

Breaking Out

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Chapter 1

Kel came awake suddenly, heart pounding, and hauled herself to her feet, the words that had woken her still echoing in her head.

"I just want to tell you something."

She swayed, eyes wide, shuddering.

She was alone in the room.

Of course she was alone in the room. This was her prison cell.

But those words had been as clear as a direct whisper in her ear, ripping her out of sleep just as she was about to go under—and not for the first time.

She sat, slowly lowering herself back on the bed, her legs trembling as if she'd been sick and was getting up for the first time in a couple of days.

She dug her fingers deep into her hair, and tugged.

A heavy metal door slammed, and footsteps echoed down the hall, coming towards her cell. She froze, rabbit still.

"What you doing tonight?" Harvey's voice echoed down the passage. Kel rose and walked to the door, pressed herself against it to hear better.

"Party. You?" Morris always spoke softly, and Kel just made it out.

"Yeah, same. Halloween always cracks me up." Harvey chuckled, clinking the coins in his pocket. They were almost level with her door, but Kel stayed where she was, listening, even though they would probably open up. Check on her.

She was fast enough to be at her desk with a book if they did. Faster than they knew.

Morris made a sound in the back of his throat. "Seeing all those people in fancy dress... They'd mess their pants if they knew how real the monsters are."

They were both silent a moment, as if contemplating it themselves.

She strained to hear if they were going to keep walking, and then realized they'd been quiet too long.

She launched herself across the room, contorting her body as she flew so she landed sitting down on the wide window sill, her back against one side of the wall, her feet propped against the other. She lifted the book off her desk five meters away, opening it to the bookmark as it sailed across to her into her waiting hands.

The door slammed open.

She turned her head towards it slowly, as if savoring a particularly riveting sentence, and only reluctantly giving them her attention.

"Good evening, gentlemen."

Harvey did not respond. He never did. He thought it intimidated her, but in truth, she wasn't that scared of him.

Morris, now. He made her nervous.

The doc was in his own league.

"Afternoon, you mean." Morris stepped in behind Harvey. Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

Kel gave both their watches a gentle nudge forward. "Evening, afternoon, whatever."

Harvey looked down at his wrist and his eyes widened. "Shit. It's later than I thought."

Morris looked at his own watch. Looked up at her.

Kel stared innocently back. She'd never changed their watch times before. Morris might suspect, but he had nothing to go on, yet.

Hopefully when he worked out what she'd done, it would be too much bother to come back and call her on it.

Harvey made a quick surveillance of her room, while Morris kept his gaze on her. It was what they always did. One to look around, one to make sure she didn't try any funny business. Only, Morris wanted her to try some funny business. He probably dreamed about it.

As always, she watched the way he held his syringe gun, his finger gliding up and down the smooth silver casing. She felt his hunger to use it like a palpable odor rising off his skin, hot and sour.

He noticed her looking and gave her a smile that dropped an icy rock into the pit of her stomach.

Harvey had finished up and his hand was on the door when the shouting started.

A fight in the corridor, coming closer.

Kel started to rise, but one look from Morris and she sunk back down on the sill.

Harvey peered out into the passage.

They must be almost at her cell, given the volume of the screaming and struggling. Two orderlies, by the sound of things, one really angry patient.

Scratch that. There weren't any patients here. One really angry inmate.

She silently cheered him on. Hoped he was throwing as many punches as he was getting.

And then the fight was suddenly in her room.

Harvey leaped back as a writhing mass of male fell through her door. It was Evans and Longmore, two of her least-favorite, and someone she'd never seen before.

Well, duh.

Of course she hadn't seen him before. She hadn't seen anyone. Anyone like her, that is.

This one was big. Tall. His face twisted with effort as he fought the two orderlies, the muscles in his arms bunching as he wrestled and punched.

To give him a hand, Kel spun the heavy melamine cup off her washbasin and slammed it into Longmore's head. She kept most of her focus on Morris as she did it, but he didn't notice in the chaos.

Really, she should give Doc Greenway more credit. He might be the devil incarnate, but when she'd come here, she could just about move a spoon across a table.

Without taking her eyes off Morris, hands tightly clasped in front of her, she tipped the light-weight wire wastebasket under her desk over and rolled it across the floor. When it was close enough, she jammed it over Evans' head.

The fighting man, her compatriot, looked up, straight at her, as she did it. A shock ran through her, like she'd closed her hand around a live wire. And for a moment, she could hear nothing.

His eyes were very dark, but blue, she thought, not brown.

Longmore punched him in the face, breaking the connection, and Kel's head jerked up, heart hammering at the thought of losing track of Morris for even one second.

But it was okay.

He'd actually turned away from her, syringe gun at the ready, trying to find a gap. He was eager as a dog at a rabbit hole.

Kel wondered what the dose in that thing was. More than was needed to take one man down, she'd guess.

Morris lunged.

She didn't know if she'd live to regret it, but Kel jinked the gun just to the right as he did, and instead of getting her fighting man in the face, he caught Evans in the arm.

"Shit." Morris pulled back, panicked, as Evans went limp. Biting her lip, Kel waited for his arm to drop to his side, nice and loose, his finger still on the trigger, and then jinked it again. Straight into his leg.

"Wha..." Morris spun to her, eyes wide, the rage and hatred in them making her press back against the window. He took one step, and fell. Like a tree going down.

His head made a nice sharp crack as it hit the leg of her desk and she winced, despite herself.

Harvey was still by the door, his focus completely on the fight, his one leg back a bit, as if looking for the opportunity to put the boot in.

And the noise had died down to almost nothing, with Evans and Morris out of the game. Longmore and her fighter were grunting and swearing as they grappled and twisted on her floor.

What was good was no one seemed to have radioed it in yet. They liked a bit of physical 'correction' now and again, did the lads.

Just to make sure, Kel slid all their radio buttons to off.

She had no objects handy that would make a significant dent in Harvey's skull. There was still the cup, and at the thought of it, she lifted it up and smacked Longmore in the head with it again. But it was just nuisance value.

Everything else was bolted down or too light.

And then suddenly, the game changed.

Longmore slumped to the ground. Still and limp as Evans. And her comrade in arms rolled to his feet, staggering a little when he got upright.

He looked like he was going to go down the same way as Morris had, and at last, Kel saw the syringe gun sticking out of his leg. Longmore must have got it in seconds before he had his lights punched out. Probably how her tall, blue-eyed friend had gotten the final jump on him.

He reached down and yanked the syringe out, turning to look at her, just as Morris had. But his eyes were very different. Just as full of emotion, but this one, she couldn't read.

He threw the gun at Harvey, as if he knew what she could do, and obligingly, she turned it, sharp end pointing the right way, and drove it straight into Harvey's neck. She made the trigger depress, and Harvey simply fell sideways and rolled forward a little, so he was more or less face down.

Kel jumped down off the sill, scrambling back a little as her fighter lurched towards her.

