

**Cartoon**  
Kari Lynn M.

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## Acknowledgements

Well, I guess I did it. I wrote a book. I actually wrote a book.

It's been a really crazy ride writing this novel and there's so much I could say here about that journey and everything... but I'll make it short, I promise.

Well, maybe.

Anyway, I think this is where I'm supposed to say my 'thank y'all's' and express gratitude for the people who kept me going and motivated while I slaved away at my keyboard during seventy percent of my time as an eighteen-year-old. So, thank you Sir Mix-a-Lot for creating the hit Baby Got Back, which I'll confess I listened to on repeat more times than I probably should have while writing this story, and to both General Mills and Betty Crocker for making and distributing Hamburger Helper Microwave Singles to college students like me who religiously eat cheeseburger mac in their dorm rooms while studying for chemistry tests well past midnight. Or, in my case, for the girl who *should* have probably been studying for her chemistry test... but somehow ended up working on her 100,000+ word novel instead.

Okay, okay, now for real.

Thank you to my family and my friends for reading my story... or, really, for begging me to finish my story and publish already so they *could* read it! Thanks especially to wonderful father for being my #1 fan right from the very first day I even mentioned having an interest in writing and for being the one that really pushed me to even get this far and publish my first book! And... thanks, of course, to everyone who is reading this right now; readers are the real reason I write. I mean, who would want to write a ~500 page book and not have anyone to share it with?

Also, thank you so much to everyone who has befriended me on Wattpad or read any of my stories on that website! I really do love that community and definitely believe that I would have never even thought of pursuing writing if I had never joined it.

Okay, I know, this wasn't really all that short... but, again, I just wrote a 100,000+ word story; did you *really* expect short from me?

I hope you enjoy my story and thank you all so, so much for reading it! <3

-Kari

## Chapter One

"Oh..." I groaned.

One small bit at a time, I could feel myself begin to awake.

And it was more painful than waking up before nine o'clock.

I leaned my upper body forward and focused my eyes on the situation around me as soon as they were opened.

At least, opened enough.

"What..." I muttered to myself.

I had to blink a few times at what I saw.

A few stiff, unmoving bodies were laid face down all around me. Each one had at least one stain of blood to cover their clothing.

"Um..." I whispered, now looking around to observe the room I was in.

No windows, no furniture. Plain and simple.

Suddenly, a soft, static-like voice arose from what seemed like nowhere.

"Hello? Agent Wolf? Come in..."

I took a guess as to where it came from, and then slowly gazed over to its direction.

"Come in, please..." it continued.

Only then did I realize it was coming from a Bluetooth-type of device, which was just kind of thrown onto the floor a few feet from my right.

"Uh..." I mumbled, again.

The voice repeated itself a few more times, so I eventually decided to respond.

I began to reach out toward it but stopped when a sharp pain struck me in the back of my head.

"Ah..." I softly sputtered out, quickly following up on the sound by pulling my hand back to touch my, apparently, wounded scalp.

I felt around where the source of my sudden pain was, and then brought my hand back into my view. I swiftly saw that a few drops of blood were laid upon my fingertips.

Whether or not they were actually mine, I had no clue, but I definitely knew something, besides my brain, was wrong with my head.

"Hello?" the static voice reiterated, for the millionth time.

"Ugh..." I muttered, brushing the thought of my injured head off. Or, at least, attempting to.

I continued my efforts to retrieve the Bluetooth receiver and pulled my body up to my knees. I then reached forward with my right hand, again, and snatched the device from the ground in front of me.

I brought it up to my mouth.

"Um, hi..." I began.

"Who is this?" the blurred voice snappily replied.

"I-I'm... This is..." I tried to answer. "Well, I can't quite remember that right now, but I will be sure to get back with you on it when... when... when I do."

"Where are you?" I could now make out the voice as being more feminine.

"I'm... Well, I'm not sure of that, either, but I know I'm not home. Or anywhere near home, probably." I glided my eyes around the room a little more before continuing. "And I'm a little confused as to, um, how I got here..."

"That doesn't matter right now. Listen, you may be in danger..."

"Yeah, I... I kind of got that..." I remarked, scanning the number of unmoving bodies scattered around me.

