

### **The Paradigm Shift: the prologue By Mohammad Khan**

I guess it's true. Everyone dies alone and no one's coming to save you. When the population of the world hit 10 billion, our resources were nearly depleted and climate change has been eroding our way of life. We were warned that humanity had only two years to get its act together before the world ended. I didn't expect the reaction to be this cruel. It was so easy for everyone to turn on each other when knowing that doomsday was imminent and plan to save humanity demonstrated this. The plan to save humanity: get rid of the imperfect humans, those hogging the resources because of their handicaps and illnesses. Soon millions of disabled people were banned to purgatory in an instant while the rest of the world believed it was for the greater good. The label 'disabled' expanded to any human who uses any device that helps them function in the real world. People who require hearing aids, wear glasses, have pacemakers, were sentenced to purgatory. And I was banished with them to hell on earth.

The world is a cruel unforgiving place that doesn't give without taking. I learned that lesson the hard way. My only escape from this hell was a dream.

*Matt Altman, 9 years old, Writer of Libertalia*

## **The Paradigm Shift: By Mohammad Khan**

### **Month 1**

#### **Week 1:**

My father never liked to lie. And didn't lie when the ravens rounded us up from our home. Ravens were the enforcers of the new world order, rounding up anyone they deem disabled. They threw me and my younger brother, Luke, in jail. They gave us these gray jumpsuits with name tags after they threw us into a dark place with no windows. The guards closed the door, locking us in the room. We tried to bang on the door and screamed for help, but no one heard us. Luke crumbled to his knees and began to sob. I tried to comfort him and until I realized that we weren't alone in the room. I would've done the same as Luke until I realized that we still had our belongings. I searched the wall for a light switch but I couldn't find one. A few seconds passed and the light turned on by itself. I looked around to see where we are.

The room looked like a 7x7x9 foot room with two bunk beds on opposing sides of the walls. I noticed a speaker and four timers above the door and wondered why that was there but then I saw another boy sitting on the bed by the light switch. The boy is a fair-haired kid with a distinctive small red scar on his right cheek and an eye patch. He wore the same jumpsuit as us. He smiled as he looked at me and my brother.

"You're new here. Name's Patrick Garrett. My disability is quite noticeable but I still try to fake my way to freedom", said Patrick holding out his hand.

Patrick had an Australian accent to him as he spoke. He seemed to have an aura of gentleness and joyfulness about him like 3 year old exploring the world around him. I felt inclined to trust Patrick because of his aura.

"M-My-M-My name's Matt Altman and this is my brother Luke", I said nervously. I shook his hand and he pulled me up to my feet. "What do you mean you 'f-f-fake your way to freedom'", I asked while helping Luke.

"The guards here are part of the Ravens outside but lower on the totem pole. We call them Crows. Now you see

these Crows don't care about us. To them we're just freaks given a second chance, hell I doubt the outside

world even knows that a place like this exists. They probably think this is a care facility", said Patrick gesturing to the room. "The police outside rounding up people like you and me and your brother are called

Ravens. The Ravens were ordered by COHS to round us up and attempt to cure us. They put us in facilities

like these in an attempt to cure us and allow us to live with the rest of humanity. We have six months to be

cured and if we're cured, we're set free, but if we're not cured then into that good night we go."

"W-W-What do you mean down into that good night we go?"

"How old are you Matt?"

"9"

"One day you'll understand that the world isn't all what they tell you."

I noticed the timer again. "What's with the 4 timers on the wall?"

“That’s the countdown.”

“Counting down to what” asked Luke.

“The end.” Patrick spoke casually.

I didn’t fully understand what Patrick said but he’s the only one I knew in the place at the time. There were four beds in the room and he gave Luke and me the other two beds. There was no windows, only one exit & entrance, and four beds, little did I know that I’d spend my last months in this cell.

A loud cry echoed through the hallways saying,

“Lights Out!” The room went back to its darkness. The clocks were bright in the dark. They kept counting down. I had no choice but to fall asleep and hope that I can go home.

A recurring dream. I could see my old house, filled with my family members. I saw my dad, mom, my sister, Alice, and Luke. Our old house was a duplex nearly falling apart. It may be molded or rundown but it was still my home. The scene changed to my family traveling on the road. A sea of stars above us as my father drove the van through the night. The stars morphed into birds and began flapping in unison across the sky. My father loved watching birds; we’d spend afternoons watching birds fly across the sky. The birds in the night sky morphed into a giant white raven. The Raven sprouted its wings blanketing the sky in blinding white light. The light blinded me and infected my mind, so that I could only see the white light. Even closing my eyes only intensified the light. In the light was a distant black figure approaching me, it walked on two legs fluidly. As it got closer I could see what it was, it was a Raven. The Raven was holding a baton. The gas mask upon his face struck fear into my heart. The Raven leaped towards me with his baton. I could feel the baton pounding upon my skin, every hit, and every blow produced bruises and shattered bones.

A familiar pain jolted me awake. Sweat poured down my face, I could feel my heart pumping in my chest almost jumping out of my body. I awoke to see the room still dark. I looked around to see if I could find my friend and brother in the darkness. I strained my eyes to see but it was futile. I heard a call from beyond the door screech, “Rise and Shine!” The lights came on with that call. The lights blinded me, forcing me to squint to around. I could see my brother also awake and looking around. Patrick was sound asleep as if he’s used to the protocol. I heard footsteps coming towards our door.

Someone pounded on our door, “GET UP!” The pounding woke up Patrick but he got up sleepily anyway. Luke & I got up as usual.

Patrick sat on his bed playing on his phone. I looked at Luke and shrugged. I opened up my belonging and found my father’s favorite book: *Peter Pan* while Luke paced the room.

A roar echoed through the hallways, “Roll Call!” Patrick sprung up from his bed and zipped out the door. He was gone before I looked up from my book. Luke and I went outside for roll call.

We lined up in the hallway, side by side. A Crow went down the hallway counting the number of heads. He stopped two doors before my room and stared down a kid. The Crow glared at the kid and spoke with a booming, forceful voice.

“Where is your roommate: Daniel Tanner?”

The kid crumpled under the power of the Crow’s voice. A terrified look overcame the kid’s face.

“He-he-I- I don’t know where he went”, said the kid squeamishly.

The Crow straightened. He turned towards the Crows by the end of the hall and called them over. The Crows dragged the kid out of the hallway. I looked around at the other kids to see how many were here. I saw at least 30-40 kids crammed into 8 rooms, boys and girls lined up against the wall. When the kid was being dragged away, no one moved a muscle out of fear of being taken as well. One memory that hasn’t left was the screams of the kid being dragged away: the bloodcurdling scream reverberated in the hallways as he was dragged away.

Followed by an ominous silence. This fazed none of the kids. It’s normal.

The Crows returned and finished their headcount. Once they were done, whispers spread throughout the hallway like a virus about the boy. The only one who didn’t whisper about the kid was Patrick. Patrick just looked at and didn’t say anything, though his expression did the talking as if to say, ‘Get used to it.’ The Crows told us to go back into our rooms and await further instruction. All of the children shuffled into their rooms without a peep.

“W-Who’s Daniel Tanner” I asked.

“He’s an old friend of mine. We used to joke about escaping this place, I guess he was serious.”

We sit at our beds.

Patrick continues. “You ready for another round of treatments?” He asked squeamishly. He knows they’re horrible and no one is every ready for them.

The ringing call for treatment always gave me a persistent headache. We exited the room and lined the hallways. They organized us by our disabilities and sent us to our treatment areas. I was in a group of 3 boys and 1 girl.

The treatment room looked like a classroom with desks and chairs. The room had the choking smell of chalk dust. We were told to sit in a circle. As I sat in a circle, I noticed the other 5 kids wore the same getup as I had to: a short sleeved gray jumpsuit. The Crow wore a purple blazer with a yellow bowtie; color combo made him quite appalling to look at.

The treatment started with us reading out loud without stammering. If we did stammer, then we’d be hit with a baton. That didn’t go well with me. I received at least 10 hits by the baton. The next exercise was singing or doing a speech in front of the class. Since public speaking and singing aren’t my strong suit, it didn’t go well. Michael was a surprisingly good singer and was only hit five times throughout the entire treatment session. I tried singing but instead it came out as screeching. The Crow smacked the chalk erasers together producing a cloud of chalk dust. The cloud clogged my lungs causing me to cough. As I was coughing I noticed another Crow standing by the door with a baton smiling. He wasn’t going to help and I couldn’t help myself without receiving a beat down. I tried to fight against the smoke and sing but I couldn’t. The treatment repeated for, what seemed like at the time, an eternity.

Lunch came and I was able to find my brother, Patrick, and my new friends. Luke had some red burns and bruises on his arms and face. The lunchroom had no windows similar to the other rooms but 20 long tables were arranged in two rows of ten. I sat with Patrick and Luke. Luke told about his reading exercises and tongue twisters to help with dyslexia. Patrick said he’s been receiving the same treatment for the past 4 and half months.

“You’re terrible at singing by the way, Matt”, said Michael snidely as he sat down. Michael also has a stutter.

“Lay off Michael”, spoke Rachel kindly. “He wasn’t that bad for only a few days in.”

I've made two other friends. Katie and Claire.

Claire, Rachel, Michael, Katie, and Alex sat with us at the table and told me their story about how they got here. Claire had ADHD and her treatments sounded like a combination of mine and Luke's treatment. Her father was a construction worker with no disability but her mother had Huntington's disease. Claire was an only child. When her family was captured, her dad couldn't bare leaving them to the facilities so he admitted himself to one. She hasn't seen either parent since. She didn't look up once as she told me her story as if she felt ashamed of some action. Claire has been here as long as Patrick.

Rachel had a similar story except she was already an orphan. Her parents died in a car crash when she was 4. She's been with her foster parents since 4 years of age and she lost them about 2 months ago. Rachel has been in the facility for two months longer than me. She's had friends beaten and killed before her eyes. Rachel has a stuttering problem and leukemia. Rachel spoke with a soft gentle tone, contrary to her potent singing voice. She was captured by the Ravens in Dallas, Texas. The Ravens broke into the orphanage and took everyone into the facility and sorted them from there. The only thing Rachel remembered was going the sleep in the orphanage the day before and waking up the next morning in the facility. She was the same age as me and has been friends with Patrick since she got here.

