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For Mae, my very own little shadow

PROLOGUE

Two black doors.

I stare at them, standing alone in a dimly lit hallway. It's cold. But still, I'm sweating.

Because I've stood here before.

I'm inside BMAC – the Bureau of Movement Activity Control.

But more than that, I'm inside the Movers' Prison.

I glance at the security scanner on the wall beside the frame. It blinks green, even though no one's placed their hand on it. The doors don't care if I have special clearance today. They want me to see what they're hiding.

The doors grin wide, an unfeeling sneer as they click open and beckon me inside.

My feet carry me forwards, as if I have no control, and I step over the threshold into the amphitheatre, cold blue lights lining the aisles of folded seats that encircle a glowing convex window. The last time I was here, the theatre was empty. Now, every seat is full. I recognise the faces – they're

from my school, my apartment building, the busy city streets I walk every day. They're all here to see something. Something I have a feeling I don't want to see.

Three figures stand in the front row with their backs to me. They stare down into the window. I know them.

Mom. My little sister Maggie.

And Special Agent Beadie Hartman.

'Mom!' I call out, but she doesn't turn around. 'Mags?' They're too focused on whatever's happening beyond the glass.

Agent Hartman turns and smiles at me – a smug, triumphant smile – and beckons me to join them.

Slowly I go to stand beside Hartman, staring down into the bright white glow of the operating room below us – dark monitors, sharp metallic instruments, and the cold steel bed where Movers are made to fall asleep. The restraints are unlatched, each furious little mouth hungry for the wrists and ankles of one of us. I watched what happened when they bit down on my friend – Rani – not long ago. When those jaws clamp closed, there's no escape.

A door opens. In walks a little man carrying a tray of syringes – three syringes. Those are the needles that send Movers to sleep. Icy dread prods my temples.

Someone is getting Shelved.

Right here. Right now.

I frown at Hartman. 'Who is it?'

She doesn't look at me, but her smile grins wider in the reflection in the glass.

There's a murmur from the onlookers as another door in the operating room opens and two BMAC agents enter

the room. They're standing in front of the prisoner, so I can't quite see. But the people around me know who it is.

'Hurry along, let's get this done!' someone cries.

'Shut her down for good!' shouts someone else.

The jeers grow louder and my sister presses her palms to the glass as the prisoner is led to the bed.

The prisoner—

My heart stops beating.

The prisoner is Gabby.

BMAC has her.

The glass fogs up with my panicked breath, blurring out her face. I smear it away, and don't dare exhale again.

Gabby's arms are bound behind her so that the officers have to help her up onto the bed. She looks so small, so helpless – nothing like the way I saw her last, on the deck of the Avin Turbine with my little sister, the Movers' wind whipping through her hair and bowing to her command. She found her power then. Found her strength.

And now, BMAC is taking it from her.

She's only fourteen, like me. They can't Shelve her. The law says they can't. At least, it used to. When she lies back on the bed and the hungry restraints close around her limbs, there's a cheer from the crowd. I turn to look at them – faces twisted with a jubilant rage. Can Gabby hear them? I want to scream, to tell them all to shut up. They've done this to her for too long – hated her, chipped away at her, piece by piece, for her entire life. The unfairness of it makes my heart ache and all I want to do is make it stop. But there's no stopping this mob. They want to see this. Want to watch her sleep for ever.

Just like Hartman.

Without thinking, I hurl myself at the agent, arms throwing punch after punch for every nasty word, every unkind person, that ever hurt Gabriela Vargas. And then I'm punching for everything I've done – every time I was no better than the rest of them, every time I called her Gooba, or laughed at someone who made a joke at her expense. Because Gabby didn't deserve it, didn't deserve any of it. And someone has to pay. And that someone might as well be Hartman.

Blow after blow lands on nothing but air. Not a single strike finds its mark and all I'm managing to do is tire myself out with each missed fist. Agent Hartman doesn't even notice me. I'm no more bother to her than a fly. I'm useless. I'm nothingness. A ghost.

Hartman nods at the man with the syringes.

My eyes burn and I look to Mom – she can do something. Mom always knows what to do.

'Mom, please, make them stop this.'

But she can't hear me.

She hugs Maggie close and shields her eyes as the first needle meets Gabby's arm.

'Why are you doing this?' I scream at Hartman. But I already know the answer. I've known it since the day the lightning struck the school roof. BMAC thinks Gabby Moved her Shadow, the person in the future she shares a mental connection with.

And worse than that, they think Gabby is the reason I became a ghost.

The second syringe meets Gabby's other arm. Hot tears

spill down my face as the final syringe is picked up and held to her right temple.

This is the one that will close her eyes. The one that will set her sleeping for the rest of her life.

I press my hands to the glass and Gabby's eyes find mine. So dark they're almost black, flecks of gold glistening under the sterile lamplight.

'I'll fix this, Gabby,' I tell her, or maybe I'm telling myself because she can't hear me through the glass, can't hear over the angry voices, but I'm making the promise all the same. 'I won't let them do this to you. I'll fix it all.'

And she nods. Did she hear me?

The final needle empties, and her eyes close for what I know is for ever.

She's gone from me now.

She belongs to the Shelves.