"You need to get out, and we'll help you..." the woman said through the device. As she continued, I placed the Bluetooth speaker securely over my ear, making it hands-free, as I assumed it was supposed to be. "Listen closely... There should be at least one hand-held gun nearby, and you'll probably want to grab it before you do anything else."

"Gun?" I echoed, my eyes nearly bugging out of my head with the ring of the word.

I then stood slowly and raised one eyebrow along with the rising of my position.

"Yes..." the woman assured me. "Do you see one?"

"Uh, well..." I shuffled toward the closest body near me, which was a tall man in a dark suit, laid face down on the tile. Soon after I had spotted him, a shiny silver glare next to one of his hands caught my eye. "I think I have, possibly..."

"Take it," the woman commanded.

I stepped in front of the man, and then crouched down to scoop up the silver gun that sat next to his body.

"O-Okay, well..." I muttered, more to myself, as I rose again. I uncomfortably situated the gun in my hands.

"I've never exactly done this before, I..." I trailed off and played my fingers around the trigger of the pistol.

Of course, though, I kept the gun pointed downward.

"I'm not..." I continued to mumble, searching the gun in my own way.

Suddenly, the pistol spat out a fast bullet at the floor beneath me.

"Oh! God, look at that..." I half-yelled out. "Well, now that that's taken care of..." I redrew my attention to the task at hand.

"Never touched a gun before?" the woman half-humoredly questioned.

"Well, you know... not exactly..."

The girl let out a small giggle, and then continued.

"Well, you'll learn fast... Now... is there a window around?"

"Window..." I whispered, whipping my head back and forth as I did so.

"Ah..." I muttered, stopping abruptly to touch the injured area on the back of my head. "N-No..." I eventually replied.

"How about a door?"

I locked my eyes onto the closed exit almost directly in front of me.

"Sure is," I responded, tilting my head slightly.

"Go through it. Actually, by this time, you probably won't need the gun, but I still don't want to take any chances with you..."

"Yeah, I get that a lot..." I quietly remarked as I approached the door across the area. And, once I had reached it, I carefully opened it by a small, common knob-like handle.

I took my time as I stepped through.

"Tell me what you see," the woman said, her voice blurring a little now.

I didn't reply very quickly, probably on account of the fact that I was attempting to enter an unknown area with a gun and absolutely no clue as to why or how I was in my current situation at all. Instead, I cautiously made my way into some sort of hallway, one foot at a time.

I gazed from one direction to the other.

No one was around.

Luckily.

"Hello? Can you tell me what's there?" the woman repeated.

"Oh!" I snapped my head permanently into the right direction, just by a random choice. I began to walk forward as I continued. "Um... Well, there's a bunch of doors around... It's a very long, narrow room... I'd say it's most likely a type of hallway."

"Good," the static voice replied. "You aren't far, then."

"Far from what?" I questioned but didn't quite receive the answer I had hoped for. Actually, I kind of didn't receive an *answer* at all.

"Take one of the doors on the opposite side of the hall, down by the end of the left direction."

I stopped dead in my tracks.

"Oh... Uh, okay..." I muttered as I slowly turned myself around to face the complete *opposite* direction.

I silently sighed as I began to walk toward the end of the hallway.

"W-Which... um, door?" I awkwardly asked.

"Whichever one leads to the stairs," was my specified answer.

"Great..." I mumbled, finally now approaching the area of my probable destination.

"Remember, it's on the opposite side from where you came... So, on the right..." the feminine voice prompted me. Like I would have forgotten.

Actually... I had.

"Okay," I said back, readying myself to test out the first door on my right. I quickly turned my body in front of it, and then reached out to twist its low handle.

"Oh, God..." I whispered shakily, unassured of what could be on the other side.

Slowly, I closed my eyes, scrunched my face, and rotated the handle a smooth ninety degrees.

And then practically threw the door out in front of me.

I shot my eyes open as I clasped both my hands around the pistol I possessed.

It was just an empty office room.

I sighed.

"How uneventful," I commented, relaxing my hands from the gun and reclosing the door. I then slowly pivoted back around and continued onward to my next attempt.

The Bluetooth girl remained silent as I began to wrap my fingers around the next door handle. Only when I began to turn my wrist did she pipe up again.

"How many more doors do you have to go?" she inquired.