Michael Yeager was taking care of his non-disabled 5 year-old brother when he was dragged away. His parents were dead and Michael was old enough to care for his brother. The last thing he remembered was his brother screaming his name.

Yeager has been here for 3 months, Katie was living on her own when the Ravens and was put here about 2 months ago, and Alex was playing a virtual reality game when he was taken. He said he had a difficult time discerning reality from fantasy when they took him; Alex still believes he's in a fantasy. He's been here for 5 months.

We were a group of misfits in hell.

"How have you guys been", asked Claire. Her voice sounded tired. Tired from everything and too tired to change her situation.

"There's nothing to do" spoke Luke.

Everyone but me and Luke went silent.

Michale leaned in. "Most kids here understand that this is the last six months of their live. They don't want to live in complete fear or oppression.....No, no they begin to do anything they can and want. Gangs, businesses, drugs, you name it, it is happening in this facility."

"So-so what you're saying is-is that the guards don't care what happens in this f-ff-facility?" I replied.

"The only people who care about what happens in this shit hole are the inhabitants, us, you and me, the prisoners." Chimed Rachel.

"Those are just rumors, Rachel. There are no gangs in this place", said Katie interjecting.

"Maybe, maybe not, someone just needs to find the proof."

"Don't worry Matt, there aren't any gangs", said Claire sympathetically.

Alex leaned in, "I've heard stories about a gang that can get anything you want and the guards do as well.

That's where they get their improvised 'treatment tools' and batons."

"What do they do if the kids misbehave or get caught escaping", Luke asked?

Alex turns towards Luke," Well if you misbehave then you get sent to the 'discipline room' and never return."

"If no one ever returns, then how do you know where they go, Alex", said Claire snidely?

"Every now and then, a few make it out. Like Daniel Tanner." Alex turned towards me and Luke. "Have you guys heard the story of Daniel Tanner?"

"For the hundredth time" said Luke exasperated.

Daniel Tanner. If such a person does exist, then there could be a way I could talk to my family or maybe even escape? I couldn't ask any of them because lunch had ended. I was obsessed with finding him.

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## **Week 2:**

The usual round of treatment began and I encountered another round of beatings and choking on chalk dust. Thankfully, the day was finished though I felt no different in my stuttering problem. I had lain on my bed waiting for my brother and Patrick. The waiting caused my mind to grow and harvest ideas on escape. If Daniel Tanner made it out, then why can't I? I harvested plans for hours on end whenever I had alone time. I planned as much as a 9 year old could plan, with fantastically ideas and unrealistic ideas. Luke sulked into the room and lay on his bed. I looked below and saw him wiping blood from his nose. He told me the teacher beat him endlessly for not reading fluidly. No guard stopped him but a girl did step in to help. Luke caught her name: Amadi Byrd. He never forgot her name since the incident. Patrick burst into the room:

"Hey guys, how's- wait what happened to you?" Patrick was concerned.

"A Crow beat him for not reading good enough but someone saved him."

"Who?"

"Amadi Byrd", said Luke wiping blood from his nose.

"Amadi Byrd? Are you sure you read Byrd on the uniform?"

"Yeah, why?"

"She's affiliated with a rumored gang here. I don't know who leads the gang but there have been scary rumors."

"Did Alex tell you this", I asked?

"No, but the stories I've heard say that the gang can get whatever you want from the outside world or a conversation with anyone: books, magazines, phones, VR headsets, a gun, posters, anything."

"Could this gang help me contact my family?"

"Maybe, but I wouldn't risk it because for them to help you, you have to help them."

“Do you know what you have to do for them?”

“It depends upon the favor you want. I know someone who went to the gang and got what they wanted; however, I haven’t heard from him since.”

“Who?”

“Daniel Tanner.”

“Of course”, I said annoyed. “Do you know the name of the gang?”

“I only know a last name, but it’s still a rumor about the existence of the gang.”

“Rumors are based on some truth. Pat, tell me the name.” I said sternly.

Patrick sighs, “Reinhardt. The name is Reinhardt.”

The call for lights out roared throughout the room and hallways. Darkness encompassed the room when the lights shut off leaving the 4 timers on the wall. It’s still counting down to something. I heard the shuffling of my brother and Patrick into their beds. I lay in my bed looking at the hidden ceiling. Planning my escape.

I dreamt of plans, of evading guards, sending notes, and creeping past cameras went down the drain as none of them worked. I tossed and turned in my bed, frustrated at not being able to escape. What Rachel said about the prisoners wanting to do anything before they die, echoed in my mind. The prisoners wanted to make their mark in the world. Why don’t I try that? What mark can I make in this world for the world to see when the crisis subsides? I don’t have the stomach for a gang or some smuggling ring. Throughout the night, my mind began to wonder about how people have immortalized themselves into history. Protests, genocides, assassinations, have immortalized individuals and groups of people in history, but I knew I couldn’t stand up for something publically. Homer, Socrates, and Aristotle have immortalized themselves by writing. Writing is something I could do. I could stand up using words versus someone’s actions and not be in immediate danger. My mind raced formulating ideas for writing. If I can immortalize myself in writing, then the future humans after the crisis can read my work and read about the atrocious actions occurring here. I began to form a solid idea in my mind until the lights in the room and roll call woke me. My eyes shot open and were blinded by the piercing white lights. The lights nearly erased my idea for writing but I was able to recover it. I didn’t pitch the idea to my friends for days because I was afraid it wasn’t good enough.

My days continued with treatment, lunch, treatment and each day I never brought up the subject of immortalizing ourselves until one day I met the rumored gang. During lunch I was stopped by a girl. Going by the way Luke’s nervous demeanor, the girl was Amadi Byrd.

“The boss wants to speak with you”, said Amadi strictly.

“The boss?” I turned to my friends and they were frozen.

At the time, I assumed they thought it was a prank some of the younger kids created. I went with Amadi to a corner table to see a group of 6 burly guys, all I guessed to be at least 22 and 1 boy who looked to be around my age. The boy had circular thin rimmed glasses with a smile that led one to believe in his innocence. He wore a gray English driver hat that covered his short blonde hair. He spoke with a soft and gentle tone, similar to Rachel’s tone.

“Please take a seat, Matt.” Said the rimmed glasses boy.

“Are you Reinhardt?” The boy sat still. “I was expecting m-m-more” I spoke in false confidence though my stuturer didn’t help.

Reinhardt chuckled. “A false appearance creates many advantages in a world such as ours. You’ll understand that one day, Matt. Now, what is it that you want, Mr. Altman?”

“I-I want to speak to my family a-and to let them know I’m alive.”

“Talking to a loved one in another facility is a tough deal, especially if the loved one is an entire family. It’s pricey, are you sure you want this? Since you’re a newcomer, I’ll give you the option of taking back what you said.”

“Yes. I am sure.”

“I need you to find a person for me. He’s quite important to me and I need him found.”

“Who?”

“Daniel Tanner. Find him in 7 days and I’ll give you a conversation with your father, face to face.”

“I-I can’t find Tanner. I don’t know what he looks like. He-he could be dead or ran out of the country. I’m sorry but I can’t do this.” I stood getting ready to leave until Amadi grabbed me by the arm and threw me into my seat. I looked at Reinhardt. His demeanor morphed into a cold calculating expression. His voice became a growl.

“We aren’t going to let you leave unless you agree, so have a seat because we got all the time in the world.” Reinhardt’s brown eyes pierced into my soul. This innocent boy a few minutes ago transformed into a cold killer.

“Y’know what, I’m being too harsh. Since it’s your first time here, I’ll let you talk to your brother Luke over there”,

Said Reinhardt jovially.

“H-how did you know-?”

“I run this place. A mouse doesn’t squeak without my knowledge. Now you can talk it over with Luke.”

I bolted for the table where my friends were. I couldn’t talk to them because lunch had ended and the guards had pushed me out of the lunch room. The last thing I saw before I was pushed out of the lunch room was a glimpse Reinhardt’s blank cold gaze. I shudder at the power that the boy wields; his gaze haunts my mind as a reminder not to cross him ever again.

After treatment, I met with Patrick and Luke in our cell. Patrick came in as his usual chipper self and my brother suffered more injuries. They walked into my frantic pacing in the cell.

“Is everything ok, Matt?”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,y-yeah, it’s-it’s all good. It’s just that...rr-r-remember when the girl stopped me today during lunch?”

“Yeah” said Luke. Patrick already knew where this was going.

“Well I met the rumored gang. It turns out that they run the place. I asked them if I could talk to our dad. They said I have to find someone.”



“Who”, said Luke excitedly?

“Daniel Tanner.”

Patrick spoke urgently. “Matt, Daniel Tanner is a legend that the older inmates tell the younger inmates to give them hope for escape. Daniel Tanner is a symbol of hope and freedom for us prisoners.”

“Sssso I can’t find him because he isn’t real? Then who was that kid that was taken away? And why would the Crows play along?” I was angry. Why would they tell us about this great person if he was never real? Patrick shrugs. “Daniel Tanner is an imaginary person as far as I know. I don’t know if Reinhardt knows that.”

“H-He looked to be the same age as me so he may have believed it.”

“I have an idea. We could create a Daniel Tanner,” exclaimed Luke, “Patrick; do you know what Daniel looks like?”

“No. The others never told me.”

“That’s good because then we can use any boy to impersonate Daniel. Patrick, who is a really good actor that can impersonate a symbol such as Daniel Tanner?”

“Michael Yeager. He’s the best I’ve seen.”

“Ok, we should also have a backup plan just in case this goes south, any ideas?” said Patrick.

“There’s nowhere to hide in this place. Reinhardt told me that he’s got people throughout this place so there is no hiding.” I said.

“Well, we need to make sure Michael wants to impersonate him first then go on from there”, Luke added.

Patrick chuckled. “So Matt you’ll agree to Reinhardt’s deal tomorrow and I’ll tell the rest about Luke’s idea.”

The next day, I agreed to Reinhardt’s deal and the 5 day deal began. I returned to my friends’ table to see what they had decided.

“5 day deadline has started.”

“Yeah, I think it’s too risky. What if there is an actual person named Daniel Tanner and Reinhardt knows it”, asked Claire.