He looked like he wanted to say something, but he was going down, and they both knew it. Just as he toppled, Kel created a safety net, caught him in mid-air, and using his own momentum, propelled him onto her bed.

He hit it hard and bounced.

And suddenly, she was in complete silence.

With five unconscious men around her.

* * * * *

Nate woke up to swearing.

He cracked open his eyes and saw the woman who had helped him earlier struggling to cuff the orderlies in a complicated weave of arms and legs.

He stared, fascinated.

She seemed to be braiding their arms and legs through each other, cuffing a wrist to an ankle, to another wrist. Four syringe guns sat neatly to one side.

She worked with a focused intensity that was a little frightening, and he made a mental note never to piss her off.

It came to him that he was lying on her bed, and he wondered how that had happened, when he knew he'd gone down on the other side of the room.

Not that the room was that big, but it would have been impossible for her to have lifted him. She stood about 5'6" to his 6'2" and he outweighed her significantly.

Finished at last, she took a deep breath and stepped back to admire her handiwork, her hands on her hips, her dark ponytail swinging. "Get out of *that*, you assholes."

She was so slender, so graceful, even in the standard green scrubs and white t-shirt they all wore. She looked breakable.

He'd never seen her before, and he thought he'd seen most of the inmates. Maybe she was new, but that didn't make sense. Why would they bring in someone new? Things were going to hell.

"Now let's make sure you can't scream for help." Her voice was quiet, but steely. He reassessed his thought that they would break her.

Man, he really needed to make sure he never pissed this woman off.

She turned suddenly to the bed, her gaze going to the sheets folded at the foot of it, but went very still when she saw he was watching her.

She took a step back, and the instinctive quality to the movement was like a hard, sharp punch to his chest. The only way she knew to be safe was to be out of reach. In here, it was the only sane conclusion.

"How long have you been awake? The others are still out cold." Her gaze never left his face and he wondered what was going on behind those pale blue eyes.

"A couple of minutes." His voice was scratchy. Rough. He cleared his throat. "Longmore didn't get the chance to pull the trigger. I only got a small dose." He waited a beat. "How'd you get me on the bed?"

She frowned, dismissing the question with a wave of her hand. "Doesn't matter. You're just lucky I have good aim."

"Oh, I've been lucky since the moment I fell into your cell."

He could tell she didn't know what to make of that, but he meant it. Things had been going nowhere until that jackass of an orderly stuck his head out of her room to rubberneck the fight moving towards him.

Nate had thrown himself at that open door with everything in him. If it delayed reaching the steel and glass door at the end of the corridor for even one minute, it was worth it.

It had been worth a lot more than that.

"My name's Nate." He wondered when her need to get the sheet would overcome her reluctance to get close.

"Kel." She finally moved closer, caught hold of a sheet and pulled it off the bed. Started ripping it into strips.

"Why has no one else come?" Nate forced himself to sit up, swinging his legs down. He propped his elbows on his thighs and put his head in his hands. He could feel he was healing already, the bruises and cuts on his face smoothing out, closing up. Longmore had cracked his cheekbone, and the tight, hot sensation he always got with a bone heal throbbed on the left side of his face.

"It's the weekend. I'm guessing these four were the only ones on duty, except maybe for someone up at admin. But they never called this in while it was happening. I switched off their radios, just in case, but even when Harvey had a couple of seconds at the end there, he didn't so much as try to reach for his. So maybe there is no one in admin." She rolled a piece of sheet into a ball and stuffed it into Harvey's mouth as she spoke, then wound a strip across his mouth and tied it behind his head.

"You think we've got them all? Right here?" Nate lifted his head, and for a moment they stared straight into each other's eyes. An uncomfortable pounding started in his chest, and it had nothing to do with the situation they were in. He dragged his gaze away. "Longmore and Evans were taking me out. There must be someone waiting for me to arrive somewhere."

"Where were they taking you?" She looked up from tying a strip around Longmore's mouth, and he suddenly realized he'd only punched Longmore's lights out, the orderly wasn't under with a shot from the syringe gun.

"Get back."

She flinched at his hard, flat command, but did not move. She looked up at him. Steady and pissed off.

"I only punched him, he isn't under—"

"Yes, he is." She went back to securing her knot. "I gave him a shot straight after you hit the deck." She didn't look at him, just rose up to fix the last gag, this time on Morris. She seemed reluctant to touch the stocky orderly.

Nate blew out a breath. Tried to think. Tried to get his mind in the game. "I don't know where they were taking me. I thought they were delivering me to some transportation waiting at the entrance."

"Well, some transportation sounds just what we need, right now." Her hand trembled a little as she bent over Morris. She stared down at him, then she stood and let go of the sheet strip. It scrunched into a ball in midair, and an unseen force pushed down Morris' jaw so it could fit inside. A strip of cloth wrapped around his face and his head lifted up, and at last she bent down and tied the knot, as if not trusting her power to tie it hard enough.

“You don’t like Morris.” The orderly was not someone he came into contact with often, but Nate knew instinctively he enjoyed his job way too much.

She didn’t answer, but he caught the quick flick of a look she sent him.

“What did he do?” He had a sudden urge to give Morris a gook kick in the nuts.

She shook her head. “Nothing.” Then she stepped away from the entangled men and looked directly at him. “It’s what he plans to do that worries me.” She shivered, a full tremor, from neck to lower back. “If he gets his hands on me after this,” she waved at the trussed heap, “I’ll wish I was dead.”

“He isn’t going to get his hands on you.”

She gave him a look of such deep pity, it took his breath away. Man, he was getting in way over his head here.

“To get back to our situation.” Nate stood, and was happy the world didn’t tilt. He really did only get the smallest dose of the drug. “I need to go back into my section.”

Her mouth fell open. “Go back?”

“Left someone behind.” It had been why he’d fought the orderlies in the first place. Thanks to Giles, he knew they were planning to ship them out, but he’d thought it would be together. Giles would not last long on his own, the shape he was in now.

“You know someone else here?” She sank down onto the window sill, where she’d been when he first saw her, her eyes wide with surprise.

“Yeah.” What was it about this woman? She was breaking his heart.

“I’ve been here nearly three years,” she whispered. “And you’re the first person who wasn’t a doctor or an orderly that I’ve met.”

And then he knew. This was HER. Good old Doc Greenway’s secret weapon. “We have to go,” he said, his eyes moving from her to the door.

If she was who he thought she was, they would be coming any second now.

Chapter 2

She hated they were going deeper into the facility, rather than out, but she also could not bear the thought of leaving others behind. Others just like her.

As she ran, one or two steps behind Nate, she noticed a camera up ahead and she blasted out a pulse of power. Not quite the top of what she was capable of, she sensed, but close to it.

Ahead and from behind them, she heard pops in quick succession, camera lenses blowing out.

She felt the quick, hard tug as some of her energy drained.

