

The rum was gone. The amaretto was making angry bubbles in Nella's stomach, but she didn't care. Her hand didn't hurt and her heart didn't hurt and she wasn't alone in the silent apartment building. In the dark, empty world.

Frank sat across from her, unfolded like a carpenter's rule on the couch. He was looking at the bookshelf beside him, his fingers tracing the cracked spines. His face was softened in the lamplight and though the scar that shattered his cheek still glowed like an almost-dead ember, Nella thought he didn't look quite as ugly as she'd thought before.

"My wife had some of these books," he said, without looking at her, "I think she would have liked you."

"Really? What makes you think that?"

He thought for a minute. "The way you treat people. You seem ready to believe that people are better than they appear at first. That there's a reason they are the way they are. And the way you are kind to people like Ann, people so damaged they appear to be monsters to others. And that you defend them from people that want to treat them that way. She would have liked that. *I* like that."

"What was she like?"

He pulled a battered book from the shelf and played with the fray in the spine.

"She was kind and funny and intelligent. She challenged me. She was a lawyer, like me. But she helped write cases for human rights violations at international tribunals, unlike me."

"Is that why you decided to participate in this case?"

"I think it was part of it," he glanced up at her with a small smile and then back at the book. "I thought it would make her proud, even if she couldn't forgive me."

Nella leaned forward, "I don't understand Frank, you were ill, how could you think she wouldn't forgive you for something you had no control over?"

He sighed, and retreated into the couch. "It's not that- I mean, it is that, but it *was* my fault." He shook his head. "I don't want to talk about it with you."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to pry-"

"No, you don't understand. It's not that I mind you knowing. I just, I don't want to be one of your patients. I don't want you to see me that way."

Nella was startled. "I don't. I don't see you that way." She paused, still confused.

"How do you want me to see you?"

Frank grinned and relaxed, leaning forward again. "Don't pay any attention to me," he said shaking his head, "It's been a long time since I had any alcohol. I think I can safely say that I'm very drunk."

Nella smiled. "I'll get you some blankets, we should get some sleep."

"Are you sure?" he asked, "I can walk, you can come pick me up tomorrow."

She laughed. "Of course you aren't walking. I'll be right back. The bathroom is free if you want it."

She tried to make the couch as comfortable as she could, but she knew it was about a foot too short for his frame. Frank returned from the bathroom still smelling impossibly clean after a long day in an old suit.

"Thank you," he said, "I swear I wasn't angling for an invite."

"I know. To be honest, I'm glad you're staying. The world seems far too lonely after today. Sometimes I feel like a stray pebble rattling around in an empty shoe." She hugged herself, then shook her head and smiled at him. "Never mind my rambling. I'm a little drunk too. Goodnight Frank."

He grinned. "Goodnight Nella." He touched her arm. "Things will look better in the morning you know," he said.

Nella smiled, but her eyes filled with tears again. She nodded and then walked into her bedroom.

It was much later than she expected when she finally woke up. She swore under her breath and sat up, wincing at the immediate headache. She got dressed in a daze and wandered out into the living room. Frank was calmly ironing his over shirt on her counter. His right arm was covered with small, jagged moons of raised, angry skin and one rough starburst in his shoulder. An exact opposite of the sky. Nella tried to hide her shock when he looked up and smiled at her. He ignored her stare and said, "Good morning," instead of offering any explanation and made no move to put his dress shirt on. "I hope you don't mind I used the washer. I guess I'm still not used to normal procedures, like private property." He chuckled.

"No, of course not. Anything you like," she said almost absently. "I'm sorry, I know you wanted to get to the prison early and I've completely overslept."

"I don't think we're going to get an interview with Dr. Pazzo today," Frank said and his face was grim.

"What? But what about finding Dr. Schneider's lab?"

Frank sighed. "I called the prison this morning to see when he would be ready for us. The guard told me he was refusing to speak to either of us for the day. Yesterday exhausted him and he needs time to recover he said." He looked up from his shirt. "Do you think this is more stalling on his part? Because eventually my contact from the military police is going to call me back. Should I tell Dr. Pazzo that and see if it forces his hand?"

"No," said Nella and paused for a moment, thinking. "That will just make him angry. The minute he thinks he has lost control of us he'll turn to someone else that he thinks he can control. And we can't afford to let anyone else know about

the bacteria.”

