Scene AA

Red had filled Randy's face and neck as he fired off message after message to Jessie. After the latest three, he stopped, staring at the screen. Waiting.

The cursor blinked at him.

He fired off another message.

Still no response.

"What are you doing?" Randy screamed at the monitor.

He slammed his fist weakly against the keyboard then pushed back from the terminal. He pulled and yanked on the wheels until he had turned around and began struggling to push himself back towards Jessie's body.

"What is going on?" Lyla said.

Randy looked up at her. She was still waiting in the corridor.

"Where'd they go?" he said.

"They're off trying to find help to break into the bay."

"They're gone?"

Lyla nodded.

Randy turned the wheelchair towards the door and slowly wheeled himself up to it. He leaned forward and pressed his face against the glass, looking both ways, then hit the button unlocking and opening the bay door.

Lyla hurried through.

"Lock it back," Randy said, and Lyla turned back to the control panel. The light above it blinked red.

"What's going on?" she said.

"Jessie is betraying me. I'm not sure what she's doing, but she let someone else in the system. We have to stop her. Push me over to the medic station."

Lyla wheeled him over, and Randy yanked open the cabinet. He rifled through, knocking vials over.

He growled something intelligible.

"What?" Lyla said.

"There's no sedatives here. Nothing to put her to sleep."

"Of course not. There's no use for it in the Threshing."

"We have to stop her!" he said.

"But if someone else has access..." Lyla said.

Randy sat thinking for a moment, then reached into the bottom of the cabinet. He pulled out two small vials, then put the contents into a new syringe.

"Take that," he said, thrusting it at Lyla. He turned the wheelchair back towards the terminal.

"What is that?"

"Adrenaline."

Lyla looked at the vials, then back to Randy.

"That's two full doses," she said. "That will put her in cardiac arrest."

Randy kept struggling at the wheels then finally stopped and looked over his shoulder at her.

"Why are you just standing there? Push me back over to the terminal."

Lyla walked over slowly, her face still in shock, and maneuvered the wheelchair back to the terminal.

Randy immediately started firing commands into a new window.

"What are you doing now?"

"I'm getting a trace put on whoever it is Jessie let into the system."

"How can you do that? The Reapers built a closed system."

"The same bug that Jessie just exploited gave me access too. I have to know who she is letting in."

"But you can't do that from here," she said.

Randy didn't answer.

"Who is helping you?"

"You're not the only person sympathetic to our cause," he said. "I've had four years to plan this. Four years to collect those that hate Marcus and the Faction and the Reapers."

Lyla's eyebrows furrowed and she took a step back from him.

He turned and looked at her.

"What? Are you hurt that it's not just you and me? Did you really think the two of us could pull this off alone?"

"Why didn't you tell me?"

He turned back to the Terminal.

"Purely need-to-know."

Randy continued working for several minutes.

Lyla stared down at the syringe in her hand. Finally, her eyes seemed to come into focus and her head snapped up.

"What is this for?"

"What?" Randy said, not turning around.

"This!" she said thrusting out her hand at him.

"Leverage."

"For what?"

Randy didn't answer. His pale face locked into a grimace and he leaned in close to the monitor as his fingers flew over the keys.

Scene BB

*How much longer?* Jessie said.

*A few minutes. Thee wilt beest patient.*

Jessie rolled her eyes and sat back.

Messages from Randy continued to flash across her conscience, but she ignored them. The decision was made. There was nothing else that needed to be said.

"Jessie!"

Craig was yelling for her.

She looked up, back towards the cave.

"Yeah?" she yelled back.

"You need to come out here."

"What is it?"

"They're breaking through! I need your help!"

Jessie jumped to her feet and took the few steps down the path to a metal wall. She took a deep breath and stepped through.

As soon as she was through, she felt a sharp pain on the top of her head. She was on her hands and knees before she could begin processing what was going on.

She felt a sharp pain in her ribs that sent her skidding across the ground. She rolled over and looked up.

Craig was standing over her breathing heavily and holding a large rock in his hand.

It looked like blood and hair was now matted on the bottom of it.

"Craig, what are you--"

But before she could finish, he slammed his foot into her face cutting her off.

Everything went black and fuzzy.

She heard Craig moved towards the cave wall.

She rolled onto her arms and knees, but when she tried to sit up, consciousness began to slip from her again and she collapsed back to the ground.

She laid there for a moment, welcoming the darkness. The rest.

*No!*

Her eyes popped open.

*Jessie, where art thou?*

She struggled to organize her thoughts enough to answer.

*The connection hast vanished!*

Jessie shook her head, try to clear the fog. She got her hands back underneath her and struggled to all fours. She waited for the nausea to pass, then pushed her way up to standing.

*He attacked me.*

*Who is't?*

Jessie shook her head again, then slowly leaned down and picked up the rock Craig had dropped and began walking unsteadily back to the hidden crack in the cave wall.

She stepped through and almost feinted.

Craig was on his hands and knees next to her equipment ripping at the wires violently.

"What are you doing?" she screamed, taking a few steps forward before losing her balance and dropping to her knees.