“What the hell?” Nate stopped short so fast, Kel ran straight into the back of him. “What was that?”

“Just me.” She stepped back, but he grabbed her arms, jerked her closer.

“That was one creepy sensation.”

She shrugged. Shook his hands loose. “Sorry.”

He stared at her, then blew out his breath. “Well, warn me next time, will you?”

She nodded, but he didn't wait for her to respond, he was off down the corridor again.

She did not follow him, and after a few steps he sensed it and turned.

"What?"

"Who is Giles? Who are *you*, for that matter?"

He shifted from foot to foot with impatience, and she suddenly realized he didn't have a scratch on his face. He'd had a swollen cheek, bruises and cuts from his fight with Evans and Longmore, but now, his skin was smooth. He looked too good for a man who'd recently been beaten up.

"Look, ma'am—Kel—can I tell you as we go? They're not going to let you go without a fight, so we need to get moving." Again, he didn't wait for her answer, he turned and ran, and she had no option but to follow.

"Well?" She panted a little as she asked the question, but she was keeping up.

"What do you want to know?" They reached the door through to the testing rooms, and Nate punched in a code on the keypad.

She'd been about to blow the door, and had to pull her power back. A strange feeling, like the way her stomach dropped and then caught up again on a rollercoaster.

He shot her a look, and she realized he'd felt it.

"Sorry." She put her hands up. "I had no idea you knew the access codes."

"Giles gave them to me."

"Oh. And how does Giles know them?"

The doors opened with a swoosh, and they stepped through into the main room. She smelt the familiar lavender air freshener with a caustic undertone of disinfectant. It was always deserted when Kel was brought here. It was deserted now. But there was an empty feel about it. No one waited behind one of the doors of the test rooms this evening.

"Giles reads minds." He had already skirted the curved reception desk in the center of the foyer.

"And what do you do?" She guessed, but was curious to hear what he said.

"I heal."

They'd reached the far side of the room, and the second set of doors. Kel waited for him to tap in the code, peering through the glass to see if there was anyone on the other side.

It was clear.

And it was unnerving. Could they really be alone? After all the years she'd plotted her escape, tried to work out which way to go, how many she would have to take out to do it, would it be as easy as simply walking out?

No way.

"*I just want to tell you something.*"

She flinched as the sentence popped up in her mind. Reverberated like some kind of urgent warning. This was new. Before, it had always been just before she fell asleep. But right now, she was as wide awake as she had ever been.

She realized Nate was looking at her, a frown on his face, and she lifted her shoulders, loosened them like a boxer. "Can you heal others, or just yourself?"

"Others, too. That's why I knew so many of the inmates."

Ah. Well, how convenient for Doc Greenway. No embarrassing calls to the hospital. Just call in Nate if the orderlies went too far, or someone got sick.

He had stopped staring at her like a lab specimen, and was jogging with a clear sense of where he was going, and she had to put on a burst of speed to keep up with him.

“You only want to get Giles out, no one else?”

He reached a t-junction in the passageways and waited for her. “You, me and Giles are the only ones left here. And I was being shipped out.”

She stumbled, but he was moving again.

There were only three of them left? How could that be? She’d never seen any others, but she’d heard them moving down the corridors, heard the murmur of voices behind other test room doors.

When had they been moved?

Nate was pounding on a metal door halfway down the corridor. “Giles.”

“Nate?” The shout from the other side of the door was muffled.

Kel walked to join him, wondering what door they had here. Hers had been an electronic lock with a bar across the front. If the bar was lifted, unless a specific code was punched in, a second steel door came down in front of the first. Not impossible for her to lift, but time consuming.

And by then, Greenway and Co. knew what she was up to. It was the best they could do to keep her in. It had worked for three years. She’d only tried to escape four times. Just thinking of the consequences she’d suffered made her stomach lurch in fear.

She took a look at Giles’s door. It wasn’t electronic. It looked like a simple deadbolt lock. No codes for Giles to read from the minds of his keepers.

She flipped it, and the door clicked open.

Nate stepped back, his gaze on her face, and something hot flashed in his eyes. Goosebumps danced along her arms.

“You’re handy to have around.” His voice sounded a little deeper than it had.

Before she could respond, the door swung fully open. Giles stood, stooped, in the doorway.

Kel forced back a gasp.

He looked around the same age as Nate, just a couple of years older than herself, but his lips were cracked and dry, his skin too pale, with dark rings under his eyes. He was wasting away. His scrubs looked as if they would fall from his hips and his t-shirt was loose on his thin frame. She could see he had once been as muscular as Nate, and even though he was clearly very ill, there was something about him that made her think they had been together in the same team. The army or the marines or something. They had a way of standing.

“You’re right.” Giles flashed her a grin. “Special forces. Glad I haven’t completely lost the look.” His voice was raspy.

She blinked. Smiled back. “Can I shield my thoughts from you?”

“Maybe. If that was you, earlier.”

“It was,” Nate interrupted, impatient.

She looked across at him, but his focus was on the way they’d come, as if he expected to see reinforcements at any moment.

“Kel, do you want to keep the syringe gun, or give it to Giles?”

They had taken the two guns with some drug still left in them. The full one off Evans, and Harvey's, which she'd partially used on Longmore. Kel shrugged. "If we're in this together, it doesn't matter which of us has them, but Giles looks like he won't be able to evade as well. You can take it." She handed it over.

"Thanks." His hands were too thin, the bones showing as he grabbed the silver weapon. He closed the door behind him, and gave Nate a sidelong look. "You do bring the nicest surprises."

Chapter 3

Giles was leaning on Kel, playing the 'poor me' sick card for all he was worth, his arm draped over her shoulders, and Nate was almost sorry he'd come back to save his ass.

As soon as the thought formed in his head, he looked up and saw Giles giving him a sly grin. It looked all the more macabre on his too-thin face.

"Will you stop it? Jeez. I want to kick your ass when you're like this."

"Kick someone else's ass instead." Giles tipped his head towards the foyer, and Nate took notice.

"Someone coming?"

"Someone coming, in a panic, because their little treasure is out of her cage."

"You said something like that before." Kel looked between them.

"Later." Nate stepped in front of her as he tucked the syringe gun into the waistband of his scrubs. He'd use his fists first. The syringe was too precious to waste until they had their victims down.

He signaled to Giles, asking how many. Two skeletal fingers were raised.

That was okay odds, with a little help from his friends.

He felt a ripple in the air, that weird, creepy spider-web feel of Kel pulsing her power out, and he shot her a look over his shoulder.

"Radios," she mouthed back at him, holding her pinkie and thumb to her ear.

Giles lifted a hand to his head, as if the sensation gave him a splitting headache. Maybe it did. He shouldn't feel glad about that, but he did.

He had no claim on Kel whatsoever, but something in him wanted to tell Giles to back the hell off.

