*Her ripped clothing was dingy with damp soil and warm blood as she rushed in the pouring rain, out of breath, towards the door.*

*She lingered her fingers through the incision of the metal, feeling the cold sense of the metal. The engraving figured the moon, entwined together with the sun in a matt pattern that looked grim and spooky under the dim light of the night.*

*She forcibly pushed on the door, but the stringent machinery remained immovable, insensitive to the hopeless touch of the sandy-haired girl.*

*From afar, she felt a howl, an appalling yell of slaughter and wreck that shook her up to the core, ripping off flowing tears from her moist eyes.*

Sam woke up.

When she rubbed her eyes, she saw the morning rain clouding up the windows of the dorm and the dim sunshine filtering through the tinted glass.

The atmosphere was quite calm.

No hysterical tears filled the air and except for the dim whispers of the *guardians*, the room was silent, pervaded by a sense of peace that rarely lulled within the walls of the prison.

The polished walls stood in the gloom of her cell, motionless and unsettling as always and the sickly scent of bleach and medicines tingled her senses, pervading her whole body with a hint of queasiness.

Sam lay sweaty in the middle of her bed.

She’d had a touch of fever the previous night, and her head still hurt a bit, despite the dosing of sedative drugs that circulated in her blood and .

Slowly patting her skin, she could feel the frosty thin polymers of the cables that linked her forehead to Karyon and puffed away.

She hated that harness.

She *hated* being trapped during her sleep by those subtle wires, but every night she forced herself to bear in mind that they worked for her own good, to keep her stable, to hail her, to lead her to the right path.

Every single night she fought the dream of being free, distant from the walls of the prison, distant from those hellish mechanisms that kept every single thought under a meticulous control, distant from every guardian and every metal cage.

*Desmoterion is a safe place* - they say each time - why should one persist on opposing on the very one thing that keeps us alive?

*Law* - they say - is order. Law is freedom. Law is control.

She hated that parching feeling of impotency before their power, the shame she tasted when they controlled her synapses and read through her mind, between the slightest thoughts that brushed her brain and the most intimate desires that she experienced.

It’s not a bunch of walls that keeps a prisoner inside, in Desmoterion.

It’s *guilt*. It’s the horrifying prospect that your mistakes hinder your own survival, the disturbing and yet so appeasing, even pleasing, idea that you can heal yourself.

You can get cured.

A rustle of footsteps broke the stony silence, accompanied with the mournful creaking of her stodgy cell door.

“How are you, Sam?” - A delicate voice whispered with gentleness.

The girl winced and slightly raised her head, facing the person who’d talked.

A woman in her late twenties drew a dim smile, eyeing her with a mixture of heartfelt concern and mild scolding, and sat on the empty bed beside hers.

The guardian wore a milky white metallic uniform, edged with the fine threads of chromed gold and adorned with her military ranks.

Her name, as the sleek tag on her chest recited, was *Selene*.

Sam smiled at the sight of the woman.

Selene was always kind with her; she took care of her needs and guarded her when the fever would come and she spent her whole nights in delirious.

Unlike the other guardians, she almost never beat her. She protected her.

“I feel better” - She proudly stated in a weak voice.

“Reports say you repeatedly refused to take your medicines” - The guardian reproached - “I can’t force you to heal if you offer resistance”.

Selene’s gaze was icy but settled, bound to obtain what she aimed to.

Sam avoided that gaze, staring at her crossed legs, instead, with an inward feeling of faint quandary and awkwardness.

“I feel better” - She repeated, this time with a hint of vexation - “The medicines they give don’t take effect and make me throw up. I don’t need them”.

“If you really feel better, I suppose you really don’t need them” - The guardian soughed - “Do you really feel better, Sam?”

“I do” - She confirmed - “Can I go, *now*?”

Selene pondered over her request, and shook her head with a sigh - “Have patience” - She calmly murmured - “I just need to ask a few more questions”.

The guardian hinted with her thumb to the tiny cables that stretched out from her forehead and bracketed her down to the machinery.

“What did you dream, tonight?” - She inquired in a neutral tone.

Sam didn’t like revealing details about her dreams.

It made her feel unsecure, deprived of her own private sphere, but each time she was asked she couldn’t dare lying to the guardians.

Bad things happened when someone did.