“We could ask around and see if anyone knows anything about Daniel Tanner or his roommate”, added Rachel. “I know of a few people I could ask.”

“That’s a good idea, except the roommate was taken away. How do we find him?”

“I could ask around. I know people that may know where the roommate went”, Alex stated.

“O-o-ok, you do that. Michael, ar-a-are you ok with impersonating Daniel Tanner in case we don’t find the roommate”, I asked?

“Yeah, yeah I can do that. I can make up anything I want right?” Said Michael.

Patrick said strictly. “No, the stories follow a specific theme of escaping and freedom. So you have to stick with that unless you want Reinhardt to kill us.”

“Right, I’ll ask around and see if I can understand his ideals and motives”, Michael replied.

“Lunch is about to be over. Matt do you need anything else”, Rachel asked?

“I need you and Claire to help with the search for Daniel Tanner and his roommate”

The next day arrived quickly. I was eager to see if any of my friends had found any information. I saw my friends gathered at the tablet talking to each other and exchanging ideas. Alex was the first to talk to me.

“Matt, there was no roommate. I couldn’t find any evidence of a kid roomed with Daniel Tanner.”

“What? How’s that possible”, I said?

“I don’t know.”

I turned towards Patrick. Patrick had a defeated look.

“So, now what”, asked Luke?

“I don’t know. We don’t know if there is an actual Daniel Tanner”, I said disappointingly.

Michael tapped the table. “Do you still want me to impersonate him?”

“Y-yes, Michael. You still impersonate him.”

Katie spoke strictly and cautiously. “Matt, what will happen to Michael if he impersonates Daniel Tanner too well?”

“That’s a good point. We don’t know what Reinhardt wants with this guy”, said Patrick.

“Matt, this is too much to info to gather within 5 days. I mean we need Michael’s acting skills and Reinhardt’s reason for wanting Daniel Tanner”, Claire stated.

Alex chuckled. “Always the pessimist, huh Claire?”

Claire looked irritated. Her quiet voice rose to a near shout.

“At least I think of bad outcomes and care for my friends. Open your eyes Alex, you aren’t in a fantasy!”

Patrick calmed the group. “Calm down alright? Katie brought up a good point. I don’t know what to do. I don’t like if Matt meets Reinhardt empty-handed”. Patrick calmly and confidently said, “Matt, it is your call. What do you want to do?”

All heads turned towards me increasing the pressure of making the decision between talking to my father and a friend going missing. Finally, I spoke with a soft tone, “Michael you won’t need to impersonate Daniel Tanner. I’ll hh-h-have to go empty-handed.”

“What’s he going to do to you?”, inquired Rachel.

“I-I don’t know. The deadline is almost up. We don’t have enough time.”

“No, but we could think of something else”, pleaded Rachel.

“When you think of a way to find a ghost, I’M ALL EARS!”, I yelled at Rachel.

Lunch had ended and I stormed out the room. I kept thinking over the options to finding Daniel Tanner . I could escape from my cell and find the discipline room. What really eluded me was the reason for Reinhardt wanting Daniel Tanner. Did Reinhardt know he is imaginary or did he know is identity. The night before the deal ended, Patrick said one thing in my mind that resonated for the rest of my life. “Hope for the best.” Those four words have kept me alive these six months to write this memoir. I lay on my bed still thinking if I should avoid Reinhardt or go to him empty-handed. Patrick’s words echoed in my head; furthermore, altering my dreams to revolve around ways to avoid Reinhardt’s wrath. Who would watch out for Luke if Reinhardt hurts me badly? Questions plagued my mind for hours on end. With only a few days before the deadline, how would I find Daniel?

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### **Week 3:**

The deadline passed. I could barely stand up without trembling. I didn’t even feel the beatings by the Crow during treatment; my fear masked the pain. It seemed like my time of death came instantaneously.

I walked to the lunch room from the treatment room. I sat where I usually do and waited for my friends, except they never came. I was standing to go and get my lunch until a calm voice said my name. “Hello Mathew.” I turned around to see Reinhardt standing on the other side of the table. He was accompanied with Amadi Byrd and one other burly boy.

“Where is Daniel Tanner?”said Reinhardt calmly.

“I couldn’t find him.”

Reinhardt looked at the table. “Well, that’s disappointing.” He looked to his bodyguard and whispered something barely audible to my ears. He looked back at me with his sharp brown eyes. “I told the Crows over at the adult facility to take your dad out. You shouldn’t have come empty-handed. I would’ve even accepted anything, Michael.”

“H-how-?”

“I own this prison”, said Reinhardt smiling, “You put your family’s life on the line when you made the deal. I gave you a chance to change the deal but you didn’t. So their death is all on you.”

I didn’t answer Reinhardt for a while. I didn’t know what to make of the situation.

As Reinhardt passed me, he put his hand on my shoulder and whispered, “oh and your friends are ok. They’re running a little late. See you soon my friend.” He patted my shoulder and left me sitting at the table sobbing.

My friends arrived to see my broken spirit.

“Matt, what happened”, asked Patrick? Patrick had bruises on his arm and face. The rest of my friends had similar injuries.

“Th-they’re g-gone”, I said sobbing. Luke had a blank expression on his face like his world just blew up in his face and he didn’t know what to make of it.

“I’m so sorry, Matt”, Rachel said empathetically,

“On the bright side, it looks like your stuttering is improving in a good way”, said Katie.

Patrick shook his head to Katie, silently saying “not now”.

I don’t remember how the rest of lunch and treatment went. The lights shut off and I settled into my bed. I had no dreams that night, for hours I stared into the face of utter darkness as if my mind couldn’t cope with the events of the day. The headcount for the next day was anything but ordinary.

We woke up when the call roared through the hallways and the lights burst bright white. I exited the room and stood in the hallway waiting to be counted.

The Crow walked into the hallway and screamed, “Matt Altman!”

The sound of my own name made me jump a little. I was unsure whether to answer or raise my hand. The scream from the Crow repeated, “MATT ALTMAN!”

“y-yyy-yes”, I replied squeamishly.

The Crow looked at me from the end of the hallway. I made eye contact with his authoritative glare. Two Crows marched towards me. Each grabbed one of my arms, lifting me off of my feet. They dragged me out of the hallway. I kicked and flared but they didn’t let go. The more I struggled, the stronger their grip on my arm became. I screamed for help but no one came. They dragged me throughout the hallways and I saw the faces of terrified kids who feared they’d be next. The Crow dragged me down a long narrow hallway that seemed to be in the depths of this facility. As I got closer to the door, I saw the name on it: Discipline Room. My heart pounded in my chest, I tried struggle for freedom one last time before they threw me into the abyss. Another Crow was waiting for me by the door; he opened a door. I was thrown inside the room. The floor felt like hard tile instead of the usual concrete my cell had. The room was lit with 5 bulbs incased in glass, four in each corner of the room and one on middle ceiling. There were three empty wooden chairs placed in random fashion throughout the room and two filled chairs. The first chair had a person covered in ragged clothing and a dirtied face as if he has been here a while. I knew the occupant of the second chair too well.

“Hello, Matt. I hope there’s no hard feelings between us”, said Reinhardt calmly.

“W-w-what are you do-do-doing here, Reinhardt?”

“I put you here. This is where it all ends. Everyone will understand.”

“What are you talking about?” The lights barely lit the room. I only made out Reinhardt’s figure in the pervading darkness.

“You are an example. By putting you here, fear of me runs deep into the minds of the prisoners, new and old. Now you stay here for the rest of your life, clinging to the edge of death with no escape.”

Reinhardt stood from his chair and walked towards the door.

“What about Daniel Tanner, he made it out of here.” Reinhardt turned around and smiled.

“Ask him yourself. He’s right there.” Reinhardt pointed at the raggedy fellow in the chair.

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#### **Week 4?**

“You’re Daniel Tanner”, I asked the man in the chair?

“In the flesh”, spoke the man. Daniel Tanner was weakened to the point that he could barely move.

“A-a-are you the legend the older ones have been talking about?”  
Daniel chuckled. “Don’t look like much, right? Yeah I’m the guy.”

“How did yy-you get h-hh-here??”

“I was put here 2 years ago and Reinhardt was put here 1 year ago. My first month here was spent being subject to cruel treatment and fear. But if you take away the fear, then the treatments of the Crows and Ravens had no effect. So I began spreading ideas of escape and freedom.”

“D-d-did you have any real idea of how to escape?”

“No, but the idea of freedom meant something to the inmates here. For the next 5 months of my life, I did spread hope and ideas. Spreading ideas didn’t bode well with the Crows. I was beaten relentlessly. Then Reinhardt came. He somehow gained control over the Crows. The Crows seemed more controlled with Reinhardt but they still carried out their treatments.”

“Did you know how he gained control?”

Daniel shook his head. “All I know is that Reinhardt runs this place. He decides who lives and who dies, who the Crows attack and drag away. He’s in complete control of this place.”

“W-w-why would you tell a story of escape and freedom if-if you knew there was no way out of here?”

“To give them hope, I would rather have the inmates fight for something rather than die for nothing.”

For once in my time here, I felt safe at home. I didn’t feel threatened by any Crow. Daniel Tanner had some aura of safety and trustworthiness; I guess that’s why the legend still lives. Daniel sat in his chair and I paced the room looking for a way out. As I paced, I heard whispers ghoulishly in my head saying “Wake up, Matt”. These ghoulish whispering gave me headaches making it impossible to think until Daniel speaking cured the headaches.

“You’re not going to find another way out other than the way you came”, said Daniel as he watched me pace the room.

I rubbed my head and looked towards him. “D-d-did you actually escape?”

“No. I made it up for the people. Do people still believe the stories?”

“I do. What does Reinhardt want with you? He asked me to find you and then threw me in here.”

“I don’t know. I’ve been in here since I can remember. Hell, I don’t even know if there is a world outside these facility walls.

“Reinhardt wants to be an absolute r-ruler.” The ghoulish whispering returns in my head.

“Yeah, basically.”

“H-h-have you given up hope for freedom? F-for living outside these walls?”

Daniel took a while to answer. His face scrunched together as if he had eaten a sour orange.

“Yeah, I’m done with this shit. I quit. If you haven’t noticed, these limbs are quite dead. I can do some but I can’t do much.”