"Um. Gotcha. But there are two guys with dart guns coming." Giles even whispered like an old man on his deathbed now, making it impossible to do anything but feel sorry for him.

He was really such an asshole.

Two men came round the corner at last, and Nate sized them up. He'd seen one of them before, Jenkins, but the other was new, or maybe he was the driver of the truck brought to ship Nate out. He was built like a tank, whoever he was.

Nate widened his stance, blocking Kel and Giles with as much of his body as he could, and then started moving forward.

But something was wrong. They weren't paying enough attention to him. Their eyes were moving beyond him, and they were scared.

“Where is she?” Jenkins lifted a dart gun, trained it at Nate’s chest, and he stopped, still making himself as large a target as possible.

Jenkins eyes kept moving, although his arm was rock steady.

Nate couldn’t help himself, he looked over his shoulder, saw Giles leaning heavily against the wall. No Kel.

Giles gave a minute lift of his eyes to the ceiling.

Forcing himself not to look up, Nate faced forward again. “Who are you talking about?” Anything to jerk them around and waste a bit of time.

“Don’t fuck with me, Halliway, or I will fuck with you. Where is Kelli Barrack?”

“Kelli? Pretty name.”

“Goddammit, tell me where she is or I’ll make sure you don’t just get shipped out, you freak, I’ll make sure you’re buried in the facility grounds. You *and* your buddy here.”

“He isn’t bluffing,” Giles said. “He really means it.”

At that moment, Kel dropped from the ceiling like a parachutist in a jump, arms and legs spread, coming down hard on the heads and shoulders of the two men. Harder than gravity alone could explain. She was putting some force behind her descent.

They went down with a shout, and Jenkins shot off a dart as he fell. Nate felt the rush of air as it flew past his arm.

Then Giles, faster than Nate would have thought, was on Tank Man, depressing the trigger, leaving Jenkins for Nate.

He pulled out his gun and gave Jenkins a nice, hefty dose, catching the orderly’s gaze as he placed the syringe against his neck. He gave him his happiest smile.

Kel was hovering just above them, still in the spread-eagled pose, ready to drop again if needed. When she saw they were done, she lowered herself gracefully, touching down beside him. He could see the strain on her face. Keeping herself suspended had cost her.

The shock of what she’d done—the control and power he sensed coming off her—almost canceled out his temper. Almost. He counted back from ten. She’d gone off and made her own plan. Without a word. Even if it had worked, he couldn’t protect people if they didn’t stay put.

“Spur of the moment thing?” he asked her lightly.

She nodded. “Yep.” Then she smiled, a flash of brilliance so bright it blinded him, made him blink.

His little lecture died on his tongue and slunk away.

“They really have been bastards to you, haven’t they?” Giles was still crouched beside Tank Man, but he rose to his feet, holding the wall for support.

Kel had gone still, like she was listening to something in her head—just like she’d done earlier, in the lobby. Her teeth gripped her lower lip so hard Nate wondered if she would break the skin.

She didn’t answer.

“That’s a pretty good block. I can’t read you at all.” Giles’ voice was soft, but it jerked Kel out of whatever thought held her. Giles looked as gray and wasted as the wall he leaned against, a concentration camp survivor.

She moved over to him, offered him her arm. There was a tenderness on her face, and Giles looked away, with no smart comeback. Then she turned back to Nate. "Now what?"

He tried to ignore Giles' hand on her delicate wrist. "We need money, and clothes. I say we take the risk those two were the last. Break into admin and see what we can find."

"They were the last two, but they called Greenway. He's probably called a couple of others who are off-duty. Jenkins was hoping to have us all back in our cages by the time the doc showed."

Okay, Giles did have his uses.

Kel bit her bottom lip again, and her gaze caught Nate's, torn. Nate knew why. Giles was in no shape to run if Greenway arrived while they were still here.

"I can run." Giles closed his eyes. "Well, lope."

"So we hurry. We do need money, and I'd like to grab my file from the doc's office." Kel tucked Giles against her side, and he towered over her like the Scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz.

"Now that's unkind, Mr. Tin Man." Giles shot him a hurt look. "You have no heart."

Kel narrowed her eyes. "Did he think you looked like the Scarecrow?"

"Didn't Dorothy like Scarecrow the best?" Giles asked her with a smile that made his dimples flash.

She laughed. The first time Nate'd heard her do it, and it cut him to the bone. It was a beautiful sound, like a bird set free. "To the Emerald City, dear Scarecrow," she said in a sing-song voice, and clicked her heels. They started down the passage, as fast as Giles could go.

Nate had no choice but to follow.

In front of him, Giles lifted a hand, as if to scratch the back of his neck, and flipped him the middle finger.

Just great.

* * * * *

Tick. Tock.

She could feel the weight of time, the press of minutes against her skin, scratchy, like rough wool.

Giles half-lay on the reception couch, his face pale and slick with perspiration from their run to the admin offices.

"I just want to tell you something."

Damn it to hell. She shook her head to clear it.

Nate stood shoulder to shoulder with her as they searched the big reception desk, and she inhaled his scent, plain soap and man, and forced herself not to shiver with anticipation.

He pulled open a drawer and lifted out a knife, one of those promotional things with a company logo on the hilt. He flipped the blade, pressed it against the skin of his thumb and slipped it into his pocket.

She tried not to stare at his hands.

How long had it been since she'd been touched by someone who didn't want to hurt her?

He brushed against her and she shifted, so torn, so compelled, she made herself crouch down and pull out the bottom drawer on her side of the desk.

"It's like imprinting," Giles said, hauling himself up into a sitting position. "If I'd been the one to find you, you'd want to do that to me, too."

His words forced a startled laugh from her, even though her cheeks burned. "You comparing me to a wild animal, Scarecrow, dear?"

Giles waggled his eyebrows at her, and she laughed again, with no reservations, until she caught Nate's gaze, and the laughter died in her throat. She stood, holding tight to the edge of the desk.

"Want to let me in on the joke?" His eyes were so hot, so intense, her mouth went dry.

"I think you can work it out." Her voice came out lower than usual, husky. She saw his nostrils flare. A hunter catching the scent.

"You might like to know Greenway just pulled up in the car park." Giles was looking toward the blind-covered window, and from a story below, she could hear the pop of gravel under tires.

They stepped away from each other, and she felt like an astronaut with her tether cut, free-wheeling out into space.

Nate pulled out a cash box and she flipped the lock without even looking at it, heading for Greenway's office. She wanted her file so bad, she could taste it.

"About a thousand dollars. Should help."

She glanced back as Nate tossed a bundle of notes in a little plastic bag at Giles.

Then she fried the electronic lock on Greenway's office and stepped inside his lair.

Chapter 4

He watched her step inside Greenway's office, ordered himself to get it together. Now.

This was not the time for gooey-eyes.

Behind him, Giles sniggered.

"I swear, Giles..." He spun, but Giles had his hands up in a gesture of truce. Then his eyes went hard.