“So you still think he's using this information as a way to gain the upper hand?”

“I was surprised that he actually had valuable information to back up his hints, but his attitude coupled with his complete enmity for Dr. Schneider tells me he is still using the information to get *something*. I don't think he's necessarily trying to escape trial and sentencing any longer. I think he is trying to make it urgent that we find Dr. Schneider so she won't escape. I don't think he's going to give us the information we need to find the bacteria until we find her. He'll give us the location of the lab, eventually, but it is only because he doesn't believe the bacteria is still there. He thinks we'll find her, or some trace of her there.”

“What do we do then? For all we know the bacteria is already destroyed. Dr. Schneider presumably escaped the university lab in order to destroy it. We just need to find her and ask.”

“Maybe I can find out from Ann.”

“Nella, I know you're good at what you do, but Ann is permanently damaged. No one can even get a coherent version of events from her. What's the likelihood that she'll even remember Dr. Schneider's old address let alone be able to tell us in any logical way?”

“We have to try. I think there is more in her mind than we've seen so far. She's our best bet for now.”

Frank turned off the iron and picked up his dress shirt. “Okay, if you really think you can get something from her, I'll try to persuade Dr. Pazzo to meet with us or at least tell us what he knows. I can try my contact again too.”

The Mansion

They were rolling past the silent mansion again on their way back to the prison when it hit Nella like shattering glass. She grabbed Frank's arm and the car slid across the empty lanes. “Stop the car,” she said, “I remember where I saw her. Stop the car.”

“Jesus, Nella! Okay, don't kill us.”

She barely waited for him to pull off the side of the road. When she opened her door, the tires were still spitting gravel at her ankles.

“Just a second! Where are you going?” Frank yelled out the open door. Nella walked back toward the mansion, her hands shaking inside her jacket pocket as they fumbled for her phone. Frank ran up behind her. “What are you doing?”

“Do you know if there is cell service here?”

Frank stammered. “What? I've never been here- I guess so, I mean we're close enough to the prison that the tower there should cover it. I don't know which ones have been fixed out here.”

Nella swore and started dialing. “Sevita, pick up the phone. Sevita, it's me, pick up the phone. I need to know when you recorded that footage of Dr. Carton's house. The one with the woman. It's extremely important. If you can meet me at the prison in half an hour I can almost guarantee it will be more than worth your while. I really need you to do this for me.” She hung up the phone and turned toward Frank. “Remember I told you I knew I'd seen Dr. Schneider somewhere before?”

The early spring sun made a weak, cold halo around him. “Of course,” he said, “You mean you saw her *here*?”

“I saw a film of her here. Sevita Das, the reporter who is covering the trial-” she paused.

“Yes, I know who she is,” said Frank.

“She's been my friend for a long time. Since the Cure began. She's always wanted to find Dr. Carton. It's been her obsession since the first day we administered the Cure. I don't know if she wanted to thank him or curse him for putting this burden of guilt on everyone. But she's always wanted to know. She's tried everything to get him to agree to meet her, but she can't find anyone who knows anything about him and so far he hasn't answered the door. So in her spare time, she comes out here and films the house. She says that he has to get groceries from somewhere, he has to have contact with the outside world once in a while.”

“And she found something?”

“She thought she did. I mean, there's always the postman and the deliveries from the Farm, but they never go inside. There's an interior door that's always closed when the outer door is open. That's how deliveries are made.” She became embarrassed as he stared at her expectantly. “Sevita makes us watch hours of footage to make sure she doesn't miss anything. But this one time, about a month ago, she taped someone coming out. No one has ever come out before. At least that we saw. I'm almost positive it was Dr. Schneider.”

Frank shook his head. “What would she be doing there?”

“I don't know, but I'm going to find out before we run out of time.” Nella began walking toward the massive iron gate. Frank grabbed her arm.

“Wait,” he hissed, “we don't know anything yet. If you go pounding on the door you could alarm her. We can't afford to lose what little bit of a lead we have. Besides, you said no one answers the door. It can only make things worse.”

Let's at least go to the prison and see if we can get some more information first. You said your friend spent hours videotaping this place. Maybe she can at least point out all the exits in case Dr. Schneider is in there. I hardly need to tell you that we can't get the military police involved."

"But what if she's in there right now? What if she's got the bacteria right there. What if today is the day it gets lost or released or stolen?"