I paused my body's motions a second and peeked to the left to count.

"Two."

She didn't ask anymore of me, so I looked back and started to open the one door in front of me. I was much calmer this time, and I figured it would, at worst, be just another empty office room.

But I had to freeze once the door was open and when I realized that it was, in fact, *not* a very empty office room.

It was an actual office, organized much like the last one, but I wouldn't say that it was completely empty on account of the man facing my direction and sitting in a chair behind a desk, right in front of my bugged-eyes.

"Hey!" he suddenly yelled, as soon as he noticed my presence.

"Sorry!" I immediately screeched out, slamming the door closed in front of me.

"What?" the girl on the Bluetooth urged out, apparently noting my distress.

"Whoops," I mumbled, now rushing to the next door in line. I fumbled to grasp its handle, but it didn't even matter, because it turned out to be locked.

I darted to the last door to be tried.

"Please, please..." I muttered, my shaking left hand already outstretched toward it.

Once I had actually reached it, I noticed there was a large plate slapped directly in the center of the wooden frame. I shot my eyes across it, and read one bold and entirely capitalized word:

**STAIRS.**

"Oh, really?" I snickered at it as I twisted at its knob. Before I could blast it open, though, a strong, manly voice yelled at me from my right.

"Stop right there!"

I paused and snapped my head into its direction.

"Who is it?" the girl in my ear added to the intensifying situation.

I looked over the large, but otherwise average-looking, office guy with shot-wide eyes. He was frozen, keeping one arm out by his side, and the other out only to point his index finger at me.

"A man..." I whispered back to the girl.

"Does he have a gun?" she questioned.

I kept my body stiff and my eyes locked on him while I replied quietly.

"No..."

"Show him yours. But don't shoot him. Tell him to back down," the girl instructed of me.

I complied and threw my hand with the gun up and outstretched in front of my face.

He immediately threw both of his hands up in the air.

Honestly, I had forgotten about the gun for a while...

"Don't..." I began to yell back at him, but lost track of what I needed to say. "D-Don't... Tell me-what... to-do..." I stuttered out, eventually.

After receiving and understanding my statement, the guy just squinted his eyes in confusion. And, at the same time, I heard a faint sigh in my earpiece.

"Just... make sure he doesn't follow you," my instructor told me.

"Don't follow me!" I awkwardly added right after, barely even listening to myself.

The man continued to stay frozen and dazed.

"Okay... You can keep going, now," the girl in my ear said.

"I-I'm going to... just... go, now..." I then slowly stated aloud.

Without another word uttered from anyone, I backed up until my body hit part of the left wall, and then ungracefully darted my head over toward the 'STAIRS' door.

I stepped toward it and grabbed for its handle with my free hand, the gun still held up by my other. And, before I completely opened it and stepped through, I looked back at the man down the hall once more.

"Be good," I commanded of him, making an odd gesture toward him with my pistol.

I then whipped myself to the left and nearly jumped into the stairwell. I soon relaxed my arms completely and looked around as the door shut itself behind me.

"Okay... Um, now what?" I asked, directing my question to the woman whom I still didn't actually know much about.

"G-Go t...to th...floor..." she responded in an extremely electronically chopped sentence.

"What?" I confusedly questioned, now reaching my left hand up and across my body to play around with the Bluetooth fixture.

"Th...gr-ground fl..."

"Ground floor?" I patched and repeated her words. "As in, like, bottom floor, right?"

I received no answer, but rather, a static mess.

"Okay, let's just hope..." I whispered to myself, as soon as the electric static faded back to silence. I then turned to the right, where the stairs led downward. I took a few trots down them and kept my eyes alert to my surroundings, which were currently only dirty cement walls and rusted railings.

I continued down approximately three flights and, eventually, got to a landing at the very end.

"Now what?" I asked, completely ignoring the fact that the person I was attempting to communicate with was unavailable at the moment. I began pacing around a little, and then continued to speak to myself. "Through the... door?"

I stopped my movements when I received an unexpected response through my earpiece.

"Yes, through the door..." the woman replied, her voice nearly crystal clear now.

"Oh, wow, you're there..." I mumbled, just loud enough for her to perceive.