"Hurt her, just one little prick of pain, and friend or no, I'll pound your face in."

Now, this was the old Giles. The mean, kick-ass Giles the way he'd been when they'd been brought here. It was such a shock to see it, Nate gaped. Closed his mouth. "You think I'm going to hurt her?"

Giles shook his head. "I know what you want to do to her, it couldn't be more graphic, but she's had it tough in here. Tougher than us, if you can believe that's possible, and there is still a sweetness to her. A genuine warmth. Don't do anything to extinguish that light, Nate, or I will fuck you over."

Nate opened his mouth to respond, but Giles went still, lifted a hand. "Greenway is coming here first. Wants a dart gun all his very own before he wanders the passages."

"He's alone?"

“All, all alone. Little lamb in the woods.”

They shared a smile. Two wolves, free of their cage at last. And with Kel in the picture, not just their own scores to settle.

Nate moved across to Greenway's office, saw Kel's fingers flying over the keyboard at Greenway's computer. “Giles says he's coming up. Keep going, though, we'll sort it out.”

She raised her head. “You sure?” There was a pinched look on her face. Like she thought the bastard was unbeatable.

“I'm sure.” This would be the most enjoyable thing he'd done in two years.

She gave a tight nod, turned her concentration back to the screen in front of her.

Nate heard the soft ping of the elevator reaching their floor. Giles was already pressed up against the wall beside the entrance door, Tank Man's dart gun in his hand.

Nate took the other side.

He heard the doc's tread on the thick carpet and Greenway walked into the room without hesitation, a phone to his ear. “I don't care if it's Halloween and you're going to a party. We have a situation. Hello... Larson? Larson?”

Nate shivered as Kel's power pulsed out, taking out the doc's phone. Man, that was something. He hadn't liked it, at first, but he was getting used to it.

“No one else coming?” he asked, lifting the dart gun he'd taken off Jenkins as he stepped forward. “What a pity.”

Greenway spun, his eyes so wide he looked like a cartoon character, far from the distracted, harmless scientist façade he cultivated.

“Halliway and Worthington.” He didn't sound pleased to see them.

“We're only here at your insistence, Doc.” Nate's finger tightened on the trigger. “We'd have gone back to our lives in a heartbeat. You made us stay.”

Giles moved at last, his eyes unreadable. “It's because General Whitford found out what happened to us that Greenway had to dismantle the facility. That's why he can't stand the sight of us. Whitford wanted us back, to be his little freaks, not the doc's. And when Greenway didn't want to give us up, Whitford rained a storm of unpleasantness down on him, didn't he, Doc? Got all sorts of people angry with you for taking the treasures they didn't know they had, and not sharing.”

“So that's where I was going? Back to Whitford?” Nate shook his head in disbelief.

“Not back to your old unit,” Greenway said, his teeth clenched. “To a new little group Whitford has created, just for you.”

“And Giles?”

“Too sick to go anywhere.” Greenway smiled, his lips pulling back over his teeth like a bat about to bite. “A bit embarrassing, really. His decline. But he would have joined you eventually.”

Giles lifted his dart gun, and his hand was rock-steady, but the doc ignored the weapon.

“Where is Kelli? What have you done with her?” Greenway spoke as if he'd rather be asking anything else, but couldn't help himself.

“Right here.” Kel had come out of the office, and she had a dart gun in her hand. Must be the doc's, the one he was coming to get. Her other hand clenched

around something small. Nate was willing to bet it was a flash drive. She had what she wanted from Greenway's files.

"How did this happen, Kelli? How did these thugs even get into your room?" His voice was soothing, like he was talking to a difficult child.

Her eyes were stone cold. That warmth Giles had spoken of just minutes ago was gone. "What did you do to me, you bastard?"

Greenway blinked. "All I've ever done is help you learn control, Kelli. Help you reach your potential."

"I just want to tell you something." She said the words slowly, whispered them, really, in a way that made the hairs stand up on Nate's arms, on the back of his neck. Her face was sharp with that spooky focus of hers.

What the fuck was going on here?

Greenway reared back like he'd been slapped. "You're not supposed to remember..."

She watched him as he spluttered to a halt, something a little... lost in her eyes. Then, without hesitation, without warning, she simply lifted the gun a little higher and shot Greenway in the throat. He gave a startled shout, and Nate knew Giles had flinched along with him.

Her move was that of a trained killer, even if Greenway was knocked out, not dead. As she watched Greenway hit the deck, head lolling, he did not think she would have done anything differently if she'd held a gun loaded with bullets.

She crouched next to Greenway's body, pulled his car keys from his pocket and stood. Looked between them, ice in her eyes. "Well? You coming?"

* * * * *

She'd only had trouble controlling her power four times. Twice when she was much younger, and still learning what she could do, once when her parents had died, and the fourth time, well, she shied away from that memory. The incident that had landed her here, in her own personal hell.

But as she stalked towards the stairs next to the elevator, the lights flickered on and off around her, and she could hear a repetitive ping ping ping as the elevator doors slammed opened and closed like a three year-old was manning the controls.

And it was worse than that. When she'd shot Greenway, it had felt as if another hand was lifting the gun. Not her.

She realized her feet were no longer touching the ground. She was walking on air, and not in a good way. She forced herself down. No need to expend unnecessary energy.

She wished she could have killed Greenway. He'd never stop hunting her. She should go back and break his neck, or smother him. She should, but she couldn't. The... other her who had somehow taken over back there was gone. And this Kelli didn't have it in her.

"Wait up." Nate's call did not register as anything more than background noise, and she did not want to face him now. She was too confused.

"Hey! Will you wait the hell up?"

Finally, her feet slowed, and then stopped, waiting for them to catch up to her.

She should feel bad about leaving Nate to help Giles, but she couldn't feel anything at the moment but pain. And rage.

“I take it the elevator is out?” Nate’s voice was dry, and it roused her. Snapped back some of her control.

She got a grip, stopped the doors at the open position. “We can use it.” She glanced across at Giles. “Easier than the stairs.”

Giles did not respond. He shuffled in after her, and put a hand on her arm. He did not say anything, and she was grateful. They must be wondering who they were getting into the elevator with. What kind of monster she was.

No one spoke as they descended. Kel leaned back against a steel wall and wished she could sleep.

The elevator touched down, and Nate lifted a finger to his lips, his gaze on Giles. “Anyone?”

Giles shook his head, but Nate had the dart gun up and ready as the doors swished open.

It was clear.

Kel wondered when the bogey man was going to jump out at them. This was way too easy.

“You getting any stray thoughts?” Nate scanned the lobby, and Kel realized he felt it too. The certainty an axe hung over their necks.

Giles shook his head. “Let’s move before old Larson decides it’s more than his job’s worth to blow Greenway off for a Halloween party.”

“I’ll get the car.” Nate held out a hand for the keys, and Kel dropped them into his palm. He was the type who had difficulty letting other people drive. She’d bet money on it.

