

The Synarchy Series Duology

The Awakening and The Ascension

Crystal Storm

Tell Our Visions

New Orleans, Louisiana

The Awakening

Synarchy Book 1

Crystal Storm

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Did you enjoy this book? We'd love to hear from you! Connect with Crystal at her website crystalsimagination.com

Dear Reader,

It's been quite the journey since I first published, *The Awakening*. Through a lot of trial and error, improved editing, typesetting, and other little nuances, I can say with a lot of confidence how proud I am of this remastered edition.

You'll find a Cast of Characters at the back of the book, but be careful reading it before you delve into the novel; it's a little spoilerish about certain characters motivations. It's included to help you keep track of everyone in this vast universe.

My goal as a writer has always been to entertain and inform. I'm hoping to hear from you, as to whether or not I've accomplished my mission.

Enjoy the world of Synarchy.

Crystal

To You:

To Antonina Bianca (Liz), Julian Terenzio (Shawn, a.k.a numbered husband), Carissa Terenzio (Jess, a.k.a Teach): Thank you a million times over for your help during the creation process. This book is made all the better by your tangible contributions to it. This is your story as much as it is mine, and I hope I have done your creations justice.

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To SVT's second wife: Thank you from the bottom of my heart. For reading this book eight times, for your honest criticism, unfailing support and patient tolerance of the insanity that is me (especially when I'm working). Here's to sharp edges and fuck the fine print.

And to you, yes you, the one reading these words; may this book be a light on your current journey. You know which one.

Namaste.

Prologue

“Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting; The Soul
that rises with us, our life's Star, Hath had elsewhere its
setting. And cometh from afar.”

- William Wordsworth

Planet Atlantis

The Second Time

6,000 Years Ago

The stress knowing what was to come weighed on him, even in dreams. At least he wasn't alone. The change in frequencies warned them, but only a few remembered to listen. Messengers from God, from the true Source, came and were labeled outsiders. Some were killed. The planet became a manifestation of the darkest fears of its men and women.

Menes bolted upright. Sweat highlighted the tension from his temples down to his heavy jaw. His violent heartbeat added a menacing soundtrack to the dream images as they invaded his conscious state. Dragging his hands over his damp face, Menes shut his eyes searching

out the 2D frequency which would balance his energy level and lower his spiked blood pressure.

When the last bit of tension was exhaled, he reopened his eyes, glancing at the sleeping woman next to him. Relieved she hadn't woken, he carefully uncoiled from the silk bedding and padded over soft carpeted floors into the bathroom.

He moved easily without the aid of superficial light. The flecks of gold in the walls around him shimmered as if conducted by his steps. He passed his hand over a cerulean crystal embedded in the marble, a tranquil glow filling the room. When he stepped up to the sink, crisp cold water fell as if it anticipated his need. Cupping both hands under the steady flow, he splashed his face several times before meeting his image in the mirror.

Sighing, his gaze dropped towards the faucet. The water stopped. He'd tried to convince more of his people they needed to change. For all the Atlanteans technological and mental mastery they had become unbalanced. They were no longer in tune to their heart chakras, and they no longer listened to the needs and wisdom of their planet. It left him frustrated, though he tried to accept it for what it was. The tick of universal time brought the inevitable truth; his nightmare was a premonition of the future.

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Menes carried that thought as he returned to the sleeping woman. When his eyes brushed across her still form, his aura pulsed with a dim gray light; sadness. She'd leave physically, returning to spirit until she chose whether or not to come back to human form, or perhaps something entirely different. Unfortunately, the scar of this event would be burned into her DNA, becoming a fear she must face in another lifetime should she revisit this dimension.

Menes slipped back beneath the sheets and drew her against him. For an instant, he slipped through his infinitesimally small door in her shields, like a scared child taking solace in the willing, unconscious reassurance she gave him. The steady rhythm of her breath lured him back to sleep.

When next he woke, it was to terrified screams, and the deafening rumble of the earth splintering around him. The end was here.

Certain cosmic laws of creation governed the universe. From Source came the Archons, three pieces of universal intelligence that assisted in acts of pure creation, ensuring that Source continued to experience itself in infinite ways.

"We have failed again," they said to the others. They occupied no body, they had no gender. They were pure, conscious, energy.

"There is great suffering," the second one mused, thoughtful.

"Just like the first time," the third circled the destructing planet, wondering what went wrong.

"I have lived it," the second almost sounded sad, though Archons did not experience emotion the way a being in physical form did. But, they remembered what it was like to have a body.

"We all have," a reminder from the first.

"What shall be done now?" asked the third.

"I believe we have an idea," said the first. It often did have these ideas.

"Ah, yes. That is a very good idea," the third had stopped their circling, focusing on themselves.

"Thank you."

"Shall we try it?"

"Yes. Go and collect volunteers,"

"Will it work this time?" asked the second.

"What is it that they say?" the first may have sounded pleased. "Third time's the charm."

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*“I will die to see my will done, and it **will** be
done.”*

-Stefano Vasco Terenzio

Forty-eight hours before his death.

Chapter 1

“Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.”

-Benjamin Franklin

June 6, 2012

Undisclosed location

Alcyone Island 11:11 PM

He's dying?”

“It's a wonder he lived this long.”

“Stubbornness. Pure stubbornness.” The comment brought collective, sad smiles, and softer laughter.

“Vasco?” The bedroom door opened, the dim light blocked by the shadowed figure of the man in the doorway.