“B-but the legend dies with you?”

“Matt, don’t tell anyone that you found me. My friends are dead. The people now wonder if I was ever real and I want it to stay that way.”

“A-a-alright, But wouldn’t you want people to know that you’re a real person?”

The whispering intensified in my mind.

Daniel shook his head. “As a symbol, I can be everlasting.”

I nodded not understanding the significance of what he said at the time.

The room had no clocks or windows like the rest of the facility. There was no timer on these walls. I couldn’t tell whether it was time to sleep or to stay awake. The lights in the room stayed on and never turned off. My body had trouble adjusting to the constant lighting. In my cell with Luke and Patrick, I slept when the lights went off and woke when they turned on; my body was well adjusted to it. By now the ghoulish whispering seemed like someone in the room was saying my name. The whispering made it difficult to sleep. To pass the time, I sat on the tile flooring staring at the door, ceiling, anything, even Daniel Tanner, to ignore the whispering. I stared at Daniel wondering what he was like in his prime. I tried to imagine Daniel telling me the story of freedom and living a world outside the facility walls. Even back then, I don’t even know if the world outside the facility still exists.

I dreamed of freedom. I escape with my brother and run into the cold. The sky had tints of gray even with the sun shining through. Birds flew in the sky in individual groups instead of flocks. As if even the birds realized it’s everyone for their selves. My brother’s kind attitude changed into a harsh bitter one. He looked at everything with spite. I couldn’t find my father in my dream. I walked with my brother down a dirt road looking for towns or villages. As I was walking, my brother vanished. I was alone by a dirt road looking for my brother. He was nowhere to be found. The ghoulish whispering of my name seemed to surround me. I stared at the constant gray sky wanting it to turn blue, but it didn’t. I looked down the road and saw Daniel Tanner. He stood on the other side of the road. I walked towards him but he seemed to move further simultaneously. Daniel had a clean look. He had lost his raggedy clothing in exchange for clean jacket and pants.

“Hello, Matt.” spoke Daniel Tanner angelically.

“How do I get out of here?”

“Dream.” Daniel vanished in a whirl of feathers. Crows emerged from Daniel’s vanished form. The crows

flew towards me blinding me with their dark feathered bodies. I woke up in my cell.

“Matt. You ok?” Luke stood by my bunk bed.

“W-what happened”, I said groggily?

“You fainted. It’s been a while.”

I yawned. “Where’s Reinhardt?”

“He died. Someone got to him. Good riddance, am I right?”

“Wh-wh-Where did you find me?”

“Matt, what are you talking about? You’ve been in your bed, unconscious.”

“What? B-b-but I was taken away by the Crows after the d-day I told you dad died.”

“Matt, dad could still be alive, we don’t know anything. You never woke up for headcount the next day. The Crows stopped doing headcount since Reinhardt died.”

This bothered me for ages. I couldn’t wrap my head around this lost time. I tried my best to remember what had happened but it was futile. Whether Daniel Tanner was a real person or not is beyond my understanding. I could barely move. Muscles had no energy and felt as though they were made of lead.

“Where’s Patrick”, I croaked using an depleting amount of strength.

“He’s sleeping in. The Crows are done keeping headcount. Matt, we might be able to escape!”

“We might”, I said plainly.

Luke gave me an odd look. “You aren’t excited to leave?”

I sighed. “Luke, I’m not even sure if a world exists outside these walls. Do you even remember your life before this facility? I vaguely remember it.”

“But we can get out —”

“—then what? We haven’t even thought that far ahead. What about the Ravens outside? Or the possibility that we could be the last of our kind? I mean you’ve heard of the natural disasters during our childhood.”

“We would think of something!”

“Things have changed.”

“Whatever. I’m going to lunch.” Luke began to walk away in indignation.

“Hey, wait what about the Crows”, I shouted!

“I don’t care.”

It took me hours to regain strength to chase after Luke. I saw Luke sitting by himself at the usual table. I sat

beside him. He ignored and silently scorned me.

“Luke, I don’t know what’s happened to me. I mean ever since we got here, we’ve been trying surviving against the Crows. If you’re worried that we’re ever going to be separated, don’t I’m not going anywhere. I’m just angry that I left you for 4 days alone in this place.” I put my hand on his shoulder and he turned around.

“I’m glad you’re back.” Luke hugged me.

“I’m sorry”, I whispered.

“Aw, that’s sweet. Family love”, Patrick said as he sat down, “Glad to see you’re up, Matt.” He sat beside me. “How you doing?”

“I’m great. Where’s the rest of the group”, I asked?

“Right here”, said Michael. Everyone else sat around me, my brother, and Patrick: Michael, Claire, Rachel, and Katie.

“Where’s Alex”, I asked.

Everyone looked at each other uncomfortably. Michael was the first to speak.

“he’s gone, Matt. His time was up. I’m sorry.”

Alex died the morning I woke up.

End of Month 1..





## **The Paradigm Shift: By Mohammad Khan**

### **Month 2**

#### **Week 5**

Time continued, the world still spun, even after my friend's death. We moved on because we knew we couldn't have done anything about Alex's death. Patrick was the most hurt by Alex's death since he was his first friend here. Some Crows still carried out treatments. Sometimes during the night, you could hear the screaming of inmates being beaten in the discipline room. The screams would keep me up a night. I couldn't help but imagine what torture the person must be enduring. I couldn't believe how this place would be allowed to exist anywhere. I used to believe in the fairy tales my parents told me and the books I read, but that belief was soon gone when I had arrived.

My time in the facility stayed consistent: wake up, treatment, lunch, treatment, and sleep. The Crows enforced the mandatory treatment attendance by coming into peoples' rooms and beating them up. They did come into my cell and nearly beat us to death. There was one lunch time that seemed embedded in my mind. One day, I was sitting with my friends eating the slop the cooks call food and we heard a scream in the room. We all looked around to see who was screaming.

"That sounds like Ryan", spoke Michael worriedly.

"Who's Ryan", asked Claire?

"My little brother."

"I thought you said your brother was a normal", said Katie?

"I did but... I don't know why I think it's him.....it's been a while since I've seen him."

But Michael's instinct was correct, his brother, Ryan, was here and running towards him with three Crows pursuing him. When Michael saw him, he instantly sprung into action and ran towards his brother. Patrick, Katie, Claire, Rachel, and I jumped to stop the guards if possible. Michael snatched Ryan into his arms and carry him away to safety while my friends and I held off the guards by pushing them back. I think I even saw Luke helping us hold off the guards. We were endlessly beaten with batons, but Michael was able to get his brother away and that's what mattered at the time. We met with Michael in his cell after the beating.

Michael's cell was similar to mine: two bunk beds and concrete floor and walls. We found Michael sitting with his brother. Ryan had ruffled black hair and suspenders with a striped shirt.

"I'm sorry you guys had to do that. It's just that when I saw Ryan, I had to do something", Michael said apologetically.

Patrick was the first to speak. "That's alright. You would've done the same if it was one of us. We need to stick together in this place."

"Ryan, these are my friends."

"He's a cute toddler. I do have one question, how the heck did he get in here", Katie asked?

"Ryan, how did you get in here?" Questioned Michael.

"I slipped past the people in the front and saw you and I ran to you", spoke Ryan cheerfully. His voice was full of joy and innocence. A quality quickly removed in this place.

"Do you know the way you came, Ryan", asked Claire?

Ryan nodded joyfully. Everyone's eyes lit up with joy.

"We could get out of here", exclaimed Rachel!

“Hold on, hold on, what about the guards”, asked Patrick, “I mean we could barely hold off three even with 6 people.”

“Ok we can think of that later. Ryan can you tell us which way to get out of here”, spoke Michael.

Ryan was about to open his mouth until the roar of roll call echoed through the hallway. Everyone scrambled out of Michael’s cell and went to their cells. I could see Michael’s cell at the end of the hall. The Crows lined us up in the hallway. They didn’t count anyone, they headed straight for Michael’s cell. A big Crow walked up to Michael and stared at him dead center.

“Give us the boy”, screamed the big Crow?

Michael didn’t respond. From where I was standing, it looked like he stared him down. Without speaking, Michael challenged the authority of a Crow. In my mind, I thought about the idea of writing to preserve what had happened here and as a testament for the future humans, if there are any. But my train of thought was stopped when I saw the Crow strike Michael across the face. Michael fell to his knees, spitting out blood. He was now in clear view. I could see the bruise where the big Crow struck him. I was only hoping that Ryan wasn’t watching this but I was wrong. Ryan burst from the cell, wailing his arms and legs in a tantrum at the Crow. The big Crow threw him against the wall. Michael immediately stood and faced the big Crow. Michael deafened his brother. Other Crows began to rush over and help their comrade. It took five Crows to restrain Michael. Ryan still lied on the ground beside the cell. The big Crow stood. He seemed to increase his stature and height. He began to beat Michael with his baton relentlessly as the other Crows held him up. I was about to move and help him until Patrick’s arm stopped me. I looked up and he shook his head at me. I noticed his red eyes and realized he hates it as much as I do. I watched, helpless.

I blocked Luke’s view because I did not want him to see this. The big Crow eventually stopped after he knocked Michael to the ground. The big Crow was about to walk towards Ryan until Michael stopped him. The big Crow chuckled. He grabbed Michael by the neck and held him up for everyone to see.

“Look at him. Anyone wants to be brave again and oppose me, this”, the big Crow displayed Michael like a trophy, “this is what will happen to you.”

He threw Michael down on the concrete floor. I could feel the ground shake when Michael landed. The big Crow pulled out his gun and pointed it at Michael.

I could hear him whisper angrily, “The thanks I get for trying to help these freaks, well no more.” The big Crow pulled the trigger and shot Michael in the head. The sound of the gun deafened me.

“ANYONE ELSE WANT TO BE BRAVE!” roared the big Crow. He walked over to Ryan’s unconscious body by the cell door. He spoke loudly, “Just to make sure it doesn’t happen again.” BANG!

The crow spoke once more. “This facility is now under new management! If anyone tries to fight, you will be killed. No one leaves this facility, even if you are cured. The only way you leave is death. Now you two”, he pointed at nearby inmates, “drag these pieces of filth out of here. I don’t want to hear another whimper out of anyone.”

