



Tethered Twins

MIKE ESSEX

ONE

Emmie Keyes

I felt everything.

A thousand nerve endings in my arm set on fire, as I felt the knife cut through flesh. I felt every inch of skin tear open, as blood seeped to the surface and emerged through the rapidly forming cracks.

I saw everything.

As I watched on in horror I saw blood pour to the floor. Drip by drip, life seemed to be seeping away, time seemed to be running out.

My heart rate paced faster and faster. It felt like a beating drum pounding away, harder and harder as I struggled to cope with the situation. It felt like my heart was trying to escape from my chest, to escape from the reality that was unfolding. Unable to control my breathing I felt a panic attack form, my lungs struggling to cope with the anxiety.

I heard everything.

Trying to hold my breathing steady I heard two figures talking. I had no idea what they were saying and yet their voices echoed with rage.

Almost as if their words were not their own.

As if they were muttering orders from a higher power.

And then they turned in my direction.

Twins. Their bodies had the same silhouette and facial structure, with them both sporting shaved heads. Yet there were subtle differences. One man had a scar down the right side of his face and his jaw was slightly offset, probably from years of violence. He had a belt of knives around his waist. The other man was slightly taller and he had no scars and no bruises and yet his face still had a warped, evil quality about it.

They were both heavily built and seemed unbeatable. The scarred man seemed to be twice my width. His shoulders were so broad and his muscles so big that fighting back seemed like suicide. He walked forward and those muscles of his began to tense, anticipating their next cruel action.

My head was forced backwards and the man stared directly into my eyes. I closed them, not wanting to look back at him, trying to hide from this nightmare but his face remained. I could feel his breath tickling my face. He wasn't going to move.

Reluctantly I opened my eyes and was overwhelmed by the colour orange. Dark pools of an orange liquid were formed in his eyes, circling menacingly around his dark black pupils. The strands of orange twisted and danced like moths around a naked flame.

He whispered something which I did not understand, although every word seemed to drip with malice and rage. There was no reply and then his arm lunged forward grabbing my neck and squeezing the life from me. The ring on his index finger started to cut into my neck and I felt the metal dig and scratch away on my skin.

His fingers gripped tightly and my mouth opened trying desperately to gasp for air. As the pressure increased my eyes began to open wide, forcing me to stare at him. A smile was formed on his lips. Was he enjoying this? What man would enjoy this?

The other man, the one who had no scars, shouted a single word and his twin stopped. *So this is how you remained scar free*, I thought to myself. *By getting your twin to do all your dirty work.* As I looked at him I saw that his eyes were just as orange and distant as his twin.

Air began to fill my lungs again and I inhaled a giant breath. My lungs pumped quickly to gather as much air as they could, knowing that this wasn't the end of the assault. My chest lifted up and down, contracting and retracting in a rapid pace.

For a brief moment I was thankful to the twin with perfect skin and then I saw the knife once again.

Please, not the knife.

The second time was even worse.

The fear of knowing what would happen, knowing the horrific pain and knowing I was completely powerless made every fresh cut feel so much deeper.

As I stared down I saw every cut. Ten cuts on each arm in a haphazard fashion. There was no style here; the purpose was simply to cause as much pain in a quick time.

Then I saw blood. So much blood. My lungs were in overdrive trying to capture the air that had been lost and this only served to pump blood around my body faster. It only increased the rate I was losing blood.

Pools of blood formed on the floor and drips continued to seep from each cut. A reminder of the pain that had been caused. The pain that was still coursing through each arm.

But these were not my arms.

This was not my blood.

And yet I felt everything.

From 150 miles away, in my apartment.

My name is Emmie Keyes and this was the day that everything changed.

Those arms belonged to my twin brother Will. He had endured every cut. He had been the one gasping for air. He was the one whose arms were tied to a chair. He had lost all that blood and I had been right there with him to endure every moment. As his sister I had felt every cut, every gasp for air and every pain filled moment.