Slowly, I began to open the door before me and peeked my head through it. I looked around and observed what seemed to me to be an upscale Holiday Inn, hotel-motel kind of lobby.

Although, I had a feeling this was not a hotel.

"I need you to pick up a file for me," the voice in my ear said, abruptly.

"Oh, really?" I replied, barely even subconsciously, as I carefully stepped out into the empty, lobby-like area.

"Yes, please. It's in one of the rooms at the back of the building, on this floor. We don't know which one, but they should all be empty—"

"Okay, but—" I began to cut her off, but it didn't seem to be of much help, because she turned around to do the exact same to me.

"Please; this is extremely important. And, we're sending someone to come get you in the meantime."

"Okay, well..." I started, again. I then turned my body in nearly every direction around me while I continued. "I would... like to know... where to go then, for that area... please."

I eventually stopped spinning myself all over, and just decided to wait for more directions.

"Go to the back of that floor."

"And... where would that be?" I raised each of my eyebrows and observed the area even more carefully, noticing that it was all walls, desks, chairs, plants, and space.

No doors.

The woman then sighed some and tried to explain further to me.

"There should be another door, behind one of the desks, on the far wall. Take that one, and it should land you into another hallway, and that's where the back rooms are."

"Okay, but I don't see any doors, actually, so, I think..." I slowly trailed off as I began to walk toward the desks along the far wall. And, once I became close enough, I spotted one, solid-wood door, practically hidden behind a tall, potted plant.

"Oh," I quietly commented as I began to approach it.

The woman spoke no more words, so I gently reached out and pulled the door open.

I walked through and was immediately greeted by the scent of newspapers and the sight of a hallway that was much similar to the one from upstairs.

And too many doors.

"Okay, well, here I am," I declared, not noticing that I was actually making hand gestures with the gun I held.

The door soon closed behind me and my instructor spoke up, again.

"Okay, good. Now, it's more likely to be one of the rooms at the far end, so start there first...."

I began walking into the far direction while she talked.

"Each door is locked with its own special code, so you'll have to be specific when you tell me which you're planning on opening."

"Um, well, I want to open... this one, then," I replied, stepping in front of the door farthest from where I came, on the left.

"Specific," she responded.

"Okay, well... its wooden, painted cherry-brown, if that's a thing, and..."

I heard the woman chuckle, just a little.

"Okay, come on, now..." she said, with a little more emotion than before.

I made a short smile, and then spoke.

"It's the farthest door, and on the left side... I think."

"Thinking isn't a good enough promise. Are you one-hundred percent sure?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Okay, get ready, here's the code..."

I quickly looked downward, toward a number pad attached to the door handle, and lifted my free hand outward to it.

"Eight, zero, five... Nine, zero, one... Two, zero, six."

I punched each number on the pad as she said it, and then waited for it to unlock, or make a noise, or something.

"It's not doing anything," I said, staring right at the handle.

"Did you try opening it?"

"Oh, well... no," I stated.

I then pushed down on the vertical knob with my hand but, surprisingly, got no feedback from it.

It was still locked.

"It's locked," I declared.

"Okay, then try it again. Eight, zero, five... Nine, zero, one... Two, zero, six."

I complied with each number, and tried the handle again, but to no avail.

"It's still not..." I began, but never finished.

"Okay... Well, try a different one. Try the one across the hall."

I didn't speak out again, at least until I had whipped around to face the next door.

"Okay... what's the code?"

"Farthest door on the right: Two, one, three... Five, seven, nine... Three, zero, two," she said.

I entered each number correctly, and then jiggled the handle.

"Nope," I said, shaking my head slightly.

"Try it again. Two, one, three, five, seven, nine, three, zero, two."

I tried again, but this time, as soon as I punched in the last number, a loud, sharp alarm-like noise began to ring all around me.

"Whoa... 'kay, that was not it..." I mumbled. Or, at least, it seemed like a mumble compared to the screaming alarm that infused the air in the area.

"Shit..." I could faintly hear the woman profane.

I stepped back a moment and looked back to the other end of the hallway, where I noticed a flashing red light had appeared, directly above the door where I had come.

"We need to get you out of there; your ride is almost there... Get your gun ready, and stay where you are," I was quickly instructed.

"Okay, but, um..." I started, as I slowly backed up and into the small, plain wall behind me. "I, uh..."