The big Crow left and along with the other Crows. Everyone stood in their places, to see a fellow inmate and a young child be tossed out of here like garbage. I shook with anger, not fear. I was angry because I couldn’t do anything. We retreated to our cells. I looked at Patrick. I could tell he was holding back tears.

We went into our cell.

“Patrick,” I said empathetically, “Patrick, you couldn’t have done anything.”

“Matt, they shot Michael and his younger brother in front of us. We may not have been able to do anything about it but I’d feel a lot better if had done something.”

“Then, why did you stop me?”

“Because you’re too young, you have lot of time until you’re number is up. I don’t.”

“Yes, you do you have plenty of—”

“—no, no I don’t. I’ll be gone soon.” It struck me hard back then that my friends are basically living on borrowed time. I looked towards the timer in our room. I have no idea whose clock is whose, but time is running out.

To the Crows, we are nothing but tally marks on a count sheet. The idea of writing to immortalize ourselves still floated in my mind.

“What about the new management”, I asked?

“I don’t know. I don’t know what’s going to happen now. They may not choose to feed us or even treat us and try to cure us.”

Luke sat quietly listening to us talk to each other.

“Let’s get some shut eye. It’s been a long day, I think.” Said Patrick.

I chuckled at Patrick’s joke. I climbed into my bed. The lights remained on making it difficult to go to sleep. The lights reminded me of my dream of the discipline room and Daniel Tanner and how hard it was for my body to adjust to the constant light. Surprisingly, I quickly fell asleep from exhaustion from the events of the day.

I dreamed of nothingness. I stared into the face of darkness hoping for some light but nothing came. The darkness persisted in my mind. I tried changing forcibly but it still persevered. I couldn’t rid it from my mind no matter how hard I tried. I woke up the Patrick shaking me awake.

“Matt, it’s lunch time.” Said Patrick.

“What about treatment”, I said groggily?

“I don’t know. Guess new management is soft.”

I scoffed. “I doubt it.” Patrick and I left to the lunch room and found our friends already sitting. We sat beside them. Luke was already there sitting beside Claire. We were the only ones in the lunch room.

“Hey how are you guys”, asked Katie?

“Still alive.”, spoke Patrick.

I stayed quiet as my friends ate their lunch. The idea for writing to tell the world about what has happened here bothered me.

I couldn't hold it in so I spoke quickly and quietly. "Guys, I have an idea."

Rachel looked at me oddly. "What happened to your stutter, Matt?"

I didn't realize it either. My stutter was almost gone.

"Oh, yeah, ok so my idea is that we write about what has happened to us during our time here. That way the future would know about us and the true colors of this facility. By writing we have immortalized ourselves, and allow us to influence history."

"Unless they burn the writings", spoke Claire.

I continued. "History is being written here and new management has the pen. We need our own pen. If we do, we can rewrite history by showing what COHS actually started: a global Purge. I would rather have the bad things occurring here in a history book than the writings of the Crows and Ravens."

I waited a while to see what my friends had to say on the matter. They shook their heads into approval. Claire was the first to speak.

"Just one problem, where do we get paper?"

"We could use some paper from the books we have", said Luke.

"But my book has printed double sided, so that won't work."

"It might, we could write in between the words in the book", said Patrick.

"Ok then we'll write in between the words. Does everyone have a book", I asked?

I was surprised that my friends had books of their own. I didn't meet many avid paper book readers during my short life.

"So what do we call ourselves, Matt", asked Katie?

"What do you mean?"

"I mean we need a collective so the future knows that we were together."

"Oh, ok. Uh, any ideas?" For a while no one spoke. Many suggestions were given, like Freedom Writers or the dead writer's society.

"We definitely need the word 'writer' in it or it won't work", said Rachel.

"That's true", said Luke, "Does anyone have any good names?"

"Libertalia", said Patrick. "A secret pirate colony where the misfits of the world created their own utopia."

The group agreed in silence.

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## **Week 6**

I was given the responsibility to keep all of the writings by everyone when they were finished. It was a big responsibility and a heavy burden. Everyone's writing spanned their entire books. They gave me their

books in the lunch room.

Until, one day we were called into the lunch room by new management.

We were sleeping in our cells. The lights of the room remained on making it difficult to go to sleep. I was able to go to sleep until someone pounded on my door.

“Wake up. Management wants you in the feeding area!” roared a soldier.

Patrick and I looked at each other. Luke was still asleep. Patrick shrugged. I got down from my upper bunk and shook Luke awake. Luke gave me an annoyed look. I whispered to him, “Management wants us in the lunch room.”

We sprinted out of our cell and headed towards the lunch room. The room was filled with guards and many prisoners that I didn’t know. We found the rest of our friends sitting at the same table.

“Do you know what’s going on?” asked Katie.

“No. But it can’t be good”, said Patrick.

“We can hope.” asked Luke.

“Because they killed Michael and his younger brother. I don’t trust them at all to do anything good.” Spoke Patrick harshly.

Luke looked hurt and stayed quiet the rest of the meeting. I saw the big Crow standing on top of a stage with 3 other crows around him. He raised his hands and the guards close to the entrances to the lunch room rush to close the doors.

“Everyone listen up!” wailed the big Crow, “Now, I’ve called you here to say that everyone’s sentences in this care facility has been shortened by 2 months. If you’ve been here for more than 2 months, you will be killed by the end of this month. For those of you under 2 months attendance will stay on your regular treatment schedule.”

Silence encompassed the room. No one spoke for a while. You could hear other people breathe from across the room.

The big Crow spoke again. “Any disobeying to our authority will result in immediate death. Any keeping of normal or disabled persons in your cell will result in immediate death. Your cells are subject to complete search at anytime for any reason. I promise that you will die alone if we find any paraphernalia or other illegal items. Now get out.”

All of the inmates scrambled out of the room. I met up with Patrick and Luke in our cell.

“Patrick, do you think they’re going to find the writings?” I asked.

“As long as you don’t give them a reason for them to look here.....I told you Matt, there is no Crow that isn’t a dictator-like.”

“There must be some”, pleaded Luke, “I mean the world couldn’t have turned against us that quickly, not everyone at least.”

Patrick shook his head. “I lost my faith in humanity when Michael died. Face it Luke, it’s us against the

world.” Luke went to sleep exasperated.

I spoke hesitantly. “You don’t believe that, do you Patrick?” Patrick looked at me. His expression looked unsure. Patrick shook his head and lay on his bed.

I looked at the clocks on the wall. The time was lower significantly. That’s what Patrick meant when I first met him. Those clocks count down to our end.

Those are the doomsday clocks.

I dreamed of the world that I knew before this facility. I was walking in a city with many people giving me odd looks. I walked into a restaurant and asked for food, but my stutter returned and I could barely talk clearly. The waitress looked down upon me. She asked me to leave the restaurant or she’ll call the Ravens. I got up and headed for the exit. I opened the door and found the doors locked. I was trapped inside the restaurant. The waitress forcibly ordered me to leave the restaurant. I pleaded with her that I couldn’t get out because of the locked doors. The waitress called the Ravens and they instantly appeared in the restaurant. But they didn’t look like the Ravens I saw when I was first taken away, it was new management. The big Crow began to walk towards me. I frantically looked for a way out. I jumped through the window pane and into darkness, barely escaping the clutches of the big Crow. I could feel the wind rushing past me as I plummeted through the dark. I saw a blinding white light approaching me from below. I quickly went through the white light and hit a hard surface, waking me up instantly.

I woke up in a cold sweat. I looked around my room. The light was still on; my brother and Patrick were still fast asleep. I tried to go back to sleep but I couldn’t. I lay on my bed looking at the bare ceiling. I thought about the four days I was unconscious and whether Daniel Tanner was actually located within the discipline room or if he was even real. Reinhardt died about 1 month ago and I never questioned how. I don’t remember how long Reinhardt was here but he at least a few more months left. I decided to wake up Luke and Patrick to ask them what happened the four days I was unconscious. I dropped from my upper bunk and shook both Luke and Patrick awake.

“What the hell, Matt?” said Patrick groggily, “What do you want?”

“What happened the time I was unconscious”, I asked. Patrick and Luke immediately looked at each other. As usual, Patrick was the first to speak.

“Well, uh. Let’s see what did happen on those four days? Uh, Reinhardt died.....I’m sorry Matt, it’s been a while and my memory is fuzzy.”

“Luke, what happened on those days?” I saw Luke look at Patrick worriedly.

“Well, it’s like what Patrick said. Reinhardt died during —”

“—how did Reinhardt die?” I interjected.

Patrick interjected. “—The Crows got him. His time was up, simple as that.”

“But I thought Reinhardt’s time was already up. I mean he was put here one year ago, right? So why would the Crows—” I shut my mouth immediately realizing that Patrick and Luke don’t know about my encounter with Daniel Tanner. Patrick and Luke looked at me oddly.

“How do you know that Reinhardt was put here already?” asked Patrick suspiciously.

“Does it matter?” I replied. “How did Reinhardt die?”

“Matt, who told you that Reinhardt has been here for a while?” asked Luke, sternly.

“Uh, you wouldn’t believe me.” I spoke hesitantly.

“Matt, who told you,” repeated Luke.

I sighed. “Daniel Tanner told me.”

Patrick scoffed. “I told you, Matt, Daniel Tanner isn’t real. I made him up.”

“No. I saw him. He is a real person. He’s in the discipline room. Reinhardt kept him locked up....for reasons I still don’t know.”

“Matt, you were in your room the entire time.”

“What aren’t you telling me?” I demanded.

“Well—”, Patrick began to speak until he was interrupted by a banging on the door.

“Patrick Garrett! Step outside this cell immediately!” roared a voice. All of us stood immediately and headed out the door. Patrick opened the door to see a Crow waiting for him. He passed the Crow and went down the hallway. My brother and I tried to go with Patrick but the Crow stopped us.

He spoke with an authoritative voice, “Only Patrick, no one else.”

Luke and I sat on Luke’s bed waiting for our friend to return. I noticed the guard forgot to close the door entirely. I thought about escaping but that would endanger Luke so I forgot that idea. While we waited, I continued to badger Luke about the missing four days.

“Matt, I barely remember what during the time you were unconscious.” Said Luke feeling annoyed.