Like everyone else on the planet we were Tethered. Everyone is born with a twin and every set of twins were forever connected via their senses, forever feeling every moment of high emotion felt by the other. This connection carried with each twin for their entire life and when one twin died, their brother or sister would die with them.

I'd shared with Will his best times and his worst times. When he got his dream job, I experienced his joy and through every heartbreak I had felt his sadness.

What he felt I felt and vice versa.

Every cut of his arm was a pain I felt. The feeling of dread was as real in Will's heart as it was in mine.

Twins until the end.

But, was this the end?

Nothing had ever felt like this before. As the two men shouted at Will, I could feel the fear in his heart. He knew time was short and if he died I would die too. The curse of being Tethered.

I didn't know if Will was strong enough to survive this. He'd never been strong, always preferring acquiring knowledge to physical skills, especially in choosing a career that helped him put his brilliant brain to use. I didn't understand why anyone would want to hurt him.

In the corner of the room I saw his fiancée, Faye. I'd seen her with Will a hundred times and she always looked happy and full of life. She was one of the most beautiful people I had ever met and I had always envied her long flowing purple hair and perfect smile. Today was a different story.

Her smile had turned into a look of horror and her face no longer showed the happiness she usually projected effortlessly. Instead guilt, remorse and regret were etched upon her as she sat there trying to come to terms with what was happening. With what she had done.

She caused this.

She was the reason Will was going to die.

She was the reason I was going to die.

As it became increasingly clear Will was not going to co-operate the men walked in close to him. All I could see were the ruffles of their black leather jackets. They were covered in dirt and frayed in many places but I doubted fashion was at the top of their priority list.

One of the men removed a sleek black device from his pocket, no wider than a pen. It carried an orange mark on the side, although I couldn't quite make it out. He held it up to Will's ear and a soft whirring noise began.

As he moved in closer I could see past his jacket and watched as Faye began to lift her slender arms up from the floor. She turned around and saw that the men were distracted and positioned both arms in front of her. With whatever strength she had left, she crawled to the door and out into the hallway.

“FAYE!” I screamed, hoping the men would hear my cries and go after her. If this was the moment Will and I were to die I could not stand for her to escape after what she had done.

But I was just a passive observer. I had no control over Will and could only go along with the ride. My life was in the hands of my brother and only he could save me.

As if by pure thought or dumb luck, the man without scars surveyed the room and saw that Faye had gone. He shouted to his twin and dashed after her out of the room.

The whirring grew louder and Will struggled to release himself from the rope that held him and tried to raise his arms. They felt weak and heavy from the cuts he had endured but he didn't want to die. He didn't want me to die.

With all the force he could muster Will lifted his arm upwards breaking the rope. He formed a fist and swung his arm around which hit the remaining thug in the jaw. The device flew across the room and clattered onto the floor. Will slipped down from the chair and landed on his hands and knees. His arms instantly gave way, no longer able to support him. He felt the feeling in them rapidly fading away.

He propped himself up on his elbow and used it to crawl towards the door. The thug rose to his feet, walking towards his device, as the whirring continued to echo through the room. He picked it up and checked it wasn't broken. Will was weak and the attacker clearly felt he could take his time.

He bent down to finish what he had started and went to grab Will. Thinking quickly Will rolled onto his back and kicked the man in the stomach.

This did nothing to stop him. On the next kick, the orange eyed man grabbed Will's leg and twisted it, forcing Will to flip over onto his back. The man leant down and grabbed Will's throat with one hand, whilst holding the device to his ear with the other. We both gasped for air and thrashed our arms and hands wildly unable to free ourselves from his grasp.

The whirring rose to a loud pitch and I could feel it now, echoing through my ears. As the thug held it to Will's ear, the noise became deafening, rattling our ear drums and causing the world to appear as one big blur.

A sharp sensation tingled through my head and I felt the noise impact on my brain. My entire head felt like it was vibrating and blood began to drip from Will's nose and mine.

Our bodies sank to the floor.