Nate’s fingers closed around the keys but he kept standing there, watching her. “You okay?” His voice was soft.

She shook her head.

He reached out a hand, tentative and gentle, and brushed her cheek. “Let’s get out of here, then we can talk about it.”

She didn’t say anything to that and Nate stepped away. “Wait for me out front.” He pushed through the glass swing doors, pressing down on Greenway’s key remote.

There were only four cars in the lot, and Greenway’s car turned out to be the Mercedes, lights flashing as it unlocked.

Kel opened the door, and cold air enveloped her, ripping away her breath. She coughed. “Wait inside ‘til Nate brings the car round, it’s too cold out here.” She let go of Giles’ arm and started to move through.

“Where the hell are you going, then?” He was already shivering—so, so thin, he had no padding against the bitter weather.

“There is something I want to do while we wait for Nate.”

She stepped out, closing the door firmly behind her, and saw Giles press his face up against the glass to watch her. Her t-shirt was so thin, she might as well be naked against the cold, and her arms felt like they were on fire.

She didn’t care.

She’d dreamed of this day for over a year, since she had gained the focus to lift herself. It may not be a wise use of her energy and time, but she would do it anyway.

She gathered her strength around her, pulling it in so it sat, bright and hot, within her chest.

She put her arms straight out on either side of her body, and leaped, spinning, up and up, like a skater in a pirouette, with the air her element, instead of ice.

She heard the short, sharp squeal of tires as Nate hit the brakes below, caught a glimpse of his head out the window as he watched her.

When the roof of the four story facility flashed past her, she stopped, tipped back her head and looked up at the sky, arms dangling at her sides. It was clear. So open and big. The blazing lights from the building obscured so many stars, but there were still a few to be seen, bright pin pricks of light, twinkling back at her. Enough to give her heart.

She hadn't seen the open sky for three years. It made her want to keep floating up forever.

Below, she heard Nate drive the car forward again at last. He parked in front of the building and opened the car door, and with a sigh, she dropped, light as a feather, back to the ground.

He stood in front of her, so big, so broad, he blocked out everything. She lifted her face to his, but his expression was impossible to read.

A flicker of movement just over Nate's shoulder drew her gaze and she stepped back, a scream caught in her throat.

Something was crouched on the roof of the car.

He—it—was caped. Black, with red lining, and his face was abnormally pale. He smiled, and she caught the flash of fangs.

Whatever it was raised its arms and leaped. Before she could move, Nate grabbed her and swung them both to the side, as if he had eyes at the back of his head.

There was a thump as the... thing... hit the ground and her eyes went wide.

The creature lay still on the hard asphalt of the parking lot, limbs splayed.

Nate set her down, and Kel turned her head.

Giles stood just outside the door. He lowered his dart gun, and despite the cold, the move was precise.

"Nice aim," Nate said. He crouched beside the body.

When he pulled its teeth out, the breath rushed out of her, and she fought hysterical laughter.

"It's a Halloween costume." She was amazed her voice came out as well-modulated as it did.

"You thought it was a real vamp?" Giles' face lost some of its granite edge, and he sent her an amused grin. "You did!"

"He looked the part." She shuddered.

"It's probably the recalcitrant Larson," Giles said.

"It is." Nate flipped closed Larson's wallet. "He'll be sorry for leaving that party." He stilled suddenly. Lifted a hand for silence. "There is someone..." He shivered, and at that moment, it hit Kel too. A strange, spidery brush of something dark, something hungry.

Something far more frightening than the dress-up vampire at her feet.

She resisted, pushed it away with her mind, and sensed it shudder, break up, at her shove.

"I just want to tell you something." A hiss in her brain, this time. Nothing normal about it.

She finally noticed Nate was gone, and Giles was beside her, pulling the gun from Larson's holster, hidden beneath the cheap satin cape. A real gun. No more tranquilizers.

Giles checked the magazine, his movements cool, efficient. "Looks like Larson wasn't the only person Greenway called."

Chapter 5

"That felt a bit like you." Giles pulled her a little closer to the cover of the car.

"What?" She stared at him, then looked away again, trying to see if she could pick up where Nate had gone.

"When you push all that power out, you make my head feel funny." He rubbed his forehead. "Makes me dizzy."

"And what just happened, it felt the same?" It wasn't a nice thought. That had been creepy.

"The brush of power feels the same, but with you, it's light and almost energizing. This was darker, like it wanted to suck me dry."

She kept silent, wondering who was out there. She was the one who should be stalking them, though, not Nate.

"Like Nate would go for that." Giles wasn't looking at her, his eyes searching the night. "Like I would, for that matter."

She was struck by how much better he looked now than when she'd first seen him. His eyes weren't as sunken, his skin not as pale. He was shivering though. So was she, she finally noticed. She leaned forward, unclipped Larson's cape and handed it to Giles. He raised an eyebrow.

"You need it more than me, Giles. Don't be an asshole." She kept her hand out, and he took it, pulled it around his shoulders, his teeth gritted as if taking it caused him pain.

Somewhere, out beyond the dim lights of the parking lot, she felt another pulse of power, and her skin went cold. "Nate."

And then it came again, reaching, like a hungry black mist, tendrils touching her face, her arms.

Kel stood—to crouch was unthinkable—and Giles rose with her.

"Pretty."

Kel's head snapped up. A man hovered between her and the building, his feet at shoulder height. He was short and thin, but muscular, like a jockey. He had brown hair with a wave in it—so, so normal, until you looked into his eyes.

She recoiled at what she saw there. That intense focus. She recognized it. Only too well. It looked back at her, sometimes, from the tiny mirror in her cell.

"You're Greenway's little pet." He watched her with unblinking interest, made her shiver with his intensity. "I was a little worried, but now I've seen you, I realize Greenway just wants into your pants." He laughed, the sound both delighted and

chillingly cold. "Well, that's a relief. Here I thought I'd be up against some stiff competition."

She slammed everything she had at him, shoving her power to the max and sending him straight into the brick wall above the doors.

He made contact. Hard contact. Dropped to the ground.

The sound of gunfire beside her was loud enough to make her ears ring, and she jerked. Giles had barely lowered the gun when she was off, calling Nate's name.

"Start the car," she yelled back to Giles. Then focused her attention ahead. "Nate." She did not care of the target she made. "Nate. Where are you?"

"Here." His voice was weak, and at the sound of it, she almost tripped with relief. She found him just out of reach of the lights, struggling to stand.

"What did he do?" She offered him a hand, searching his face in the darkness for injuries.

"Must have lifted a branch or piece of wood behind me while I was watching him, hit me on the back of the head." He gripped her outstretched hand and she helped pull him to his feet. Already his voice was stronger as his body fixed the damage, and something in her relaxed a little.

"Giles should have the car started." She started tugging him.