“Ok. Where do you think Patrick went?”

“I don’t know. He did say his time was up.”

I nodded. “And new management did shorten the sentences to 4 months.” Luke and I continued to sit together in silent for a while. At the time, I didn’t realize how twisted it was. I was barely concerned for a friend, whom I’ve come to trust, that disappeared. I’ve been in the “care facility” for a while now and my sense for concern of other people other than my brother had disappeared. It’s a dog eat dog world for me.

“So how long do you think we’ve been here?” asked Luke.

I shrugged. “I don’t know.” I looked at the doomsday clocks. “But we don’t have much time left.”

“You’re not afraid of new management?”

“I don’t know. After losing so many people, it’s hard to fear death anymore.”

“You’ve given up on escaping? What about the group?”



“Libertalia was a way for us to carve our names into history so people will know what happened here; it’s not a way for us to physically escape but a way for us to mentally escape. I’ve given up on escaping because what is there left for us? Mom and Dad could’ve suffered the same fate as dad for all we know.”

“But we still have to try.”

“Luke, we don’t even know where we are or where Mom, Dad, or Alice is. If we escape, we’re running blind.”

“What the fuck happened to you?”

“Hey!” I still can’t believe that my 4 year old brother has grown up so much.

“Oh, shut the hell up. We’re living on the edge of death and you still want me to follow those damn rules? We can’t follow those same rules anymore. We need to adapt. It’s us against the world, only we can help ourselves”, wailed Luke, “I’m sorry but- but if you’ve given up your life and won’t fight for it then I don’t want to be near this at all.”

“Luke, you’re getting yourself worked over nothing. So let’s calm down and—”

“No. No, I am done. You’ve held me back for too long. I’m done. You’re not my brother anymore.” Those words dug into my skin. I left Luke alone for the rest of the time. I climbed up onto my upper bunk and lay there for a while. For a while, my mind split in half. One half thinking what I could’ve said differently and the other half thinking that this entire thing will blow over soon. I didn’t hear Luke move at all below my bed. I thought he had gone to sleep as well. I heard Luke speak quietly.

“If you’ve given up on your life, at least help your friends survive.” With that, I heard the door of my cell shut and lock.

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## **Week 7**

“Luke! Luke, what the hell are you doing?” I shouted through the door. I heard no reply coming from the door. I kept yanking on the door to see if could force it open. I heard boots coming towards my door. I backed from the door, thinking what to say to the Crow. I couldn’t tell them that Luke went missing because then he’d kill Luke for trying to escape and kill me for fun. I could hear the Crow unlocking the door from the outside. The door unlocked and the Crow poked his head into my cell.

“Is everything ok?” The Crow had a kind face. The way he spoke nearly threw my off. I expected him to be tough and rigorous. “I heard someone pulling on this door.”

“Uh, no everything is, everything.....my brother went missing. Can you help me find him?”

The Crow opened the door fully and stood in the doorway. “Sure, what does he look like?”

“He’s a bit shorter than me. He has brown hair. His name is Luke Altman.”

“Ok, I’ll see if I can find him.” The Crow began to leave.

“Hey wait. What’s your name?” I asked the Crow before he left.

The Crow looked at me and smiled. “My name is Jared Holt. I work this hallway. What’s your name pal?”

“Matt Altman.”

The Crow nodded. “Ok, Matt. I’ll see what I can do about your brother.” The Crow left my cell and locked the door from the outside. The guard left me alone in my cell.

I remembered one thing Patrick said about all of the Crows and the rest of humanity turning against us. Jared defies that. If Jared is as benign as he makes himself out to be then there maybe hope for humanity after all. I paced my tiny cell to waste time. I hoped Jared could find Luke. I did wonder what happened to Patrick. I stopped pacing my room and sat in Luke’s lower bunk bed. I never realized back then how poisonous being alone can be: you’re left to your thoughts for conversations, you being to question what you see and hear and you have no one to share it with. Over time these thoughts begin to morph your mind and you yearn for human contact. Even someone speaking on the other side of the door would suffice, just anything but your thoughts. Luckily, back then I had still had some friends left. I still sat on Luke’s bed waiting for someone to return. I heard the locks turn on my door. I stood to see who was opening my door. Patrick nonchalantly entered the cell.

“Hey Matt, where’s Luke? What’s wrong?”

“Patrick? What happened? I thought you were dead.”

“Last time I checked. I’m still here. So where’s Luke?”

“He ran after you. He thought you were being euthanized.”

“Oh man. You didn’t try to stop him?”

“He and I had a disagreement. He locked the door behind him before I could stop him. I told a Crow to find him.”

“YOU WHAT! Matt, why the hell would you involves the Crow?! You can’t trust any of them.” shouted Patrick.

“But I may have found one that we can trust. His name is Jared Holt. He seems like a kind person.”

“Seems? That’s not good enough. I hope you’re right Matt, for your brother’s sake.” I trust Patrick’s judgment but I couldn’t help but think he was wrong in this case.

“So why were you called?” I asked Patrick.

“They called the wrong guy.”

“Really? How the hell did that happen?”

Patrick shrugged. “I guess the guard misheard my name.”

“Wow, what name was actually called?”

“I think Alice something. I forget the last name.” said Patrick scratching his head. My eyes went huge. “Alice? Alice who?”

“I don’t remember why?”

“My younger sister had the same name but she and my mom went to a different facility. It’s been a while since I’ve seen them.”

“If she’s somewhere else then, I don’t think it’s your sister Alice.”

“What did she look like?!”

“She-she was a small person with wavy brown hair.”

“That’s Alice! I have to get to her.” I got up and ran to the door and started to pound the door with all my might.

Patrick stopped me.

“What the hell are you doing?”

“I’m trying to call the Crow I met. My sister is out there and I need to save her!”

“Matt, she’s gone. They were lining people up to kill them. They pulled the trigger after I left. I heard the gunshots.....I’m sorry.” I pushed myself from Patrick. Even though I wasn’t sure if that was Alice, I cried. I couldn’t stop crying for a while. I heard the doors begin to unlock. I immediately stopped crying. Patrick and I simultaneously jumped away from the door. The door unlocked and opened fully.

Jared held Luke by the arm.

“Is this your younger brother, Matt?” asked Jared. I nodded.

He gave a slight nudge to Luke, ushering him to go inside. Luke stepped inside and hugged Patrick.

“Goodbye Matt.” Jared closed the door and locked it.

“Luke, where did you go?” asked Patrick.

“I went looking for you. I thought you were going to be killed.”

“No, they called the wrong name apparently.”

Luke looked at Patrick oddly. “Whose name did they call?” Patrick gave me a glance. I shook my head no.

“It-it doesn’t matter, Luke. I’m okay. That’s what matters.” Luke seemed to buy that logic. He never brought up why Patrick survived ever again.

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## **Week 8**

Luke kept giving me a cold shoulder. He cut all ties of even talking to me. He’d only talk to me indirectly and only in company of others. Life continued for us in this manner for some time. I spent most of my time alone in the cell. One good thing came of this loneliness: time to reflect. I knew I was going to die; it was only a matter of when. The doomsday clocks didn’t help. The numbers kept falling I never knew if they were hours, days, minutes, seconds, anything.

I wasn’t afraid of dying. What I feared was dying before Luke. I would worry about Luke if I had died before him. The time I was unconscious still plagued my mind relentlessly. I thought about asking Luke what did happen but realized it would anger him more.

Most days started with me waking up to empty bunk beds of Luke and Patrick. They always beat me waking up. I went to sleep before both of them. Some days, I almost forgot I had roommates. I remembered Luke but I barely remembered Patrick; lunch was the only forget-me-not I had. Even during lunch, Luke avoided me. He would sit on the other side of the table and out of my sight. I decided to ask Katie about the time I was unconscious.

“Hey Katie”, I whispered, “do you remember what happened the time I was unconscious?”

“What are you talking about, Matt?”

I saw Patrick’s head slightly turn in my direction.

I whispered quieter than a mouse. “You don’t remember me being gone?”

“No. You’ve been here for as long as I can remember—”

Patrick interrupted quickly. “Matt, why don’t you leave that alone? It’s over. Those days are gone.”

“Patrick, how do you know how long I was unconscious for since there are no clocks anywhere in this goddamn place?”

Patrick stammered to talk. “Matt, it doesn’t matter what happened.”

“So something did happen? Is anyone going to tell me?” I looked around and most of my friends kept their eyes from meeting mine. I looked at Luke, silently pleading for him to tell me but he looked away. Patrick finally spoke up.

“Ok. The day you told us your father died, you went to your bunk and slept. The next day, we lined up and the Crows called your name. The Crows dragged you away. We didn’t see you for a long time and we all thought you were dead. And then we found you in our cell with a letter on my bed. The letter was from Reinhardt which threatened us if we spoke about what happened to you. So all of us kept it a secret, hoping you wouldn’t remember it.”

“Not telling me made it worse. I wasn’t able to live in peace; the missing time haunted me. Look, I know you guys meant well but keeping information about a missing time in my life wasn’t right.”

“Thank god we can talk about it now” said Rachel happily. “Now, Matt, tell us what actually happened to you during your vanished time.”

I spun my tale of my time with Daniel Tanner and the discipline room. I still have a hard time believing that I met the legend Daniel Tanner to this day. After I finished telling my story, I asked them about what I had missed.

“Ok. When we realized you weren’t coming back, we looked throughout this facility for you. The Crows thought we were trying to escape and beat us relentlessly. After a few failed tries looking for you, we thought you were dead. A while later, rumor spread that Reinhardt had died. We looked for any evidence of it and found one: the restraint of Crows vanished completely and was replaced later with new management. Another piece of evidence was that he was nowhere to be seen. And then you magically appeared in your cell, sleeping in your bed.”

“And Reinhardt? You’re sure he’s dead” I asked.

“We haven’t found any evidence that he’s alive” said Claire.

“Ok. I hope he’s dead.”

We continued to eat our lunch. The food seemed to be improving in quality making it nearly edible. I heard the doors shut and saw multiple Crows come into the lunch room and block the doors. The big Crow walked into the room with booming voice.

“It has come to my attention that a few defected people have tried to avoid their time. If they step up before I count to five, they will be killed privately in a different room. If they do not step up, they will die where they are and a few more defects at random. They will die in this lunchroom and we will not remove their bodies. Come forth if you are one of them.”