I felt a sense of pride that Will had tried to save us. That he had fought for our lives. Knowing I would die with a loving brother was some comfort.

Our breathing rose and then fell, as the last ounce of breath left our bodies.

A piercing screech erupted from the device and all sound vanished from my world.

A tear fell from Will's eye as he said my name "Emmie," followed by "I'm ... so...rry."

I knew that he meant it.

As the world faded to black I saw two orange eyes staring at me from the corner of my room. Someone had been watching me the whole time, not that it mattered now.

I closed my eyes to be greeted by memories of my brother protecting me as a child.

"Will, thank ... you".....

TWO

Tobias Zen

“No man left behind. No man left to die.”

Those words echoed in Tobias Zen’s mind as he stood many miles away from Emmie in the brightly lit dressing room. On hearing back his perfect piece of propaganda he pulled a sly grin that raised the corners of his expertly pruned goatee and beard. Image meant everything to Tobias. From the way he wore his designer suit, to the words that he used whenever he spoke.

It’s why he kept his hair extra short and why he preferred to keep his hair grey rather than try to dye it another colour. Whilst other men tried to hide their grey Tobias saw it as adding wisdom to his overall image. Tobias was his very own personal brand and he tried to put that into everything he did.

Although he could afford any procedure he wanted Tobias had only ever used plastic surgery once, to hide injuries he had sustained in an accident, and he vowed never to do it again. He wanted people to know his face and that meant keeping the wrinkle lines on his forehead, his large nose, and rounded chin consistent.

He continued to practice his speech, ensuring his words were as well prepared as he was. “I promise, that no soldier will be left behind to die. I will give my entire mind, body and soul to protect this country and to protect the brave men and women who defend it.”

“An investment in TethTech is an investment in the future of our nation, an investment in the future of our world and an investment in human lives,” he loved his new copywriter and thought about giving her a raise when this was over.

Tobias looked out on the stage. In a few moments he would appear on the Jonathan Lewis show. The most important chat show in the world.

Unlike Tobias, Jonathan Lewis was a cosmetic surgery addict. He was fifty now but he looked like a twenty five year old. His hair was a rich brown colour and he had no wrinkles on his face. His lips were so plump they looked like they belonged on a woman and the tip of his chin was perfectly shaped into a small point. He wore jeans and a black designer T-Shirt. It sickened Tobias to see someone hide who they were but the show was just a means to an end for him so he was prepared to humour this man, at least for the moment.

Tomorrow morning his company ‘TethTech’ would go public and float on the stock exchange. Turning years of hard work in building his company, into a huge stream of cash flow from new investors.

Tonight, he would kick start that investment with an emotional speech on how his company would revitalise warfare. He would explain how through his use of Tethers, he could protect the life of every soldier on the battlefield and ensure a minimal loss of human casualties.

Playing on human compassion had always worked well for Tobias and tonight would be his biggest trick. No one wanted to see a soldier die, especially after the events of the '20 Day Siege' and Tobias knew exactly how to turn public sympathy into cold hard cash.

"Two minutes Mr Zen," said the announcer.

Tobias looked at himself in the mirror. He straightened his orange tie, checked his hair and buttoned his designer suit. Alongside appearance it was also important for Tobias to stick in people's minds. He looked down at his shoes. A pair of Orange trainers. A vibrant contrast to his tailored suit and that was exactly why he wore them.

"The man with the orange trainers," was a lot more memorable than being just another guy in a suit. Plus Tobias had always had a thing for the colour orange.

The announcer tapped Tobias on his shoulder and pointed to the stage. His moment of glory would come soon. Tobias looked on to the show floor to see a raised wooden platform that housed hundreds of fans. Above them was a giant skylight that looked out on to the night sky and flooded the studio with light from two giant spotlights. It was more like looking out on a stadium concert than an intimate studio interview.

The studio had rafters that ran along the ceiling and around the skylight. They ran cables to the lights and to the cameramen, of which there were two, one either side of the stage.

