Chapter 3: Cellblock B

For the next several days, Rachel settled into a routine. She would wake up at 5 and meet Ayane in the gym. They would train, shower and eat before heading to the communal area to talk to the other inmates. Amell would drop by occasionally to intimidate the inmates.

Things started to change one morning. She had been here about two weeks. Herself and Ayane had just finished sparring when another inmate, Marcus Kellan, approached them.

He was a tall, lean guy with brown hair and pale skin. He was among the older inmates as well, so when he spoke people usually listened.

He approached and said quietly, “Word is Amell will be gone in two days. Do you know what that means?”

Ayane’s features shifted as she said, “That means there’ll be a prison full of metahumans with only normal people to stop us.”

He nodded and said, “Exactly. We’re faster, stronger and smarter than them. So when Amell goes, I say we leave. Pass it on and if you’re caught, it didn’t come from me.”

Rachel said, “It seems awfully convenient, doesn’t it?”

Marcus replied, “Maybe. But this is the first time we’ve had hope in years. We have to do something rather than just sit here and be their tools.”

Ayane nodded and said, “I agree. But we’ll need a plan.”

Mark nodded and explained, “In the evening, the guards will come to tells us to go to our cells. That’s when we attack, and then a group of us will go to the control room to stop them from calling Amell.”

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The two days passed without incident, and the final day was mostly uneventful until it was time to return to their cells. When the guards converged, the inmates rose up and all hell broke loose.

The communal area was lit up by fire, lightning, gunfire and screams filled Rachel’s ears as she got to her feet and picked up the tray she had had her food on.

A guard aimed his rifle at Marcus before Rachel was there, whacking him on the back of the head with the tray. Another noticed her and fired. She dove aside and if not for her enhanced reflexes, she would have been dead.

She tossed the tray aside and rushed forward, punching the man before wrenching the rifle from his grip and punching him. She spun and aimed at another guard, taking him down with a shot to the face.

As more of them rushed the inmates, one managed to get behind Rachel and grab the rifle with one hand. With the other, he swung a combat knife at her. She avoided it before a shot hit her leg and she fell to her knees.

As the first guard swung at her again, she cried out as a blast of ice came from her hand and froze him in place. Getting to her feet unsteadily, she examined the guard, and tapped the ice. It didn’t even feel cold to her.

Returning her attention to the battle around her, she could see that the inmates were winning. There were only a few guards left, and the exit was open. Marcus rushed over.

“There’s a control room we need to hit to make sure they don’t contact Amell. One of ours is looping the cameras but we need to move quickly. You in?” he asked.

Rachel looked down at the bullet wound on her leg before saying, “I’m hit. I can fight, but I can’t move very fast.”

He nodded.

Then an arrow sprouted from his throat, and he fell. All of the fighting stopped as thirty inmates turned to face Amell, clad in his suit and clearly ready for a fight.

The tension in the air could be felt until it finally got to a breaking point, and a man rushed him, throwing fire. Then Amell was behind him, a sword sticking out of the inmate’s chest.

Remember. Rachel needed to remember. To stop Amell, they needed to predict where he’d be and strike there rather than where he was.

Nodding, she picked up the fallen soldier’s combat knife and pried the bullet from her wound. It bled for a moment before stopping as she tossed the knife to the ground and stood.

Amell pulled his sword out of the now dead attacker, and spun it before vanishing. He appeared behind one person, then another, and Rachel found that she could see him starting to form milliseconds before he appeared.

She raised her hands, ready to strike as Amell appeared behind another victim. She threw a blast of ice, and it hit his arm, forcing him to drop his sword. He growled and then appeared in front of her, already throwing a punch.

She barely deflected it before she was hit from all directions as if at once. Ayane rushed to her side and tackled him, giving Rachel a moment to breathe before rushing to join her comrade.

Amell blocked, ducked and weaved, moving as fast as he could to avoid their strikes. He could tell that more inmates were converging, so he vanished, moving to an easier spot to manoeuvre. His back to the wall so nobody could attack from behind, he pulled out his bow and nocked an arrow, firing at someone. A blast of ice knocked the arrow aside before an icicle stuck into his shoulder.

He dropped his bow and cursed before everything around him stopped, and the Architect appeared.