Nobody moved a muscle in the room. I exchanged glances with my friends, silently asking ‘is it you or me?’

“5!” screeched the big Crow. Still no one movement in the lunchroom.

“4.....3!.....2!”

You could hear everyone shuffling about worried about what would happen after one.

“1!.....Last chance for those handicapped.”

The big Crow looked around. “Very Well! You may now attack.”

The big Crow ushered toward the crowd of inmates. At first I was confused at why he was telling us to attack but then I saw. I saw four inmates rise and begin to walk towards designated targets in the crowd. Complete chaos erupted in the room.

Everyone began to head for the doors for fear of being killed. The Crows held the doors shut while a large flood of inmates headed towards them. Screaming nearly deafened me. I tried running towards the door. I snatched Luke by the arm and dragged him with me towards the door. I could tell he was screaming something, maybe it was someone’s name or maybe he was just resisting. During my rush towards the exit, Luke slipped out of my grasp. I couldn’t find him in the crowd of inmates and guards. The flood pushed me out of the room.

I ran to my cell hoping to find Luke or Patrick. I arrived and found neither of them. I ran out of my cell and tried to head back to the lunch room, but the current was too strong. I headed back to my room and waited for Luke and Patrick there. I waited and waited but they never arrived. The current of inmates died down and Luke and Patrick were nowhere to be found. I could hear the boots of Crows come marching down the hallway. I tried to look out and find the one Crow who might be able to help me but he too was nowhere to be found.

The Crow shoved me into my cell and locked the door. Before the Crow had shoved me, I caught a whiff of a horrendous stench. I remembered what the big Crow had said, the stench was from the dead bodies.

Realizing there was nothing to do but wait, I fell asleep. In my dream, I was back in the same restaurant. Everything played out exactly as it had before, except when the Crow tried to attack me, I fought back. At first, I was successful but as the fight dragged on, I began to fatigue and I was captured by the Crow. The Crow dragged me out of the restaurant and into a police car. He tossed me into the police car. I bumped into another person as I was thrown into the police car. The person caught me and helped me back up. “First time being thrown into a police car?” asked the person.

“Yeah.”

“Well, try to have your back hit the other side, not your head. It’ll be less painful that way.”

I was handcuffed and struggling to sit properly. Someone helped me. “Hey, thanks for the assist.” I looked up and saw who it really was.

“No problem. I’ve been helping people for years” said Daniel Tanner.

“Daniel” I said joyfully.

“It’s nice to see you again, Matt.” The car zoomed through the streets.

“What did you do to get yourself locked up, Matt?”

“I-uh fought a Crow.”

“Nice. I took on a Raven and won.”

“If you won why are here?”

“He had backup. They got me and tossed me in here.”

I chuckled. “Well, at least you got one.” I turned towards the window. I saw huge skyscrapers flying by and colorful lights streaking my field of view. I thought about the smell of dead bodies and thought of my brother and my friends.

“Hey Daniel, do you think the world would stop creating facilities like this?”

Daniel took his time answering. “After we’re dead.”

“Do you think this is right? Do you think people like me deserve this?”

“Honestly, I’m not sure. I haven’t seen a clock for a while. I don’t even remember what one looks like. I don’t even know there is a world outside the walls of the facility. You still have a lot to learn about the world. The world isn’t a nice place. People are cruel, mean, and relentless. People do things bad even when they know it’s wrong but it’s for the greater good. That’s why this is happening to us, it’s for the greater good.”

“So, you agree with the actions of the Ravens and Crows?”

“They’re just doing what they are told. COHS is what I don’t agree with. I mean who the fuck would authorize the genocide of nearly half the population of Earth?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know but it happened.”

The police car slowed to a halt at quarry. The quarry still looked huge even in the dead of night. There were many floodlights in the quarry and they all seemed to be turned towards the middle of the quarry. The Crow dragged me and Daniel outside of the car.

“March up the quarry” spoke the Crow loudly.

“Close to the edge of the middle quarry.”

Daniel and I marched to where the officer said. As I got closer to the edge, the floodlights illuminated what I saw. Thousands of bodies strewn throughout the middle of the quarry. They looked to be tossed in carelessly. The floodlights illuminated each and every body allowing me to see every inanimate detail. Bodies were on display for whom, I have no idea. Maybe for people like me, as a message for this is the end. It’s over and no one is coming to save you. Daniel and I reached the edge of the quarry; we looked at each other knowing what’s coming next.

“Any last words” asked the Crow.

“Fuck it” said Daniel with a smile. His remark made me chuckle and made me forget what was about to happen. In my last moment, I laughed knowing it was over. I heard a gunshot and saw Daniel’s body tumble forward and into the quarry. I looked at Daniel’s dead corpse, he was smiling. The stench of rotting corpses made me faint, causing me to fall head over heels into the quarry.

I woke from my dream to the smell of rotting bodies. The odor was intolerable. I could hear people gagging and vomiting from the smell. I got up from my bed. Both Luke and Patrick’s bed was still empty. The stench of dead bodies enveloped my room. I couldn’t escape the smell even with my nose plugged. I haven’t gone to treatment for a while now. I think they’ve given up on us. The call for lunch echoed through the hallways. I heard my door unlock and I hurried to the lunch room to see if I could find my friends.

The big Crow was serious. I entered the lunch room to find a pile of dead, rotting corpses of inmates. I noticed the Crows had gas masks on which gave them the appearance of Ravens. The Crows wore their gas masks unaffected by the rotten smell of the bodies. I sat with my food at the usual table. Unable to eat, I pushed my food aside. I saw Rachel and Katie join me at the table. All of us had our noses plugged. “Do you know where Luke is” I asked with my plugged nose.

“No” replied Rachel. “Have you seen Patrick?”

“No. Where’s Claire?”

“She wasn’t in her cell. I checked” said Katie. “You don’t think they’re—” Katie ushered towards the pile of the dead.

“I hope not” I said. “Let’s see if they come later.”

So we waited, but they never arrived. Rachel, Katie, and I exchanged worried glances. We looked the dead pile simultaneously.

Lunch had ended. I walked by the dead pile and saw a Luke’s tag from his uniform. I also saw Patrick’s head sticking out from the pile and Claire on top of the pile. Tears welled up in my eyes. I kept walking and I saw him, the Crow that could’ve helped. I angrily walked over to Jared and charged him.

“Matt? What are you doing?” I kept pushing him. “Matt, stop or I’ll have to detain you” whispered Jared. I didn’t stop. I was restrained by other Crows and beaten by their batons. I was beaten unconscious. The last thing I remember was Rachel and Katie also being struck by the guard’s baton.

I regained consciousness in another room. The floor was tiled. I looked around. I was lights at the four corners of the room. I was sitting in a chair. I was in the discipline room.

“Hello Mathew” said a voice behind me. “It’s been a long time.” I turned around and saw Reinhardt sitting behind me. He had bandage around his hand. Reinhardt noticed me looking at his injury. “This is a little souvenir from new management. They took a hammer to my hand.”

“It can’t be worse than what you did to me, Reinhardt” spoke Daniel Tanner sitting against the back wall. “You’ve kept me locked up here. Karma’s a bitch, isn’t it?”

“Why are we here?” I asked.

“This is where the outliers and disrupters go. What are you in for, Matt?”

“I harassed a Crow.”

Reinhardt laughed. “I didn’t think you’d have it in you.”

I chuckled at Reinhardt's remark. "So now what?"

"Now we wait for our number to come up."

"We stay here forever?! What about the stuff in our cells or our roommates?"

"Your roommates go on without you. The stuff gets trashed after a while. Why you have something important?"

"Yes" I spoke quietly. The door began to rattle. Someone was unlocking the other side.

A Crow opened the door: Jared Holt.

"I'm sorry for putting you here, Matt, but you I had to detain you for attacking me."

Reinhardt chuckled. Jared gave me, Daniel, and Sebastian a bag full of food. Jared began to leave.

"Wait" I shouted. "Can I ask you to do one last favor?" Jared stopped and turned.

"What do you need?"

"There are books in my cell stashed beneath my bed. I need them, especially *Peter Pan*."

"Ok." With that, Jared left the room. The door shut loudly. I could hear Jared fumbling with the locks outside. Jared's footsteps receded from the door. Silence encompassed the room. I stayed in my chair. I could hear Reinhardt's rasped breathing.

"So how did they manage to drag you in here, Reinhardt" I asked.

"You try fighting back with a shattered hand. I guess you'll die here, instead for what I had planned for you."

"I don't want to know what you have planned for me but yeah it looks like this is it" I said.

End of Month 2..



**The Paradigm Shift: By Mohammad Khan**

**Month 3**

**Week 9**

“Is it true what they say” asked Reinhardt. “About the dead bodies in the lunch room?”

“Yes. It’s true.”

“Christ” Reinhardt chuckled. “I heard the Crows talking about it but I didn’t think they had the stones to do it.”

“Well, they did. My brother and roommate were one of the victims.”

“I’m sorry about that, Matt; I wish I could’ve done something.”  
I scoffed. “I doubt that. You would try to kill them.”

“I only threatened to kill them. That’s completely different than actually killing them.”

“Of course it is” I said under my breath.

I stayed in the same spot in the discipline room for what felt like months. It was the same as before. I worried about my friends. They have no idea what happened to me after I had attacked Jared. I tried sleeping but as usual, the constant lights made it quite difficult. I guess Daniel noticed me trying to force myself asleep. He pulled up a chair and sat beside me and tapped me on the shoulder

“You can fall asleep better if you don’t force it” said Daniel lively.

I woke up groggily. “Last time I was here you were barely alive.”

“Yeah, I’ve had a revelation of a sort.”

“Really, what kind? I may need one, if I survive this.”

“If I’ve survived this much, I can survive anything.”

“And that’s got you this far?”

“Yeah don’t believe me? Try it yourself.”

“I sure hope that cute mindset will help me.” added Reinhardt.

“It will work if you ever gave it a chance” said Daniel.

“Everyone dies alone. And no one is coming to save you.”

We sat in silence. Reinhard stayed in his chair emerging in and out of consciousness.