Jonathan's stage was as cosmetic as the man himself. It was half enclosed in a dome that showed the greatest landmarks of the world all superimposed on to one image. The other half of the dome gave the audience a perfect view of a single sofa where Jonathan and Tobias would soon be sitting.

Between the audience and the stage were a row of metal gates and guards were located around the gates. Tobias had asked for security to be improved for his appearance and the production crew had not disappointed. He didn't want a repeat of recent incidents.

Jonathan took to the stage, "Our next guest was voted Man of the Year in TIME magazine, appeared in the Globox world's best thinkers hot list and was responsible for ending the 20 Day Siege."

The crowd started to cheer. A set of twins held a British flag to their chests, smiled and started to weep, somehow managing to do everything at the same time in unison. Another woman ran to the stage and was promptly stopped by security.

It was clear who everyone was here to see tonight. Tobias could see everything and was in his element.

"He is a national hero and the man who will change the world forever," Tobias heard Jonathan's words and only he knew how true they would be.

“Join me, in welcoming ... Tobias Zen!”

The crowd rushed to their feet, cheers erupted and a chant began. “Zen! Zen! Zen!” They stomped their feet in unison and the wooden stands started to creak from the pressure.

Tobias stood by the entrance to the stage for a moment. He wanted to soak in every last bit of applause before he made his way to the stage.

The woman who had been stopped by security caught a glimpse of Tobias in the stage entrance and she fell to her knees. The sight of her idol proved too much. To her, he was her saviour.

As she fell to the floor, twenty miles away her twin did the same.

Tobias saw the woman and knew that this was his greatest moment. A prelude for what was next to come; his life was about to be forever transformed.

He walked onto the stage and held his hand in the air to acknowledge their applause. “Thank you, thank you.”

Tobias shook hands with Jonathan who grabbed his arm and raised it into the air. “Tobias Zen, everyone!”

The cheers continued long after the audience signs that read ‘applause’ had been turned off.

It was Tobias who stopped the cheers, simply by directly facing the crowd and preparing to speak. The crowd really wanted to hear what he had to say and they quickly let the room return to silence.

He uttered his first words to the audience. “No man left behind. No man left to die.”

The crowd knew where this was heading. His optimistic spiel was exactly what the world needed right now.

As Tobias was about to launch into his masterpiece, he spotted an odd face in the crowd. In amongst the cheers and happy faces, a woman with straight red hair sat stony faced. She looked in her early twenties and although Tobias thought she looked beautiful he could see she also looked unhappy, almost angry.

Oh, well, you can't win them all, thought Tobias.

Jonathan gestured to the crowd for them to sit. It took three minutes for them to contain their excitement and for everyone to sit down ready to hear Tobias continue his speech.

As the last person sat down, the red haired woman took to her feet.

“Tobias Zen,” she stated with a voice that echoed through the silence.

Tobias looked at her, frustrated that he would have to wait to win the crowd over. Jonathan whispered to Tobias that they could have the woman escorted out of the building.

Tobias saw that she was wearing a grey and green patterned army uniform and knowing how important soldiers were to his cause, he encouraged the woman to stay. "Yes, my dear."

"This is a citizen's arrest," she shouted. "I am here to arrest you for war crimes against the people of Britain and the world."

The crowd immediately began booing the woman.

"I can assure you, you are mistaken," explained Jonathan. "Tobias Zen is a national hero, without his help there wouldn't be an army for you to enlist in. Without him you may have never been born."

"You are wrong!" screamed the woman. "Tobias Zen is no hero. He is responsible for the death of one billion people! He is a traitor and he will be held accountable for his crimes."

As security guards made their way to the woman's seat she held an arm out and raised the palm of her hand upwards pointed at the air.

She looked up through the glass ceiling above her and saw a helicopter shine a beam of blue light through the window and onto the crowd. It engulfed the room.

The entire audience were fixed in place. Security guards were like statues held to the spot. Camera men were stuck to their cameras and even Jonathan Lewis, a man well known for rarely standing still, remained motionless.

The only two bodies that could move were now focused entirely on each other.