"The gunfire?" Nate refused to move, his arm a steel bar keeping her in place.

"Giles took care of him."

He gave a nod, and let her pull him towards the building at last.

They needed to get moving, before more members of Greenway's little army arrived.

* * * * *

Nate was liking the car. It was quiet, powerful muscle, taking the corners so sweetly, it was as if a hand was holding it down from above.

The road winding tight and fast through the trees was a surprise. He had no memory of his trip to the facility. He'd been drugged, completely out of it. He'd had no idea they were in the middle of nowhere, halfway up a hill surrounded by forest.

It made him furious that even the scent of the pine had not been allowed inside.

A town had to be close, though, unless the orderlies had been planning on partying away Halloween along with the squirrels and bunnies in the wood.

He glanced into the rearview mirror. Nothing behind them. Yet.

Giles was lying across the back seat, so still he could have been asleep, although Nate doubted it. Kel sat beside him, shoulders hunched with tension, staring out the window as if expecting something to come at them any second.

It set him on edge.

He glanced across at her, and saw her lips were moving, like an incantation or something. "What?" He forced his eyes back on the road and when he turned to look at her again, she was giving him all her attention.

That spooky, full-on, don't-mess-with-me look.

"I just want to tell you something," she said, and the hairs on the back of his neck rose up. His knuckles went white on the steering wheel.

She turned her head suddenly, a whip of a movement, towards the passenger window, and with a terrible, reverberating pop, the glass blew outwards.

She hit the seat belt release, and for a split-second he looked into her eyes, saw the cold death in them, then she lifted her arms and seemed to be sucked out into the night.

“Shi-it.”

Giles flew forward as Nate stood on the brakes, felt the stabilizers and the braking system work double time to keep them from snaking like a fish on a hook.

“You didn't get a hint of that?” Nate hauled at the hand brake, and Giles was already out by the time he opened his door.

“Not a damn thing.”

They both stood still, trying to hear over the tick of the engine as it came to terms with a sudden stop.

“Kel!”

Giles gave Nate a look as he shouted out, but what the hell, anyone out there knew they were here. Squealing tires will do that.

Shards of auto glass glinted red in the light thrown off by the rear lights. Somewhere a little further back down the road, someone stepped on a piece, and it crunched beneath their shoe.

Without speaking, without even a look, he and Giles ducked down, moving to the front of the car, and then made for the side of the road.

Just a couple of hours earlier, he wouldn't have thought they could do it without him half-carrying Giles.

But Giles was with him all the way, and then leaning in, close to his ear. “They're blocking, but they can't keep it up for too long. I'm getting thought-flashes.”

He went silent, and Nate waited it out, heard the faint rustle of someone moving a couple of steps away, on the other side of the tree.

Giles held up four fingers. Then pointed to their location.

“Kel?” Nate mouthed.

Giles shook his head, and a cold burn flared to life in Nate's gut.

What the hell was going on?

Chapter 6

What was wrong with her?

Kel crouched on a high branch, one hand out for balance against the massive tree trunk, and tried to think through the numbing cold and the confusion.

She'd heard it again in the car. That sentence, over and over. And Nate had asked...she shivered as she remembered the horror in his eyes as she'd tried to explain, but the moment she spoke it, loud and clear, it was as if the fear-induced fuzziness those words seemed to strike in her had vanished, and in its place was the cold certainty of attack, of a trap just ahead.

She could feel dark power reaching out from the trees, malevolent and tinged with desperation, and she'd gone after it without thought. Without a moment's hesitation. Gone after to kill. Eliminate.

What was wrong with her?

Because even as she'd thrown herself at the threat, ripping through the air faster and stronger than she ever had before, the feeling had vanished.

Making her doubt it had ever been there to begin with.

A twig snapped just below her tree, and she tensed. They were quiet, only one mistake had given them away. And then she sensed it.

The same prying, dark touch as before.

She closed her eyes for a moment in relief. She'd take danger over madness, any day. She had felt something earlier.

It felt the same as it had back at the facility, but the man who'd confronted her there was dead. She thought of Giles' steady hand and knew that to be true. So, others. Greenway had to have a supply of them.

He must have mobilized his crew before he'd arrived at the facility. They were here to round her, Nate and Giles up and take them back to hell.

'I just want to tell you something.'

The thought sprang into her head, and she couldn't help lifting a hand to her temple.

It was coming from the man below. Pouring out with his noxious darkness. Trying to force her to react. To reveal herself.

She looked around for a weapon and wondered what Greenway wanted to make her do. What this was all *for*.

There was a thick stick, a little longer than her arm, caught in the foliage of the branch she was crouched on. She worked her way towards it, and got a good grip. Whatever the trigger was, she wasn't playing. Greenway had gotten it wrong.

It came again, insidious and frightening, and she took a deep breath and dropped out of the tree, free falling towards the man below.

They could take her back over her dead body.

Or his.

She slammed into him, using the branch across his back and shoulders, and he let out a sharp, eerie cry before he crumpled like a dry autumn leaf. She held herself off the ground only at the very last second. It took more energy than she'd bargained for, because of the speed of her drop, but she managed to land without a sound next to the body she'd brought down.

There was no light out here. The stars and a fingernail moon provided the only illumination, and she couldn't see his face. His body was thick-set, strong without any sign of softness. She shivered as she remembered the wisps of black, reaching for her.

Though she would swear he wasn't one of the orderlies, he was strangely familiar. And he was dead.

The sound of footsteps running in her direction made her leap up into the tree again, this time just above the body, in the dense foliage of the lower branches.

"Rennie?" A low whisper, a woman, who was little more than an outline to Kel. She bent over the body. "Shit." She stood still, and Kel had the sense she was communicating with her colleagues.

There was something familiar about her, too.

Had she met them? While Greenway played with her mind?

The woman turned sharply towards the left, and another shadow seemed to flow towards her.

“Any sign?” The rough, low voice made her heart lurch with fear, and she knew she was afraid of this man she couldn't see, would have sworn she'd never met.

She started to shiver, cold and nerves wracking her body, and she lifted herself off the branch an inch into the air, so it wouldn't shake. She could feel her energy draining from the effort.

The woman turned in her direction and Kel's heart hammered in her chest. “Where's Tom?”

“Gone after the army boys.”

“She never killed anyone we asked her to in training.” From the sound of her voice, the woman had turned back to the body on the ground, and Kel's panic eased a little.

“Guess when her own life's in danger, Greenway's pet does have claws after all.” There was something gleeful in his tone.

“The trigger doesn't work. It makes her come after us, not come to us.”

“Then use it knowing she'll be attacking, not making nice.” He stepped away, his shadow separating from the woman's. “Not that she ever did. She fought Greenway every step of the fucking way. Her resistance level was too high for us to ever trust her in a live op, but he wouldn't listen.”

“He thought her talents would be useful. More useful than the other failures.” The woman toed the body on the ground. “Guess he was right.”