Reinhardt spoke kindly. “Thank you Daniel, for everything.” His eyes slowly shut. His bandage was coated in blood and his breathing came to a halt.

Another Crow came into the room to deliver food but it wasn't Jared. Jared never came. I feared he was killed by the big Crow.

Some time passes, Daniel is sleeping against the wall and I am still in my chair and Jared still did not return with my book. Reinhardt sat in his same old rotting wooden chair. I fell asleep for the first time but it didn't last long. I was woken up by the subtle but noticeable sound of dripping. It was a constant flow of something dripping. I looked around the room to see if there was a pipe leakage. I looked over at Reinhardt to find him keeled over in his chair. The blood trickled from his hand onto the tile floor. I couldn't hear his breathing. Reinhardt's eyes stayed shut and I feared for forever. I went to Daniel and nudged him awake. He went to Reinhardt to check for a pulse. I already knew what Daniel had found without him saying it. Reinhardt is dead. Daniel left his body as it was, dangling on the edge of his chair by the exit. I saw Daniel's eyes fill with tears. He didn't talk but I could tell he was hurt.

I spoke softly. "Are you okay?"

"Y'know he brought this upon himself" said Daniel chuckling. "Even though he threw me in here, I still respected him."

"He left you here to die. Why would you still like him?"

"He and I were best friends before all of this happened. Reinhardt would back me up in schoolyard fights. When Reinhardt was fifteen, his father was gunned down by a police man for a suspected weapon. We later found out that Reinhardt's father was holding a water gun. Reinhardt was playing tag with water guns when his father was shot. He never got over his father's death. And then two years later, he lost his mother to breast cancer, leaving him and his younger sister. When these "care facilities" began to emerge throughout the country, Reinhardt was separated from his sister. He and I were sent here. Reinhardt didn't like feeling helpless as he was with his parents. That's why he wanted control of the Crows, to control who lives and who dies. At first, I was on board with that but the Reinhardt became corrupt with the power he possessed. He threw me in here when he heard that I was telling people to fight for their freedom. In a way, Reinhardt was the gate keeper of this place. He decided who left and who entered. He kept those who tried to gain power in check but now he's gone, new management runs this place."

"I'm sorry Daniel. I had no idea he meant that much to you." Daniel walked over to the door of the discipline room.

"He was family. The last family I had left." Daniel began to pound angrily on the door.

The pounding echoed throughout the room. I saw the Crow burst through the room.

"What's going on he—" Daniel jumped on the Crow and began to beat him relentlessly. The Crow lay unconscious on the ground as Daniel stole his gas mask and baton. He turned towards me.

"Are you coming or not?"

"Where are we going?"

"We're going to end this."

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## **Week 10**

As I write this part of my life, I have to admit that my sense of time has left. I'm not entirely sure when events happen, only that they happen. My time spent here has injured me both physically and psychologically. I can feel my end approaching as I write my final chapter of my life.

Daniel led me through the hallways of the facility. He carried a baton but a hidden gun as well. He

handed me the gun.

“What do you me to do with it?”

“Use it when I get in trouble.” I had never carried a gun before, nevertheless shoot someone. We continued roaming the hallways. A guard turned the corner at the same time as we did. The guard was met with a baton to the face.

“Keep going” said Daniel hyped up on adrenaline.

“Where are we going, Daniel?”

“We’re going to take down the big Crow. If he’s dead, then it’s all over.”

“What about the other Crows? They won’t just disappear.”

“They will. They’re bought guards. They’ll run as soon as the money stops flowing.”

“You think the big Crow pays them” I asked struggling to keep up with Daniel’s stride.

“It would make sense. If he isn’t then I hope that gun is fully loaded.”

As we continued our brisk jog through the hallways of the facility, I noticed all of the cell doors were open. It must’ve been lunch time. Daniel was increasing the distance between us. My legs began to burn; I hadn’t eaten in a while. I couldn’t keep up with Daniel. He continued running without me. A Crow jumped in front of me and attacked Daniel. He threw Daniel into the wall cracking it. Daniel fought back by swinging his club erratically. I held the gun in my shaking hand. I aimed the gun at the Crow beating down upon Daniel.

“Shoot ‘em” shouted Daniel from the fray. “Shoot him, Matt!”

My mind and heart went to war within me. My heart told me to pull the trigger as an act of revenge, but my mind suggested me to be merciful. My hand shook violently at the internal war raging. “Matt” screamed Daniel. I pulled the trigger and shot the Crow in the back.

Daniel pushed the Crow off of him. “See it wasn’t so hard? Just make sure they don’t get back up next time.” Daniel took my gun and shot the crow in the head.

He took off and I followed quickly. We arrived in the lunch room to find it half empty. The inmates looked at us oddly. They looked at Daniel’s baton and at the gun I was holding. I saw many smiles and one kid who stood and shouted, “RIOT!”

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## **Week 11**

The entire room filled with chaos, bodies scrambling to join the riot or escape it. The Crows were thrown into the mix and were quickly overrun. I saw Katie and Rachel running towards us. I was about to run to them until Daniel dragged me to the side.

“Look, the big Crow is going to come. We need to kill him. Are you prepared to do that?”

I nodded instinctively.

“Good, because he’s here.” You could tell the big Crow had arrived because of the flying bodies. Inmates were being tossed left and right. The Crow was going for Daniel. Daniel slipped through the crowd and headed towards the Crow with his baton. I tried keeping up with him but there were too many people in

the way. I ran into Katie and Rachel.

“Matt, where the hell did you get the gun?!” asked Katie.

“And where were you?” Rachel said.

“I was thrown into the discipline room. Daniel Tanner was with me. We broke out. He beat up a guard and gave me a gun.”

“Wait that guy is Daniel Tanner”, said Katie surprised. “Well, at least our symbol of hope is real.”

“Yeah, I need to help him kill the big Crow.”

“Wait, you can’t go and kill him” said Rachel. “Then, you’re no better than he is.”

“Rachel, the longer I stay and argue the more likely Daniel will lose. The Crows and Ravens have done far worse than killing. They’ve tortured us, humiliated us, and separated us from our friends and family. I think it’s time he tastes his own medicine.”

I ran off without hearing the rest of Rachel’s argument. I pushed my way through the crowd towards the battle happening between the big Crow and Daniel. My hope for freedom kept me going through the thick crowd. I could hear the struggle between Daniel and the big Crow as I got closer. When I finally pushed my way through the crowd, I saw Daniel on the floor bleeding. The big Crow stood tired over Daniel with his boot on Daniel’s chest. He laughed.

“Well, this one put up quite the fight.” The big Crow looked at me. “Oh, do you plan on doing something as well.”

The big Crow kicked Daniel’s broken body towards me.

“Daniel” I whispered. I still had the gun but I was too preoccupied with my friend’s shattered body before me. This was the third time I could’ve prevented a friend’s death. I wasn’t going to let Katie and Rachel down as well. I stood suddenly and steadied the gun at the big Crow. The big Crow saw this and for the first time, I saw a look of fear upon his face. The look of fear amused me; a man so powerful yet so afraid same as me. I pulled the trigger but a Crow grabbed me from behind and made me miss. The shot went towards the ceiling. The crowd quieted and settled down. The Crows were able to suppress the belligerent crowd. The big Crow used this to his advantage. He whispered something to the other Crows. He picked up Daniel’s body and put him on his shoulder. The other Crows grabbed me by the legs and arms. The big Crow walked to middle of the lunch room and the Crows followed carrying me.

The Crows lined up the inmates on one side of the lunch room. The big Crow held up Daniel Tanner’s dead body, displaying it to the suppressed inmates.

“This is Daniel Tanner. The legend has ended. The tale that has been told for years has been a lie. Your legend is nothing more than a man.”

The big Crow ushered to the other Crows for me. The big Crow kept me by side with a strong grip on my arm.

“This boy was following Daniel Tanner. Remember what I told you what would happen if you disobeyed me again?”

The big Crow, still holding onto Daniel’s body, tossed me in front of him. I landed on my knees. The big Crow threw Daniel’s body to the suppressed inmates. His body rolled in front of them, lifeless.

“Bring this boy’s belonging’s from his cell” the big Crow ordered the other Crows. The Crows came back with 6 books. They tossed them in front of me.

“Now light them up” ordered the big Crow. All within a few seconds, the work of me and my friends turned to ash. The Writers of Libertalia is now ashes.

“Let this serve as a warning for you all; disobey again and you’ll lose your belongings. I’m letting this boy live for now but he will die just as all of you will die” said the big Crow pointing at each and every inmate. “It’s only a matter of time. Now return to your cells for further instruction.”

The Crows took each inmate back to his or her cell. Jared Holt came and took me to my vacant cell.

I arrived at my cell to meet the solitude and loneliness it now represents. Jared put my book on Patrick’s bed.

“I could only save yours. I couldn’t fit your friends’ books in my pockets. I’m sorry.”

“Jared, can I ask you to do one last favor?”

“Sure what is it?”

“Make sure you’re the one that comes and drags me to be killed.”

“Matt, I can’t do—”

“Just try. Please Jared. When you come here to take me to my death, I’ll give you my book. When you get out of here, publish it. The world must know what happened here.”

“Alright, if it means this much to you it would mean more to me if I had helped.” Jared was about to leave.

“Wait one more thing.”

Jared turned around.

“Do you have a pen?” He smiled and threw me a pen. Using Jared’s pen, I continued my story in the book.

## **Week 12**

I guess it’s true. Everyone dies alone and no one’s coming to save you. When the population of the world hit 10 billion, our resources were nearly depleted and climate change has been eroding our way of life. We were warned that humanity had only two years to get its act together before the world ended. I didn’t expect the reaction to be this cruel. It was so easy for everyone to turn on each other when knowing that doomsday was imminent and plan to save humanity demonstrated this. The plan to save humanity: get rid of the imperfect humans, those hogging the resources because of their handicaps and illnesses. Soon millions of disabled people were banned to purgatory in an instant while the rest of the world believed it was for the greater good. The label ‘disabled’ expanded to any human who uses any device that helps them function in the real world. People who require hearing aids, wear glasses, have pacemakers, were sentenced to purgatory. And I was banished with them to hell on earth.

The world is a cruel unforgiving place that doesn’t give without taking. I learned that lesson the hard way. My only escape from this hell was a dream.