Tobias and the red haired woman were all who remained.

"Well played," said Tobias.

In amongst a sea of motionless bodies, the red haired woman lunged forward towards Tobias. As he was pushed to the floor, he saw a chain around the woman's neck that held in place a Queen of Diamonds playing card.

THREE

Emmie Keyes

I felt nothing.

I looked down at my arms and saw no scars and no blood. No signs that last night had occurred and yet there was a feeling of emptiness. I no longer felt Tethered to Will and I no longer felt his presence in my life.

The feeling of emptiness lingered even more until it consumed me. When I knew my brother was out there and felt his presence, it was the wall that protected my life. Now brick by brick my world was crumbling.

My brain finally registered the reality. I was overwhelmed with a feeling of loss and the tears flowed down my face. For two hours I didn't speak, I just sat on the floor with my knees pressed against my chest, my arms around my legs and my head held down, my long blonde hair flowing over my knees. I wanted to make myself as small as possible so the world would swallow me up.

I cried. So many tears. Until my blue eyes became sore and itchy but even that sensation couldn't take my mind away from what had happened. My chest became tight and it started to become hard to breathe. Every breath felt enormous, as if I was trying to remove the events from my body and breathe back in some good from the world.

I tried to put the pieces together to make some logical sense but if Will was dead, how had I survived? If your twin died, you died too. That was the way life worked.

I should be dead.

No.

Will should be alive.

We both should be.

Will was the last family I had left and now I was all alone.

"I shouldn't even be alive!" I screamed, unsure how to put my world back together again.

I lay there, not wanting to move and face the world. Not wanting to come to terms with the events of last night. The betrayal. The pain. The loss.

More time passed. How long, I cannot know but it felt like an eternity.

When I finally opened my eyes to look, everything seemed so empty. My apartment had always been small and fairly sparse but now it just looked desperately so. My aged wooden double bed, my chest of drawers that I'd found abandoned on the street and my red leather beanbag that had been left here from before I moved in. What little possessions I had now had less meaning than ever. My world was empty.

My eyes scanned the room looking for something familiar to provide a moments comfort. It didn't take long. I could see into my bathroom and barely used kitchen from my bed and that was all there was to my room. It was only when I looked over at the broken table where I set out my clothes than I saw them.

Two orange eyes staring at me through the darkness.

It took me a moment to register what I had seen. I still felt delirious and wondered if I was hallucinating. The eyes kept their focus on me as I slowly rose to my feet, my body emotionally and mentally drained.

Despite what had happened I still wanted to live. A spark in me still wanted to be alive and I knew that's what Will would have wanted too. I had neither the physical strength nor the energy to fight this foe so I walked backwards to my bedside table making sure to keep looking at them the whole time. I reached down slowly, not wanting to provoke a reaction and slid open the drawer.

Reaching my hand inside I moved it around frantically trying to find my weapon. Instinctively I turned around so I could see it and then realised what I had done. I'd given them a perfect opportunity to attack. I grabbed my gun, quickly ducked in case of an attack and spun round to aim it directly at them.

I was sick of being another average girl; I'd always had an average height and average weight and in this world you couldn't afford to be weak. For the last two years I'd trained to be a police officer and now I had my weapon I didn't want to be afraid to use it.

My arms may have been weak last night but I suddenly found them filled with energy. Filled with life. I held the gun with all my might and walked slowly towards the eyes.

"Put your hands where I can see them," I said, in as calm a tone as I could muster.

"I know who you are and what you did to my brother," I continued to remain as calm as I could. "I am not afraid to use this," I lied.

The eyes did not move, not even a blink.

Who are these people? I thought to myself.

I edged towards the eyes, keeping my gun held firmly in place with both hands. With each footstep closer, the eyes became brighter and clearer.

Were they watching me? What did they want?

As I took another step closer a loud BEEP emerged from near to the eyes. *The device!* I thought, as I dashed towards them feeling supercharged from adrenaline. I didn't want to play the victim any more.