"You're going to be fine; Ace will be there in a few minutes."

"Who?" I questioned.

Suddenly, the far door shot open, and a large man in a casual, blue suit appeared. And, of course, he was pointing a large gun directly toward me.

I let out an unpleasantly sounding screech.

"Hands up; put your weapon down!" he yelled at me.

"Shoot him!" the woman in my earpiece barked.

Once my scream had ended, the back of my head began to throb, once again, and I began to fall backward. I didn't actually fall at all, though, because I already had had myself pinned against the wall. At the same time, as well, I threw my gun down on the ground below my feet and swung my hands up and into the air.

I took a deep breath and brought myself back to full consciousness as the man started to slowly pace toward me.

"What were you doing here?" he shouted, over the loud alarm system.

"I don't, I don't..." I stuttered out.

"Why were you here?" he yelled, even more loudly.

"I don't, I-I don't know," I stammered.

"Why?" he screamed, now only two feet away from my face.

"I don't know!" I half-whined back.

"I'm going to ask you one more time, girl... *Why* were you here?"

"I honestly have no clue, sir... h-honest, I really don't, I—"

Abruptly, a loud shot rang through the hall, and the man halted with a shocked expression upon his face. Immediately after, he fell forward and toward me.

I let out another awkwardly high-pitched and unnatural sound as he collapsed below me. My eyes then flew up, and I became face-to-face with another, younger, armed man, who was holding his own pistol at the man's body.

He gazed up at me.

"Hi, I'm Ace, nice to meet you," he introduced extremely fast. He then turned to my side and bent over to retrieve my abandoned shooter.

I studied him as he did so and noted his causal jeans, green tee and short, but messy, blond hair.

"Now, I know it's probably been a long, hard first day on the job, but..." he said as he brought himself back up to stance. "Rule number one is..." He held the pistol back out to me. "This guy's your friend."

He smiled.

My wide eyes never left his face as I reached forward to receive the gun.

"So, do you have a name?" he asked, now placing his hands on his hips.

"No, I... I mean, I do, yeah, but, um..." my mouth stumbled out. "I-I just, I can't quite seem to... remember, right now..."

I pursed my lips and finally looked away from him.

"Can't remember your own name?" he inquired.

"Yeah, I can't... um... remember anything, really, right now, I'm..."

"Don't worry," he shot back, placing his one free hand onto my left shoulder. I slowly gazed back up as he finished. "I'll call ya 'Amnesia'."

He winked, and then spun himself right around.

"Follow me, Amnesia!" he yelled out as he began to walk down the hall.

I looked his, actually, well-toned body up and down for a quick moment.

"Well, okay..." I whispered, pretty much just to myself, and then began to pace straight behind him.

I stopped at the same instant he did, right in front of the far door.

"So, where you from, Amnesia?" he inquired as he reached down to twist the door knob. He then looked over his shoulder, giving himself a better view of me. "Or have you forgotten that piece of personal information, also?"

He gave a small laugh.

I gave a quirky smile back.

"Actually, I'm from... upstairs," I responded, thinking of my reply as almost perfectly clever.

He blankly stared at me.

"You know... like, upstairs... of the building?" I continued.

He lifted the corner of his mouth slightly.

"Nah... But, that's cute, though..." he finally said, making a type of gesture with his pistol.

He then slowly turned back around.

"I see you've met Ace," the woman in my earpiece piped up, catching me off guard.

"Oh, god!" I partially yelled out, throwing my free hand up to my chest. "You scared me, sorry..."

"Huh?" Ace questioned, spinning back around.

"Oh, no, not you..." I began. "It's just the... the girl... in my ear..."

"The girl in your ear? Damn, you really have lost your mind, haven't you?"

"No, I.. " I reached up and quickly brushed my hair behind my ear, revealing the Bluetooth piece attached to my head. "*This.*"

"Oh, yeah... Is that Mel on there?" he suddenly leaned forward and aimed his mouth toward my ear. "Hey, Mel!"

"Oh, God," the girl, 'Mel', laughed. "Do your job, Ace."

Ace leaned back and turned around again before she even finished, so I assumed he didn't even hear any of her response.

"Alright, let's roll," he said, pulling his handgun up by his face and reaching down to turn the door handle.

