

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.

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..