"This isn't the place to argue about this."

Nella reluctantly began walking back to the car with him. He took a deep breath.

"Maybe this is the day, Nella. Maybe this is the very last day. But what is banging on the front door going to do about it? You think they're just going to hand over the bacteria because we say please? There's a reason Dr. Carton doesn't want the world to know who he is. There's also a reason that Dr. Schneider was in there when no one else has been allowed. I'm not saying those reasons are questionable or honest or anything else. I'm just saying they exist. And until we find out what those reasons are, we're going to have to tread carefully."

"I can't just wait around."

"We're not, we've got a plan. Let's follow it. Someone will tell us something, and then we'll have to decide what we're going to do."

Nella slid back into the car. She flexed her wounded hand after closing the door. It was stiff, and she had a heck of a hangover. She shut her eyes as Frank turned the car on.

"Have you thought about that?" he asked as he pulled the car back onto the tar.

"Have I thought about what?" she asked, her eyes still closed.

"What we're going to do once we know where Dr. Schneider is?"

"I guess that depends on where she is. You do realize that the chances of her remaining unfound in a Cured sector are pretty remote don't you?" she opened her eyes to squint at him.

"I've thought about it, yes." He was quiet for a moment. "I'm not a soldier."

"I know. I understand if you don't want to go with me. I can do it alone."

"I just don't know if I could shoot someone. Not knowing they could be Cured. Not even to defend myself."

Nella smiled gently at him in the mirror. "Well," she said, "let's not borrow trouble. Let's just get through today."

The prison was a flat, dull blotch. Nella felt her chest fill with lead as soon as she stepped out of the car. They walked toward the door silently. Nella reached for the handle, but Frank put his hand over hers to stop her. "No one can

know, not even your friend,” he said.

“I know. She can be trusted, but she won't ask if I don't offer. I won't say anything.”

“I'll see you soon,” he said and let her go.

She hesitated for a second, not wanting to walk away into the madness of Ann's cell. She realized she was truly frightened. Nella became angry with herself and pushed herself forward through the heavy door. She forgot to say anything to Frank and she felt immediately guilty. But she didn't turn around. She had to be professional. She felt ridiculous instead.

What Ann Saw

Ann was calm and Johnson looked well-rested, even cheerful. “Good morning Doc,” she said.

“Good morning. Everything seems to be going well here. How is Ann?”

“Like a new woman. She let me brush her hair, and she hasn't tried to bite her hands at all today, I even took the straitjacket off.”

“That's wonderful,” said Nella.

“Yeah, and Wells got this idea to line the exercise room with old mattresses from the empty cells. We're going to see if she'll be okay out there for a change of pace. That is, if it's okay with you of course.”

Nella smiled, “I think as long as she stays like this, that will be fine. I'm going to post a standing order for sedative if she becomes unmanageable or can't sleep. That means you and Wells and her night guard are in control, not Mr. Grant, got it?”

“Do you think we can keep her this way if we do?”

“I do. I think she was only as bad as she was because she didn't have medication for so long. I'm going to order some tests though, with the infirmary. I don't think anyone's done a serious evaluation of what kind of damage she is really suffering. I'll be able to tell you in a few weeks whether she'll be able to adjust to less constant supervision or not.”

Wells came in, half out of breath. “Hey Doc, how's your hand?”

Nella smiled, “Much better, thanks.”

“It's almost ready,” Wells said to Johnson, “but I'm going to need a hand with the last few so we'll have to wait.”

“Oh,” interrupted Nella, “that's okay, I think I can handle Ann for a few minutes, if you both want to go.”

Johnson looked at her doubtfully. “Are you sure?”

“I think so,” said Nella, “I was going to ask for a few moments alone with her anyway, I need to ask some confidential questions for the trial.”

“Okay, but remember, if you need someone, press the green button and we'll all come running.”

The guards began walking reluctantly away. Nella didn't want to waste any time, so she didn't wait to see them out the door.

Ann was sitting on the floor of the cell making echoes with her voice and looking pleased. Nella sat down next to her. “Good morning Ann.”

Ann looked over at her in surprise, but it quickly faded out, and Ann lost her focus.

“How would you like to go out into the sunshine today?”

Ann closed her eyes and smiled. “The sun is coming back today? There hasn't been any warm sun since before the teeth. Before the beast room.”