"I won't let you do it!" he said. "I want to make it out alive!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Randy told me what you were doing! That you're going to delete the whole Threshing and kill everybody so you can win."

"Don't be stupid Craig! I can't do that. And I would kill myself if I did that."

"But you come back!"

Jessie struggled to her feet and took a step towards him.

He turned and grabbed her portable terminal and held it over his head.

"Not another step!" he screamed.

Jessie put out a hand towards him.

"Craig please, don't. I'm trying to free us. All of us. Not just you and me. But everyone. In all the towns. I'm getting rid of the control."

"No you're not! You're just trying to win!"

"Think about that Craig," she took another step towards him. "I'm spent the last nine months trying to get out of this. I don't want to win. I just want to go home. Aren't you tired of this? This Threshing. All your friends getting scrambled or dying. Don't you want it to end?"

Jessie took another step towards him. She was now less than ten feet away.

Craig's eyes lost their focus for a moment and he stared off in the distance, listening.

"Don't listen to him!" Jessie yelled. "He's lying to you!"

Craig took a step back from her, shaking his head.

"No," she screamed lunging for him but he turned and slammed the terminal against the metal railing.

The terminal shattered. Pieces flew all across the path and down in between the wires.

Jessie fell to all fours again and Craig took a step back from her.

"You have no idea--" she began.

But Craig had turned and started running down the path away from her.

"Where are you going?" she yelled.

"He's going to save me! He said I just had to keep following the path and I would--"

"He's lying!" Jessie yelled. "Stop! You can't go further into the grid without--"

Craig suddenly tripped and fell.

He rolled over and looked down at his legs, his eyes wide with fear.

One of his feet had disappeared and blood poured from the empty space.

"Get back here!" Jessie yelled.

He lunged forward onto his belly and began trying to crawl back to her, but now most of his legs had dessolved away. He opened his mouth to yell something, but only a gurgled screech escaped as blood began pouring from his lips.

He gazed at Jessie and reached his remaining hand towards her before it disappeared as well.

After a few more seconds, there was just a small pool of blood where he had been.

*Jessie...*

*I can't get you back in.*

*Tis doest not matter. They art hither.*

*Who?*

*Thy brother has't trac'd me.*

Jessie dropped her head and began to cry. Great sobs escaped her chest.

*Thee has't to listen. They shall beest hither soon. I has't did install the virus, but thee has't maketh t runneth.*

*I can't! My terminal is gone. Craig is... gone. And the other Coders will break through soon!*

*Thee can doth this. Thee musteth but doth this. F'r all of us.*

*Balaam!*

*Farewell Jessie. T hast been an hon'r.*

Scene CC

Jessie laid on the pathway very still. She had a hand clutched to the wound on her head that was still seeping blood. A boom echoed into the corridor from the cave.

The other Coders were still working their way in.

*Jessie, you need to answer me,* Randy said. *I know Craig is gone. I know your equipment is destroyed. We need to work together to get you out of there.*

Jessie continued laying still, breathing slowly, shallowly. She did not answer.

*Jessie!*

Jessie wiped her eyes with her sleeve, and winced at the pain in her ribs.

This was the part Jessie never really understood about the grid. She knew that her body was laying in a bay in the Capital, perfectly safe and plugged in. Her head wasn't really smashed with a rock. She wasn't really kicked in the ribs.

But she still felt every bit of the pain.

Balaam used to tell her it was in her head. That if she could really understand reality, she would be invincible inside of the grid.

But he never push the bounds of the grid. And she'd spent the last nine months watching what happens to the people that do.

*Jessie.*

Her eyes popped open.

*Lyla?*

*Are you ok?*

Jessie struggled to a sitting position, her legs crossed underneath her.

*I know things are bad Jessie, but we can still get you out. Randy can still help you win the Threshing.*

*Do you know what he did?*

*Jessie, we've all done bad things. Things we didn't want to do. But that's what you do when you're fighting someone like Marcus.*

*He killed Craig.*

There was a pause before Lyla answered.

*Craig got scared and made a stupid decision,* she said.

*He was doing what Randy told him to.*

*Randy had to stop you from destroying everything. Jessie, you don't know what will happen if you destroy the grid. You're too young to understand. It will be chaos. People have lived with the grid the entire lives, you can't just set them loose.*

*So I should just let people like Marcus and Randy keep them trapped?*

*Randy will be different. He'll take care of you. He'll work for the towns.*

*Do you know he tried to kill me?*

*What are you talking about?*

*With the incinerator. He tried to have me burned up.*

*But you were--. I mean, we all thought you were dead.*

Jessie shook her head.

*He knew. He knew I'd come back.*

There was a long pause, and then Randy's voice was back in her head.

*Jessie, we've been over this. I didn't know--.*

*Stop it! Stop lying! I know what you did!*

*Fine. Yes, I thought you might come back. But I was scared Jessie. I had been locked up for four years. Four years! I was afraid that Marcus would put me back in.*

*But you tried to kill me!*

*I didn't know for sure you would come back. I just wanted things to end so I could... so Marcus wouldn't be in charge any more. And we're so close Jessie. Marcus is gone. I'm in charge here now. All you have to do is help me win the Threshing and it will be over. You can come back. We can be in charge together. We'll have everything you and I dreamed about back home.*

Jessie started to answer, but didn't know what to say.

