It was a normal Friday in Los Angeles. Liv said something as I tried to not look as if I was about to collapse on the floor, sleeping. Liv noticed my exhaustion, so she decided to go to Starbucks with me after school and have some coffee. She got a Frappuccino while I insisted on hot chocolate.

“Any new news, Daniela?” Liv asked, laughing about her word choice.

“No.” I knew what she was about to ask. “Soon.” I said, standing up and walking out.

I knew things would never be the same again. It felt like everyone knew what happened on Monday, the day someone found out about my family being former members of the FBI. I rode my bike to Wendy’s where I talked to Dane.

Dane Core was an 18 year old star soccer player and a serious studier. The first time I had met Dane, I knew we would be good friends. He was playing soccer while I was walking around. Our eyes instantly met. His eyes matched his perfectly cropped hair, which fell onto a part of his face. While I walked towards him, he met me halfway.

“I saw your shirt” he said, staring at the Italy logo while talking. “Want to play soccer with me? That is, unless you have something else to do……..”

I told him to stand near the goal post. I took the ball and crossed it. Dane received, and hit a perfect header. He grinned at me.

We met every Friday from 5-7pm to play soccer scrimmages and practice tricks. It was one of the things I looked forward to.

When Dane turned 16, he got a job at Wendy’s and offered to chat during breaks. We met there ever since.

“What’s up?” Dane said, energy sparking out of him like a firecracker.

“We need to talk.” I said, sitting down at a table.

“My break is 30 minutes long.” He said. “Will that be enough time?”

“Definitely.”

Everything seemed to be absolutely perfect. Dane was heading over to Bank of America to deposit a check. He walked in. The first thing he noticed was an employee, laying forgotten on the floor, clearly deceased. There were other people laying lifeless ten steps away from him, while two men were stealing money out of the cash register. Two armed men. Dane retreated, shocked and terrified. A surge of familiarity struck him. There was a shatter of glass next to his foot. One of the armed men shot at a flower vase an inch to the left of Dane’s foot. He turned. A man a foot taller than him was towering over him, gun pointed at Dane’s heart. He felt someone inject something into him, and the room spun as Dane collapsed on the floor, a gold coin and check in his pocket.

I was worried when Dane didn’t show up for his break. Zack and Jared recommended that John waited outside, while we visited the place Dane said he would visit before returning to work. Bank of America.

Zack and I were searching for clues when I turned and saw something gleaming on the floor. A gold coin. I picked it up, remembering the coin from when I had given it to Dane for his birthday. I made a mental note to show the others the coin later.

Jared sat down in a chair. *Probably the only one not soaked with blood*, I thought, watching the faces Robby and John made as they walked in. Robby was in his late twenties, while the rest of us were entering our junior year of high school.

“Now what?” Zack asked, as we all got settled in the car. Zack yawned as Jared stretched in the space he had. I glanced out the window, pretending to be interested with the view.

“We can’t stay here.” John said. “I think we should head north and give our friends Michael and Joshua a visit.”

“We could stay there until we get everything planned out.” Jared suggested.

“Joshua’s place it is.” Robby declared, and I saw out of the corner of my eye that everyone glanced nervously at me.

The car was silent. It felt like we had been in the car for years. Jared was playing hangman on his phone with Stephan, who we had picked up along with Khue, Susannah, and Liv. We were on the road to San Francisco. I was silent in the backseat. Robby was driving and Zack sat next to him, looking bored. We were in a Toyota minivan, John sitting on the floor. Jared and Stephan were in the middle, and Liv, Khue, Susannah, and I were squished in the back. Zack unbuckled and switched places with John.

“If you need anything, we’re all here for you Daniela,” Zack said.

I didn’t respond. Zack snuck glances at me the 6 hours it took to reach San Francisco until the car stopped at our destination, a huge house with a Mercedes parked outside. Suddenly, a car approached behind us. A tall man with blue eyes walked out of a black SUV and stood adjacent to the driver’s side.

“Long time, no see.” Michael said, a grin spreading across his face.

After dropping our belongings off, Michael told Robby to take us out for sandwiches. We arrived at Burger King and got a seat away from the only other customer inside. We sat four to a side, boys on one side and girls on the other. Liv was sitting against the wall in front of Zack, Khue was in front of John, I was in front of Jared, and Susannah was in front of Stephan. Robby pulled up a chair and sat at the head of the table. I showed them the coin and Robby had a theory.

“Do you think Michael and Joshua know what happened to Dane?” Robby asked.

“If they did, why?” I asked Robby.

“Well they do hate each other, and Dane witnessed the death of their father.” Zack said. “They probably want revenge.”

We talked about it until we eventually dismissed the idea and headed back to Michael’s house. We planned to leave, since we didn’t know if our theory was true. I took a shower, changed into Nike shorts and a blue shirt, and climbed out the window. I met the others and made a quick count.

“Where’s Susannah?” I asked. All of a sudden, we heard a scream. We instantly turned.

“Susannah!” We whisper-yelled, running towards the scream, and into the darkness.

We ended up a few miles away in a small house. Robby went first, with me behind him. It was empty and dark, with only one light on in a closed room. While Robby and I waited for the others to catch up, he spent his quality time tying his shoe. Once everyone was inside the house, he kicked open the door, which wasn’t necessary, but looked cool.

Dane was sitting in a chair which was back to back with Susannah’s. The chairs were tied together. Michael and Joshua were standing near them, with their hands filled with treasures.

Then the unexpected happened. Robby pulled out a badge, which I immediately recognized. Sounds of cars filled the room, and men entered with their guns drawn.

“I’m Agent Robby Peaks, Federal Bureau of Investigation,” was all I could make out as the men with guns grabbed Michael and Joshua and took them outside. While Robby untied Susannah and Dane, Robby explained everything and filled in the blanks.

“Those two men are actually Thomas and Lois Machender, who are wanted criminals around the world. They stole whatever they could whenever, and then disguised themselves as regular people. Dane was robbed once and he knew it was the Machender twins who did it. He told the police their information, but no one believed him. Then, when there was a train accident, Thomas and Lois’ dad died inside. Dane, who happened to be next to him, miraculously survived. Since then, the Machender’s have been seeking revenge on Dane.”

“Why did they take Susannah?” Zack asked.

Susannah answered. “I was outside waiting for you guys, and since you all were still inside, I decided to take a stroll around the place. I found this house and went inside. Unfortunately, Joshua heard something, probably me walking in flip flops, and came out of the room. He saw me, grabbed me, and tied me up.”

“How did the FBI know to come here?” I asked.

“Remember when I was tying my shoes?” Robby asked me. I nodded. He took off his right shoe and showed us a red button hidden well behind his shoelaces. “This button sends a message to the FBI. I pressed the button and whispered ‘Machender’ so they knew where I was and what I found.”

Once the FBI finished questioning us, they said we were free to go. I stepped outside and was greeted to smell of fresh air which I had so dearly missed.