“Yes Ann, warm, quiet sun outside. We can go see it, but first I need to ask you a few questions. Is that okay?”

Ann looked wary and her bandaged hands tapped nervously, but she still did not look toward Nella.

“We won't talk about bad things today Ann. I just want to know where Dr. Schneider lives.”

Ann wrinkled her brow. She shook her head.

“Did she ever have you send things from the lab? Or deliver things?”

“She wanted monkeys. But Robert said she hated the monkeys. She hurt them. So I didn't bring them.”

Nella could see Ann becoming agitated. “Okay Ann, we don't have to talk about the monkeys. I just need to know where Dr. Schneider's house was.”

“She had a boyfriend. Robert didn't like him. He said Dr. Schneider's boyfriend would steal.”

“Who was her boyfriend Ann?”

Ann looked at Nella as if she were an idiot not to know, meeting her eyes directly. “Dr. Carton was her boyfriend. Dr. Carton from Kingsfield. Robert says you shouldn't talk to him. He's a thief. But Robert didn't know-”

Ann trailed off and started her echo game again.

“What didn't Robert know Ann?”

Ann ignored her. “What didn't Robert know about Dr. Carton?” Nella sighed in frustration. Ann looked at her and smiled.

“I like you,” she said, “You don't hurt the monkeys.”

Nella smiled despite her worry. “No Ann, I won't hurt any monkeys.”

Ann looked up at the ceiling. “Robert didn't know that Dr. Carton took the vial. In his pocket. It shouldn't be in his pocket. Dr. Schneider said. But he took

it. And Robert didn't know. I couldn't tell." she clapped her hand over her mouth and shook her head at Nella.

"What was in the vial Ann?"

"I can't tell. Dr. Schneider will hurt the monkeys if I do. Burn us all up if I tell. She says Robert is slow, too slow. If he knows I smelled the vial he'll get mad. He'll get mad and maybe he'll hurt the monkeys too. Burn us all up to save the world. So I was quiet. Even when Dr. Carton stole the vial. But the monkeys died anyway. Maybe because the camera saw him take it. And Robert always saw what the camera sees. All the monkeys are gone." Ann started to cry.

Nella hugged her, careful not to relax in case Ann became agitated. "It's okay Ann, it's okay. Let's go see if the sun is out." She helped Ann to her feet. Ann sniffled but shuffled obediently alongside of Nella. They walked out of the cell and through the nearby door. Wells and Johnson were stuffing the last mattress against the concrete wall. The small yard was soaked in bright light. Even Nella squinted in the spring sun. Ann stopped moving and lifted her face, closing her eyes. Warmth pulsed around them and the soldiers looked relaxed as they lounged in the daylight.

Something was scratching at the back part of Nella's brain. For a man who had spent his time meticulously documenting the lab procedures, Dr. Pazzo had certainly seemed to miss a lot. How could he not have known about the altered bacteria until Dr. Schneider told him? Nella was uneasy as she watched Ann bask in the golden day of early spring. Something crept up her neck and crawled behind her eyes with pricking insect legs. If she could only think of what exactly was bothering her . . . But a guard walked through the doorway. "Dr. Rider," he said abruptly, "You have a visitor. She's waiting for you at the entrance."

"Thank you." Nella turned to Johnson. "Are you and Wells going to stay with Ann?"

"Sure Doc," said Johnson, "I've never seen her so calm. We'll be fine."

"I'll make sure I write that order for sedative use. You remember what I said. You're in charge, not Mr. Grant. And I'm going to order those tests for the next few days. She will have to be transported to a facility that has the correct equipment."

"And that will tell us if she'll- if she'll stay like this?" asked Johnson.

"I hope so," said Nella. She watched Ann turn in the sun one more time and then went to meet Sevita.

Sevita was pacing at the entrance. "What's going on?" she asked as soon as Nella came in view. Nella sighed. She wanted to just tell Sevita, but Frank would be upset. "I can only tell you part of it," she said apologetically, "I need to get into Dr. Carton's house."

Sevita snorted. "So do I, but that doesn't mean it's going to happen. How many hundreds of hours have we watched that housed? We've only ever seen one person go in or come out."

"Yeah, and I need to know where that person went."

"What? Why? I thought this was about Dr. Carton."

"I can't tell you Sevita, not yet."

"Well, what did you need me for?"