*I know you don't trust me. I know you're scared of me. And I'm so sorry for that. But I promise I will make it up to you. And what choice do you have? If you stay where you are, the other Coders will eventually find you and beat you. If you help me, I can get you out and we can be together and start over again. Finally have a chance to be a family again.*

Jessie waited, thinking.

Another loud boom came from the cave. This time everything shook around Jessie.

They were getting close.

*Jessie! Can you here me? Jessie! It's Ernst! I think I'm through...*

*Yes. I'm hear.* Jessie replied. *Where are you? Aren't you with Randy?*

*No! He locked Alex and me out of the bay.*

*Jessie,* Randy said, *do not listen to him. He can't do anything for you. Only I--.*

*That's not true!* Ernst said, *I think I've figured out a way out for you.*

*Listen to me,* Randy said. *I've already sent guards to find Ernst and Alex. As soon as they find them, they'll be detained.*

He paused momentarily, then continued.

*Jessie, I can't let you or anyone else get in my way. I've come too far. I've suffered to much too stop now. I'm here, with your body, and everything I need to stop you and end this.*

*But then you'll lose the Threshing,* Jessie said.

*True, but I'll retain control of the Americas Faction and there will be another Threshing in four years. I'll win that one. You have a simple choice Jessie. Help me win the Threshing, serve the Faction alongside me, and I'll let your friends go back home to their towns with the full support of the Capital for them and their families. Or, the entire Faction suffers the loss of the Threshing, your friends die, and... Jessie, you'll die too. This time for real.*

Jessie sat quietly. She wiped her hand off on her pants, then reached up and touched the wound on her head again. Her hand was smeared with blood again.

She reached up to the railing and struggled up to her feet. She swayed for a moment before gaining her balance.

There was another loud bang from the cave. The shaking threatened her already precarious balance and she heard rocks scattering.

Voices floated into the passageway. The other Coders had broken through.

*Ernst?*

*I'm here Jessie.*

*And Alex?*

*He's with us too.*

*Ok. Tell me what to do.*

Scene DD

I muffled roar arose from Randy before a coughing fit wracked his body and doubled him over in the wheelchair.

Lyla backed up from him still clutching the syringe as he flailed trying to regain himself.

"That ungrateful--" he began yelling before the coughing fit overtook him again.

Lyla backed up again, fear creeping into her face.

Randy regained control again and turned the wheelchair around towards Lyla.

"How do we stop her?" he said.

"We... I don't think we can. It's the Threshing. We can't break in from the outside."

Randy sat still, his breath calming down as the anger melted away. He looked more sad than angry now.

Randy slowly began wheeling himself over to Jessie's body. Once he reached the table, he kicked up the foot plates and put his feet on the ground. He pushed hard against the arm rests, began to raise out of the seat, then collapsed back.

"Please," he whispered. "Help me up."

Lyla slid the syringe in her pocket and put her hands under his arms. She gently helped him to a standing position. He leaned hard on the table catching his balance.

He stared down into her calm face. He reached up one of his bony hands and gently rubbed her cheek.

"I still miss her hair," he said.

There was just the few inches that had grown in since she had come to the Capital.

"I know she does too. She always loved her long hair. She was always putting it up into bows and making our father braid it for her so she could play outside."

Randy sighed. He reached his hand behind him keeping his eyes on Jessie.

"The syringe," he said.

"What?" Lyla answered.

Randy craned his neck around to look at her.

"I think I was clear," he said. "Give me the syringe."

"You're not actually going to do this. You can't kill your own sister."

"I'm not. *She* made the choice. She knows I can't let her go through with this. She had her way out -- her way to live -- and she refused it. She chose this. Not me."

Lyla took a step back.

"I won't let you," she said.

Randy turned part of the way around to face her fully.

"Excuse me?"

Lyla shoved her hand in her pocket and clutched the syringe.

"I won't give it to you. I can't let you do this to her."

Randy let out another frustrated sigh.

"Fine!", he said.

He turned back around and slowly lowered himself down before plopping back into the chair. He put his feet back up on the kick plates and started wheeling himself around to the other side of Jessie.

"What are you doing?" Lyla said.

"I'm getting another one. It's not like you have the only supply."

Randy struggled against the wheels but got them moving again. He turned his back on Lyla and began moving around the foot of the table.

Just as he turned to the medic cabinet, he felt a sharp pain in the side of his neck. His hand flew up and knocked Lyla's hand off the syringe. He screamed in pain and grabbed the syringe and yanked it out of his neck.

He stared at the plunger that was pushed all the way down.

He turned to look back at Lyla. She stood several feet from him, breathing heavily.

"What have you done?"

Instead of coming out clear, it came out a slurred mess of a phrase. His vision began to blur. He felt his heart pounding in his chest. Lyla was talking to him but he was having trouble hearing her. He opened his mouth to say something, but everything went black.

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