Just as I was about to reach the eyes it became clear what I was seeing. My DualCam was placed neatly next to my computer.

I had completely forgotten about it. A DualCam allows people to record what they experience and what their twin experiences in really high intensity moments.

My brother had given it to me as a gift, before they were even available in shops. He explained that although he lived miles away, I could use the camera to record the important moments in each of our lives and that it would bring us closer together.

Over the last year I had recorded every important event that he encountered and he had done the same to me. We had planned to meet this week to share our memories and to catch up.

He said he would only be gone for one year and now he was gone forever.

All I had left were my memories and everything that I'd recorded on this camera. As I stared down at the black box with its two glowing orange blobs, a need for closure dawned upon me.

This box had recorded every important event in Will's life in the last year. With the memories of Tether events fading moments after they occur, this box could give me a perfect image of everything that had happened.

If I wanted to understand why Will was killed, there would be no better solution, no clearer oracle than this box. A part of me also wanted to surround myself with happy memories to cushion the reality of his death.

I slid my hand down the right side of the box and found a thin opening no wider than a credit card. I slid my nail in and used it to flip open a hatch, exposing a digital display.

I held my thumb down on the display and it was quickly scanned. 'Identity confirmed'. With personal memories you couldn't be too careful and a biometric scanner was certainly one way to ensure your darkest secrets remained hidden.

Pointing the camera at the nearest wall it whirred into life. The two orange eyes, that had tormented me moments before, lit up as two rainbows full of colour that intersected on the wall and started to form an image.

The camera clicked and three thin pencil sized legs emerged, folding downwards until they hit the floor. Once there, they expanded outwards, creating a tripod to hold the camera in place.

With the camera secure, I started to rewind it back to the earliest memory on file.

I watched as Will sat outside my apartment. This was mere moments after he had given me the camera and said goodbye, knowing we wouldn't see each other again for a year (at least).

He seemed uneasy, as if he didn't want to leave. At the time I had thought it was simply because we would be apart for so long but now I wondered what else may have been weighing on his mind. He stared at my door biting his lip, at one point raising his hand to the doorknob as if he wanted to say one last thing. But he did not. He turned around and left the building without looking back.

As he stood outside, rain started to fall on his face and the camera started to flicker.

The twin rainbows coming from the camera started to flicker too and change in colour. As they settled on a harsh orange, the picture began to speed up.

A new scene began but it was so fast I could only make out passing details. In the corner of the image I saw a countdown clock ticking down from 100%.

Every image was bathed in orange. There were so many I could only catch a glimpse of them. The ones that stuck in my mind were; Will's apartment, 88%, a giant glass dome, 72%, a train shaped like a bullet, 51%, Faye holding a knife, 44%.... The video continued to jump forwards and backwards in time showing events I had long since forgotten.

When the readout showed 30% the lights changed again to show a crystal clear full colour image at normal speed. Only this one, I had never seen before. It was a memory Will had somehow kept hidden but which the camera had recorded.

A room full of pipes led way to a single solitary chair surrounded by wires. The wires circulated around the chair and in the middle sat a young man. He was held to the chair with some sort of harness in place over his chest. Wires ran into the harness and tailed off into various machines. Several other wires protruded from his body.

All that remained exposed or uncovered by wires was a round area of flesh in the centre of his torso that had been covered in a silver liquid.

The man's face was shown on camera but was like nothing I had seen before. One side of his face was devoid of any skin, leaving the bone of his jaw exposed and slivers of flesh hanging in place.

The other side was no better; a black eye and a scar that went from his mouth to his ear. He seemed to have been tortured, although how a man could survive so much damage I had no idea. At least I assumed it was a man. With so much damage it was hard to tell.

Yet despite his clear physical pain and anguish he seemed calm. The man sat patiently in his chair. *Is he delirious or just mad?* I wondered to myself.

16%

The camera turned around, I assume showing me what Will could see. He looked down, showing a notepad and focused on it.