"I don't know all the entrances and exits like you. I need to make sure that the woman we saw on the tape, if she is inside, that she doesn't get out until I've talked with her."

Sevita sighed. "Can I at least come with you?"

"It might be dangerous, Sevita. Not just for you, but for Christine too."

"What are you talking about?"

Frank touched Nella's shoulder. She jumped and then blushed when she saw him.

"Sorry," he said, "didn't mean to startle you."

"Frank, this is Sevita Das from HCN. She's going to help us get into Dr. Carton's house."

Sevita gave Nella a strange look and then smiled as if she knew something that Nella did not. She shook Frank's hand. "Pleased to meet you," she said.

"Likewise. I've watched all of your documentaries," Frank said.

"Look," said Sevita, "I don't know what you're up to, but I'm coming along. I realize it's probably confidential because of the trial and I promise not to air anything until you tell me it's okay, but there is no way-" she held up her hand to stop interruptions, "Nella, there is no way I'm not going into that house with you after all this time. You want my help? Sure, of course I'll help you Nella, you're my friend. But I'm not going to pass up an opportunity either."

Nella glanced at Frank. He seemed slightly troubled. Sevita saw it too. She folded her arms and looked at Nella expectantly.

"Okay," Nella said, with an interior wince, "but I'm serious that this could be dangerous. If I tell you it's time to leave, then you leave and don't wait for me or for Frank. And Sevita, if I tell you we can't go home for a while, you have to trust me. For Christine's sake."

Sevita still had her arms crossed but she was biting the corner of her bottom lip and Nella knew she was nervous. "Yeah, okay Nella, I won't ask questions but I can see you're worried. I'll be a good girl scout and follow directions."

Nella glanced at Frank. He looked concerned but saw her look at him. He shrugged and smiled. "If you think this is best Nella, then we'll all go together."

Why don't we go somewhere that isn't so public to discuss the details though, okay?"

Sevita nodded. "Nella's apartment is closest. But I brought the bike. I don't have car privileges like you important folks." Nella laughed. Sevita squinted at Frank and looked particularly sly. It made Nella's skin prickle apprehensively.

"Frank, can I catch a ride with you? I'll show you where Nella lives."

Frank looked startled and shot a glance at Nella. "Sure," he said quickly, but Nella blushed, knowing Sevita was not fooled. But Sevita showed mercy and didn't say anything, just walked toward the door. Frank turned toward Nella. "Dr. Pazzo won't tell me anything," he said quietly, "and my contact hasn't been able to find any labs connected to Dr. Schneider, all he has is her home address."

"I don't think it's actually Dr. Schneider's lab. I think it's Dr. Carton's. Ann said Dr. Carton lived in Kingsfield and that Dr. Schneider was in a relationship with him. That's all I could get from her."

"Kingsfield? That's still in the Infected zone."

"That's just where Carton used to live, maybe the bacteria is somewhere else. Wherever Dr. Schneider is. Maybe even in the mansion." She paused and looked at him. "I know you don't want to tell Sevita anything, but we can trust her. She's my friend and we've been through a lot together."

Frank nodded. "For her own peace of mind, though, perhaps the less we tell her, the better." He followed Sevita out to his car. Nella glanced back down the hallway. If only she could place what was bothering her. Just a few minutes and she knew she could figure it out. The worry was palpable, tasting acrid, like burnt sugar in her mouth. She shook herself. She didn't have time for this. Nella sighed and pushed through the glass door into the bright, sunny afternoon.

She worried what Sevita was telling Frank in the other car. The two women hadn't met until the Cure, but Nella, like most other Immunes, was not innocent of blood shed. She had felt a serious twist of guilt shoot through her when Dr. Pazzo had laid bare the fact that Immunes had killed people who were merely ill. People who were not in control of themselves. Nella knew that others had killed too, that people had defended themselves or even sought out people like Frank as if they were prey. But her feelings were of overwhelming *personal* guilt. As if she ought to have known better. And she didn't want Frank to know what she had done in the past. She worried that he would be disappointed somehow, that he would turn cold and unfriendly if he knew. It made her feel deeply alone.

Sevita was already drawing a diagram of the mansion on Nella's table when she came in. Frank was rummaging in the kitchen for lunch. Sevita looked up with a wicked smile as Nella walked through the door. Nella should have been exasperated, but she was not. She was relieved and comforted to see them