“I heard someone who gets killed” - She spilled out with a trembling voice, trying to recall the smallest detail, the slightest sound of her memory - “I felt bad for them”.

“Good” - The guardian expounded - “…and could you see the person? Was there a fence or any kind of hitch between you and the person?”

“There was a door” - She clearly spoke out - “The door was locked up, and I couldn’t see the person”.

“Very well” - Selene smiled, revealing a streak of satisfaction - “Can you remember any detail of the door?”

The image of the door lingered across her mind, bright and clear.

Sam could perfectly recall the whiteness of the glossy metal and the accurate carving of the sun and the moon that was engraved on the pliable material.

She had dreamt that door for days, and could perfectly visualize the charming symbol; But she felt embarrassed.

A recurring dream – they say – is always a foreboding of harmful issues.

It looked so prohibited, so intimate and secluded that she felt the irrational urge of keeping it hidden, as if it was jealously guarded treasure.

“No…” - She lied, her voice even more uncertain and quavering - “I can’t remember”.

A rough slap reached her face, unexpected.

Raising her gaze to the guardian, Sam could see that the between the placidity of the woman lurked only eagerness and the cruelty.

Selene was losing her temper.

“Speak the truth, Sam” - The guardian grumbled in a puff.

“There was a symbol” - She murmured, as a warm tear of weeping trundled across her cheeks and fell on the ground.

“What was the symbol like?”

“The moon… and the sun…” - She bleated - “Entwined together, like a sort of logo but, I swear, I don’t know what it meant”.

Selene tenderly dried out her tears with newfound gentleness and, as if nothing had happened, loosened her cables, freeing her from the harness.

“You can go, *now*” - She announced - “But don’t you try to lie again”.

Sam, a little bit deranged, faltered towards the way out, furtively observing the woman that kept sitting still beside her rumpled bad.

Sure, guardians could be scary to death, when they would be lied to, and it wasn’t the first time she got beaten either, but there was something disturbing in the abrupt change of mind that had run through Selene.

The mere inkling of a white lie, a harmless moment of uncertainty had turned her even-tempered face into a raging grimace.

Her wide brown eyes no more expressed concern, but plain, ruthless *disgust*.

She tried to convince herself it was normal, it was all about *her* mistakes. Lying is not conceivable, after all, and any other guardian would have beaten harder for a lesser misdeed.

She just let the restless musings slip away, and turned left in a corridor that led to the higher levels, leaning her fingers on the handrail.

Sam lived in the second level, one of the quietest and less inhabited.

It worked in a quite simple way.

The fourth level hosted all sorts of thieves and rowdies who’d been charged for minor crimes and usually squared up a short time of Redemption before vanishing from the sight.

Below, the third level was dedicated to the crimes against humans.

There lived drug abusers, murderers and violent people in general and, given their poor consideration of the gift of life, loitering across those dark hallways was not advisable.

Subsequently, there was her level, the second one.

It’d been originally pledged for the crimes against public safety, but it eventually functioned as a receptacle for mentally ill and unstable people who they wanted to keep off from the public attention.

Living down there was reasonably uncomfortable, but it surely had its good points.

The sandy-haired girl was *not* really unstable – they knew it – and during the day, Sam could enjoy a certain degree of freedom, being allowed to wander in the higher levels and eat meals in the public refectory.

The guardians, especially Selene, treated her with a decent amount of tenderness and, after all, she ran less danger in comparison to the troubled environments of the higher levels.

Further down was the first level.

Well, she didn’t know what *exactly was* there, but some rumored that the level hosted dangerous torture devices for the most heinous crimes.

When asked, Selene had never talked explicitly about that, but once she’d let a detail slip out of her mouth. There – she had said – stay the *Infidels*.

When her cellmate Kalinda, who used to inhabit the bed near hers, was brutally carried away by a team of guardians, her friend Lyra had told her she’d been brought to the first level.

In the first level – Lyra had argued – no chance of living further exists, because unlike normal people, an Infidel doesn’t deserve another possibility to redeem…

Sam finished hopping on the stairs and walked through the third level.

A quick glance to the common clock revealed it was stuck, but she could guess it wasn’t time for lunch yet, according from the sunlight that filtered through the small-sized windows.

She decided to head towards the terrace garden to get a breath of fresh air, and stepped towards the elevators, departing from the lambent titanium alloy cages of the cells.