12%

I moved in closer to read what the note said. It had clearly been written in a rush but I could just about make it out.

7%

"You can save everyone. You are free."

6%

"I'm free?" I couldn't understand. Did the note mean I was free of my Tether? Free of my brother? And just what did I need to save everyone from?

5%

As I tried to understand the note, I watched as it was placed into a pocket.

3%

The camera looked back at the person in the chair, as a doctor rolled a large piece of metal equipment into the room. A cylindrical tube sat in the middle, with a bubbling orange liquid contained within it. From the tube there sat a long pole, with a razor sharp tip.

2%

The pole was twisted around so it sat over the man's stomach and his eyes became clear. The sense of calm evaporated instantly and he struggled to try and escape. The video moved in closer and I could see an arm emerge from the side of the frame to hold the man back, with two doctors now holding him in place.

As the sharp tip cut into his stomach, the orange liquid formed into a large sphere inside its container.

1%

Pressure began to build in the container and the sphere was once again ripped into smaller pieces and sucked out of the tube with a rapid force. They shot up the pole and out of the razor sharp tip right towards the man's stomach.

He screamed in agony, his head shot backwards and he grabbed his arms onto the chair, holding on for his life. As the second scream began to form on his lips the camera stopped. A solitary message remained on my wall in large letters.

"All footage deleted,"

"What?" I shouted.

I grabbed the camera and the digital display echoed the same sentiment. Every memory I had of Will on the camera was gone.

Changing the camera mode, I switched to the Internet and proceeded to log into my cloud drive that stored all of my files. My entire drive of files had been deleted. Not just my videos but every document, every photo and every file I had ever saved was gone.

As I moved to file a help ticket, the screen froze and a fresh message emerged. "Cloud account cancelled."

I tried to open my other online services but the story was the same. All accounts had been closed. My social networking accounts gone and my files deleted.

I started to feel sick.

I opened one more window, already certain of what I would see. As I logged into my online banking I saw it within minutes.

"Account cancelled: closed due to loss."

"*Closed due to loss,*" could only mean one thing.

Someone had told the world I was dead.

I had been meant to die after all and someone knew that very well. With Will gone, my death was a certainty and someone had been trying to clear up every loose end.

And although they didn't know it yet, I was still a loose end that needed cleaning up.

I reached for the phone and dialled the only person I could trust.

FOUR

Tobias Zen

The red haired woman held Tobias tightly to the floor.

He couldn't understand it. He had a heavier build than she did and yet every time he struggled she was able to turn his body weight against him. He reached his right arm out to grab her and she jabbed it with her elbow. He tried to kick her and she kneed him in the crotch.

She was far fitter than him too. Years of dedicating himself to his research and using his mind as his greatest weapon had kept him lean and a lack of physical fitness had let his once strong muscles weaken.

By contrast, the red haired woman had the body of a gymnast and the power to match. She could move with sheer grace and knew exactly the right way to position her body weight to have the advantage. He was outmatched in every way.

After much struggling he resisted and allowed his body to rest flat on the floor. "OK you win," he said.

The doors to the studio opened and a team of men and women dressed in grey and green patterned army gear appeared, each of them with a playing card held around their neck. Tobias couldn't make the cards out from this distance but it was clear they weren't all the same. "Very effective use of branding," he mocked. "We could use someone like you on the product design team."

Tobias estimated around twenty men and women with playing cards now stood in the studio, alongside the crowd who remained motionless. They all seemed very young, like toddlers compared to Tobias. *None of them look over thirty*, he thought to himself *the youth of today, always causing trouble*.

Despite being outnumbered Tobias was pleased that his backup plan could easily take on twenty people. A hundred would be a far more interesting test but this would have to do.

The red haired woman motioned to two guards who walked over and grabbed Tobias allowing her to walk away and answer a phone call.

Tobias could not hear what she said but something had clearly upset her. She answered the phone with perfect posture and yet throughout the conversation she threw a hand to her mouth as if in shock and motioned her arms wildly into the air as if to issue specific instructions.

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