I pushed both my arms down by my sides and tightened my right hand on my own, unused gun.

Slowly, he pushed the door open in front of us and stepped carefully through. He looked around alertly as he walked, keeping his gun in a ready position.

"Alright, 'Nesia, we're good," he declared, now resting his arms.

I then stepped out after him and relaxed myself as I let the door shut behind me. I looked around a little, but the area still looked like a hotel lobby to me.

"Okay, we need to go up a floor and get out the same window I came in," Ace proclaimed.

"Why not the front door?" I asked.

We both began to make our way toward the stairwell, across the room.

"Because..." he started, looking up and around observantly as he talked. "We would need—" He abruptly stopped.

"Nesia!" he suddenly yelled out, grabbing my attention.

I shot my head up and saw only a glimpse of another armed man, dressed in average office clothes and standing behind a desk by the stairs, before Ace jumped toward me and pushed me down to the ground.

"Ah!" I shouted, tumbling down behind one of the sofas.

A gunshot rang out in the room.

"I think we just might have company..." Ace mumbled, safely crouched beside me.

I began to pick myself back up to my own crouch position, and Ace poked his head and pistol over the armrest of the couch.

Another shot shouted out, but this time, from him.

My body froze with both my sweaty palms clamped onto the gun in my lap.

A medium length silence then followed.

"Okay," Ace began, his eyes slowly surveying the area from behind the sofa. "I think we're good, now..."

"You *think*? Or do you actually *know*?" I half-mouthed out to him.

He looked over to me.

"Rule number two, 'newbie': you never know. You may know what you think, and you may think you know, but you never know."

I looked at him confusedly.

"Simple," he added, raising an eyebrow. He stared back at me a second, then continued. "Now..." He snapped his look downward and began reloading bullets from his pocket into his gun. "We need to get upstairs. Up and out."

I didn't say anything else and waited for him to cautiously stand back up.

"Come on," he said, partially whispering this time.

I silently obeyed and stood up behind him. He began to leisurely walk toward the stairway's door, and I followed a little more swiftly after him. Once we had reached our destination, I gazed over to the desks against the wall. I looked behind them and saw the armed man from before lying face down on the hardwood floor.

"Hey, Amnesia, you've already lost your memory, so let's not lose the rest of you here, too. Okay?"

I flipped my gaze back toward Ace, now noticing that he was holding the door open for me, while already standing halfway on the stairs ahead.

I didn't give any reply and looked downward as I stepped through the doorway.

Ace let the door go once I was near him, and then began up the staircase. I remained close behind him and trotted upward until we reached the door to the next floor. Once there, Ace opened it in front of us, but took his time to get through it.

"Stay close," he commanded, holding the door open for me to follow through.

I looked around to see a large, cubical-filled area with dimmed lights and long pathways. Ace began down the path pointing left, and I kept myself near behind him. I also remained alert as we walked, busying my eyes to search around us and tightening my hands on my pistol.

"That room, I think," Ace piped up, pointing his gun at the farthest of three doors on the left wall.

"*Think...*" I echoed quietly.

"God..." he muttered, a small chuckle added to his voice.

We both approached the door, one of us on each side. Ace then reached down with his free hand and began to twist the handle.

"It's locked," he declared.

"Huh?" I shot back.

"Locked..." he softly repeated, now leaning over to study it.

"W—" I started, but abruptly became cut off.

"Weapons down!" another random, deep voice yelled out from behind us.

I snapped my head into its direction and saw yet another armed man, dressed identically to the others I had seen previously. He held up his own gun toward us with one hand and reached for a radio-like device on his belt with the other.

"Second floor; I found 'em," the man said into the radio, as soon as he was able to retrieve it. He then slowly placed it back and returned his full attention onto us. "I said drop 'em!"

I remained still and looked over at Ace from the corner of my eye.

"Mm..." I heard him begin to respond. "Nah."

Without another instant passing by, Ace threw his shooting arm up and let his pistol spit out a single bullet at him.

I shot my head from Ace to the man and watched as the bullet struck him directly in the chest. He let out a short-lived yelp, and then tumbled down to the ground.

"Oh my God..." I mumbled out.

"Whew, close one..." Ace said, turning back around toward the door. "Okay, now..."