“You have done well,” he said. “Today, they go free and the stage will be set for a legacy of heroes.”

“Is it finally over?” the Archer asked.

The Architect replied, “This is the day you die. Your final battle will cull the weak and leave the strong prepared to rise at the Ifrit’s side.”

Nodding, Amell pulled the icicle from his shoulder and picked up his bow as time returned to normal, his face a mask of resolve. He rushed forward.

Rachel rushed to meet Amell, and the moment she was close enough she grabbed him.

They both appeared outside the facility. It was snowy, and quiet.

“You can’t stop me alone,” Amell spat.

“She’s not alone,” came a voice.

Both turned as there was a metallic thud.

A man in a large, dark red suit of armour approached. The suit was 8 feet tall, covered in plates of smooth metal. The helmet was blank with the exception of eyeholes surrounded by blue lights.

“Who the hell are you?” Rachel asked.

“I’ll tell you after we beat the Psycho,” he said.

Rachel shifted her attention back to Amell, who nodded and rushed her. She avoided his attack before calling, “Behind you!”

The man in the armour turned and hit Amell with an uppercut that knocked him into the air and stunned him.

As he fell back to the ground, Rachel threw an icicle. It flew straight and stuck into his chest.

She rushed over as he fumbled at his mask, pulling it off.

“You…you’ve done it. You’ve saved everyone,” he said.

“And you’ve lost,” she said.

“META have lost,” he replied. “I’ve served my purpose.”

With that, he lay still.

The man in the suit said, “I’m detecting twenty-five heat signatures in the hill under us.”

Rachel turned as he listened before turning to her and asking, “Has he got like keys or anything?”

She bent down and found a keycard in a pouch on his belt, showing the man. He nodded and looked around before saying, “If we want to free your friends we’ll need to find the entrance.”

“You didn’t answer the question,” Rachel said. “Who are you? And why are you here?”

He replied, “The media at home has taken to calling me the Phoenix. I find and stop people like Arrow over here who are too much for the police to handle. I’m here because I’ve been looking into rumours of a place like this. A secret prison where superhumans are created, and a group of people seemingly unrelated apart from their blood types and a so-far unclassified gene that only appears in a select few.”

“The meta gene,” Rachel breathed.

“Exactly,” he said.

Then he looked around before saying, “There’s something metal up here,”

He led her up the hill, where they found a trapdoor. Rachel bent down and strained to lift it, but it wouldn’t move. The Phoenix moved to the other side and lifted as well. The suit whined from the strain, but the thing wouldn’t move. He stepped back and looked at it.

“This is made of some metal I haven’t seen before,” he said.

Rachel leaned in to examine it, and saw a series of symbols carved on it.

“There’s symbols on it,” she said. “A snowflake, a flame, a spear, a lightning bolt and a phoenix.”

The Phoenix nodded and said, “The Phoenix, that’s me, obviously. The snowflake must be you, given your powers. And the rest?”

She shrugged before a voice in her head said, “You have power. Use it.”

Curious, she raised her hand and threw a blast of ice. She kept the stream coming until the whole thing was frozen, and then stomped on it. Some of the ice broke, but the manhole itself didn’t.

The Phoenix motioned for her to step aside before a small device came from his wrist, and a blast of energy hit the trapdoor, breaking a section on the corner off. Nodding, he fired again and again until the whole thing broke.

Rachel nodded and looked down. There was a ladder leading down into a seemingly empty room. She climbed down, the Phoenix following her.

They came into the room to see a single door, beyond which stood a group of inmates, pounding on it with their powers. The Phoenix looked around before rushing over to a computer. He did something to it, and the door opened.

The metahumans all ran out, looking around before starting to go up. Ayane rushed straight over to Rachel and asked, “Where’s Amell?”

“Dead,” she replied.

Ayane smiled before asking, “What will you now?”

“I want to go home,” she said before something occurred to her.

She turned to the Phoenix and asked, “Where are we?”

He replied, “County Meath, in Ireland.”

Smiling, she said, “Well then I better get going. How about you Ayane?”

She turned to see that her friend was gone, leaving the only people in the room herself and the Phoenix. Nodding, she climbed out and saw that people were leaving.

As she heard the Phoenix come up behind her, she asked, “Which way is Dublin?”