Kel had to ease herself back onto the branch. Before she came crashing down. There were others?

The woman looked sharply in her direction again. As if she'd heard that tiny scrape of her shoe on bark. And then suddenly hands grabbed her from below, threw her down.

With one last burst of energy, she landed feet first and leaped away, like a rubber ball, completely unprepared for the hard, sharp smack against her shoulder, the echoing retort of a gunshot.

She hit the forest floor on her side and slid through the leaves and dirt, trying to find some last reserve of strength. She came up with nothing. Nothing but pain.

Two faces peered down at her.

“Well, Kelli. Nice to see you.” The man was nothing but a shadow, his face in complete darkness as he leaned over her. She had never been more afraid in her life.

This man had hurt her before. Her body was screaming it at her. She tried to get her legs under her, scrabbling on the loose debris of pine needles and soil, and he put his foot on the shoulder he'd shot. Leaned his weight into it.

She couldn't help the scream that wrenched out of her, ripping her throat raw as it escaped. Lights flashed in front of her eyes and she tried to curl into herself, panting.

The woman dropped beside her, silent, and grabbed her hands. Kel saw the glint of handcuffs.

No! She would not go back.

Both of them suddenly snapped their heads up, dived away as a shot sounded, so loud, so close, Kel made herself even smaller on the ground.

Another shadow reached her, Nate's gentle hands moving her to her back. "They get you?"

"Left shoulder." She gasped the words.

"Let's get to the car." He lifted her as carefully as he could, and she saw someone who had to be Giles, gun in his hand again, sweeping in a slow move, left to right.

And then they were running, Nate holding her close to his chest, Giles half-turned to keep an eye on their back.

He shot twice, and she heard a cry as someone went down.

Nate reached the car, put her across the backseat. Without a word, Giles took the driver seat, and Nate crouched next to her in the footwell in the back, and they took off.

From what seemed like a long way down, she heard another shot, wasn't sure if it was Giles shooting out or someone shooting in.

And then Nate's hands were on her shoulder, and there was a heat, a searing heat, everywhere. Her shoulder was on fire. She must have made a sound, because one hand came up to brush her hair back from her forehead.

"Shh. You'll be all right."

She didn't remember anything else.

* * * * *

Kel came awake with a cry.

Nate turned to the backseat, and saw her staring wildly around the car, looking like a refugee from a war camp. Dawn was just breaking, and the early light illuminated her ripped and blood-soaked t-shirt. Dirt smudged her cheek and there were twigs and pine needles in her hair.

Her eyes widened as she caught his gaze, and her hands went to her shoulder, pressed down on her skin.

"You healed me." She rubbed the spot where that bastard's bullet had gone straight through her back and out the other side.

He hoped Giles had killed him, but didn't pretend they'd be that lucky. His anger had fueled his healing, and he didn't feel nearly as wiped out as he should for the damage he'd fixed.

"Thank you." She spoke in a whisper, and closed her eyes for a moment. "I...thank you."

"If you want to thank me, you can promise to never exit a car moving at eighty miles an hour ever again." He jerked his thumb at the window, covered over with plastic he and Giles had rigged with tape. He thought he was over that but, no, he guessed he was still pissed off. Beside him, hands on the wheel, Giles flashed him a warning look.

Kel blinked at him. "You think I did that just for the hell of it? I wasn't in control when I blew the window."

That stopped him dead.

"Who did have control, then?" Giles asked into the silence.

She couldn't stop rubbing her shoulder, and Nate remembered the way she'd screamed when that bastard had stepped on her wound. He clenched his fists. Then she lifted both hands to her head, rubbed her temples.

"That's the question, isn't it?" She laughed. "The big question."

"Keep it together, Kel." He spoke sharply, afraid if she lost it now, they would not like the result.

"I think Greenway implanted a verbal trigger in my head. Only it's gone wrong. It doesn't work the way they meant it to." She watched him as she spoke, and he admired the control she was forcing on herself.

"Well, shit." Giles changed gear as they turned onto a highway.

She lifted stricken eyes to his. "Those people back there, they all knew me by name. I knew them, too. They felt familiar."

She flopped back against the seat and closed her eyes. "There are others like me, others the trigger doesn't work properly on. They're out there somewhere. Scattered because your commander wanted to close Greenway down. Those two who caught me..." She drew in a shaky breath, opened her eyes again. "The trigger worked on them. They work for Greenway. They spoke about ops."

Giles whistled. "A paranormal black ops team under Greenway's control? That should have given him major ammo against the Colonel. Why didn't he use it? If he had a successful team, he'd have been untouchable. He'd have been allowed to keep anyone he wanted."

"Unless the good doc hasn't told anyone. Maybe there's more money in private enterprise." Nate felt a headache brewing. "More control."

"And what did it matter giving the others up, anyway, when the trigger didn't work on them? They're broken." Kel crossed her arms over her stomach, looked out the window. "Like me."

Nate forced himself into her space and grabbed her hand. "You are not broken."

She studied him, calm, dry-eyed. "I'm sure as hell not myself. I need to look at the files I stole from Greenway's office. See if there is any information on what he tried to do. And..." she bit her lip. "I'm going to see if I can track down the others he let go. Break them out of whatever cage he delivered them to."

His reaction was gut-deep. "No."

She lowered her eyes, then lifted them again. Drew her hand out of his. "I'm sorry, Nate. I don't answer to you. I will always be grateful for hooking up with you and Giles. You helped me get free, saved my life. But I'm not crawling into a hole and wondering when Greenway is going to come find me. Not when there are others like me out there. Stuck in the hell we were in, with no one to save them."

He sighed. Turned in the seat. Watched the Merc eat up the road.

"Would certainly bring unwanted attention to the facility if we sprung some of the former inmates." Giles pulled down the sun visor as the sun rose higher on the horizon.

"Giles, I don't expect you to get involved..." Nate sensed Kel's double-take as she looked at Giles properly. He was still way too thin, but otherwise, he was no longer at death's door.

"Seems you have a good effect on me." Giles grinned at her in the rearview mirror.

"We're all sticking together." Nate tried to keep his hands relaxed on his thighs.

“Why would you do that? Why would you help me?” Kel leaned between the seats, and he smelled the forest in her hair.

“Yeah, Nate. Why wouldya?” Giles drawled.

“We're a good team. And... I don't want you out of my sight.” He ignored Giles, spoke only to Kel.

“I'm not changing my mind about finding the others.”

He nodded. “All right. But we make a plan, and we stick to it. No flying to the ceiling or out of windows.”

She started. “You didn't like the ceiling thing?”

“Nate doesn't like anything he hasn't authorized in advance, unless it's him doing it.” Giles said.

“Well, guess we're in for a fun time, then.” Kel smiled, leaned in and brushed a kiss on his cheek.

And as the press of her lips on his skin burned him bone deep, the bastard of it was, he thought she might be right.