He reached back down to the door knob, and tried to twist it once more, but with no success. Afterward, he released it from his grasp and stepped back a few steps. He looked it over a moment, and then ran and jumped into it, making it basically collapse inward.

"Must have been a weak door..." I commented.

"Please... no doors can withstand me," Ace remarked.

I narrowed my eyebrows at him and almost smiled, even though he was looking in the opposite direction.

Not even a millisecond later, though, *another* voice shouted out from somewhere on our left.

"Put your guns down!"

Without even giving me time to look in its direction, Ace grabbed my arm and pushed me through the broken doorway.

"Go!" he yelled at me as I fell onto a scratchy, carpeted floor.

I heard a few gunshots scream out from behind me, and then Ace jumped onto the ground beside me.

"Get out the window," he ordered.

I poked my head upward and looked around until I found the source of the room's light, which was a half-opened window on the right wall.

I quickly threw my hands out in front of myself, and then used them to push my body back up into a standing position, losing my gun somehow in the process. I then sprinted over to the window with a feeling that Ace was close behind.

I peeked out and through the opening, and then looked downward to notice we were a fair amount away from the ground with nothing but the roof of a dark car below us.

And, of course, there was no way to climb down.

"And exactly *how* did you come in here?" I inquired, turned my head slightly over my shoulder toward Ace.

"Just jump!" he urged.

"What?" I yelled, now looking directly at the car below.

"Come on, 'Nesia!" Ace shouted back, behind me.

He then grabbed me by the back of my waist and pushed me forward. I practically flew out of the window, screaming out until I landed, mostly on my side, onto the top of the car below.

Ace quickly fell, in a crouch position, beside me.

"Okay, now, get in the car!" he yelled out.

"Oh..." I whined, already feeling a sore kind of pain in my side and back.

Ace resituated his legs, and then slid safely off the car and onto the ground below. I rolled my head over to see him better but didn't move the rest of my body immediately.

I watched as he began to approach the driver's door, and then stared blankly as he turned back to me.

"You comin'?" he asked.

"I—" I began to respond but stopped short when a bullet bounced off the car roof, directly beside me.

I let out a short and hideously high shriek, and then slid myself down to the gravel on the passenger side of the vehicle.

And I immediately got in.

"Not supposed to get in strangers' cars..." I muttered through heavy breaths, intentionally just for my own amusement, as I reached over my shoulder for the seatbelt that I figured I would probably benefit from using.

"Hey, at least you're remembering something," Ace commented, both slamming his door and pushing the car into drive at the same time.

I didn't even have time to click my seatbelt into its place before he floored the gas pedal.

"Whoa-'kay!" I yelled out, suddenly releasing my seatbelt and grabbing onto the sides of my seat instead.

"Yeah, hang on!" Ace shouted back, his body firmly hunched over the steering wheel.

I obeyed his command as he sped past a few more tall buildings. I looked outside through the tinted windows and soon saw that we were slowly becoming surrounded by a number of trees. Ace then gazed up into the rearview mirror and gradually let up on putting the pedal to the metal.

"No one's following us," he pronounced.

"Well, thank God, right?" I said, looking over into his direction.

He smirked.

"Sure. Kind of takes the fun out of it, though, doesn't it?"

"Fun?" I questioned, tilting my head down a little and my eyebrows up a little more as I did so.

I shook my head a little and looked back toward my passenger side window.

"How do you..." I began to add. "How do you... do this... all the time?" I gazed back to him. "I mean, this is what you do, right?"

He smiled a smirk-y smile, again.

"You mean kill strangers that have threatening weapons and/or demeanors and save damsels in distress? Yeah, I do it all the time. Well, the first part of it. It's just my job."

"But... But, how, exactly, do you do it?" I rephrased.

Ace paused a moment, then answered.

"You know, I like to pretend like I'm in a cartoon."

"A cartoon?"

He looked back and forth between me and the road ahead as he continued.

"Yeah, like I'm in one of those crazy violent video games, or a James Bond movie, or a crazy violent James Bond video game... Or, to categorize all of that... a cartoon."

"And I'm the one who's bumped my head?" I joked.

He laughed a little, under his breath.

"You asked; I told. Anything else you need to know?"

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