposed to exist. Obliteration, really, was the kindest choice.

The world had not been kind to Anne Campbell.

She had lived through years of suffering, years of pain, unforgivable and unforgettable. Her presence was hidden, which was all Marie could do. The rest was up to herself. She needed to reach her parents.

Utopia Perfecto kept losses programmed, 'deaths' recorded. Whilst Anne, unrecorded, could slip away, the Governor knew about her parents.

Time was of the essence.

From scraps of information and the diaries, she had inferred that her parents were working on twisting within the fourth dimension. Translated via her own intellect, her parents had travelled in time, a *mistake* certainly, and gone back.

Anne Campbell was a *mistake*.

To look at the bright side of things, she would be able to dislodge their work, reversing everything that had happened since the start, including but not limited to herself. If it worked, Anne wouldn't have to live with the searing pain anymore.

Sand was falling with time. Governor had spies, such as Marie. Loyal...or bribed.

Utopia Perfecto wasn't as flawless as the Governor tried to portray.

Dislodging the machine wasn't hard, and neither was avoiding Marie. The hard part was coping with the fact that she'd never get to see her *creators*.

It hurt, more than Anne wanted to admit.

Here in Utopia Perfecto, pain was weakness, waiting to be exploited. Pain was the cause of violence. Pain could not be tolerated.

Pain is weakness...pain is the cause of violence...hence, only once pain is banished, can peace blossom.

I hate them. I hate them for creating me, crafting me, from metal and wire, from fused iron and melted copper—I despise myself.

For being.

I cannot feel. I cannot—I should not.

Clunk. Clink.

The first thing she knew, her consciousness jerked into place—nothing—

A sickly sweet croon filled her starving soul, laced with steel and syrup. “Oh, there you are, darling daughter. Look, your perfect little wires—I just hope you’ll be able to let me travel in time flawlessly!”