Vasco turned from gazing at the grandfather clock in the hallway. “Yes, sir?”

“He wants to see you.” Steel gray eyes, clouded with hidden emotion, looked at two others. “All three of you.”

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There was nothing lavish in this room, the furniture as sparse as the walls. What did take up space was all mahogany wood; sturdy, masculine. Neither knickknacks nor small keepsakes touched the dustless surfaces. Nothing decorated the mantle above the burning fireplace.

There wasn't a place for those things in the room of a man who didn't exist. The only thing which indicated someone might occupy the room (besides the dying man in the canopy bed) was a framed photograph on the nightstand. It showed a woman captured in a moment of happiness. You saw it in her shyly lowered blue eyes, the slight curl of her smile. Those allowed in the room often said she should've smiled wider. She'd always had such a beautiful smile. Her husband always replied, *it was just enough*.

Marcello S. Terenzio was one hundred years old. He laid there, his eyes closed, twisting the simple gold wedding band around his finger as if he needed reminding of its presence. It became more of a habit after his wife died.

Demetrius Terenzio left as the triplets filed silently into the room, giving his children the requested time alone with their grandfather. When the door clicked

shut, Marcello released a heavy breath and blinked open aged, light gray eyes.

Simone M. Terenzio-Russo smiled gently at her grandfather, the first who moved to his side. "You wished to see us."

Marcello stopped fidgeting, covering his granddaughter's hand in his own. "I must be brief." It was such a rarity to clearly see emotion rolling through his enigmatic eyes. "My Mari is waiting for me." He paused, taking another heavy breath. "You have never been to the vault. I've arranged for the plane to take you."

Lucien Terenzio, the youngest by seconds, stood behind his sister and asked, "The vault? What's in the vault?"

"Wrong question, Lucien," Vasco Terenzio said quietly. He slowly walked to their grandfather's side. "Why?"

Marcello smiled, unmasking his pleasure with Vasco's question. "When you get there, you will know." He dropped his head back against the propped up pillows, raising his eyes to the ceiling. "I almost wish I could live to see it. Well, with these eyes, at least."

"See it?" Simone asked.

"The Ascension."

THE AWAKENING

June 6, 2012

Somewhere in the Caribbean

Phoenix Isle 11:26 PM

The full Moon in a star-cluttered sky threw an eerie, glow over the thickness of the greenery below it. To say the moon's unblinking stare knew something that the organisms on Earth did not was a truth not yet discovered. But it would be.

A wet heat blanketed acres of jungle, surrounded by picture-perfect calm, clear blue waters. Exotic wildlife was forced to share their homes on this small island. It was twenty miles away from the main one which saw activity of a human kind since the mid 1920s. Power grew there. It did not wait silently; it spread its hands like the tentacles of a tumor touching everything it intended to and more.

A house, barely visible past the low hanging cypress branches, was a recent addition to the landscape. Stilts protected it from the mild swamp, and full wall to floor windows displayed the darkness within. It wasn't until the shrill ring of a telephone cut through nature's maternal hum that a small light snapped on. On the fourth ring, the phone was answered.

"What?" a male grumble.

"He's dying," the woman's tone was pleased.

The reply was groggy and slightly annoyed. "Sudden, but nothing I didn't already know."

"He's not transferring power to his daughter," she paused briefly for dramatic effect. "He's giving it to the triplets."

This information was unknown, and seconds of silence followed. "How do you know that?"

"SVT Securities bugged his room two days ago. They're on their way to you. He's giving them access to the vault."

His thinly trimmed eyebrows shot upwards. "What?"

"Mmhmm."

"Bastard."

"Easy, cousin. We planned for this."

He sighed in frustration sitting up in bed. "I've never been in the goddamn vault. This will give them an edge."

"True. Even so, I'm sure our grandfather would've agreed..." Amadeo heard the cunning smile in Olivia Terenzio's tone as she spoke "...who better to take on a Terenzio, than a Terenzio?"

"The stakes are too high to take this lightly," he snapped, his grip tightening on the phone, annoyed at the amusement he caught in her voice.

"I take nothing lightly."

"Fine. Have you heard anything from Kayla?"

"Not yet. We will."

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"This needs to happen soon. The more the triplets know, the harder this will be."

"You worry too much."

He frowned at how cavalier she was. "You don't worry enough."

"Jesus Christ," Amadeo could hear the smoke from Olivia's cigarette being blown into the phone. "Pull the stick out of your ass and start enjoying your job. We'll win."

"We better."

"We will. Get ready for your guests." A dial tone punctuated the words.

General Amadeo Terenzio glared at the phone, resisting the urge to slam it onto its cradle. Tossing the thin sheet aside, he climbed out of bed, glancing over his shoulder at the eyes which peered back at him.

"Get dressed. Get out. Your money is on the living room table." Without another word, he stalked over to his closet, throwing it open to a line of uniforms and expensive suits. A uniform was selected. Time to go to work.

June 7, 2012

Somewhere in the Caribbean

Alcyone Island 12:12 AM

Brothels, while illegal almost anywhere else in the world, were not on Alcyone. That made *The God's Tempest* an extremely popular place for tourists and the locals. It also made the working boys' and girls' profession a lot safer. The brothel, cleverly shaped in the form of a pirate ship, was rarely empty, both men and women catered to by a wide variety of professionals who were disease-free, discrete, and extremely talented, both in and out of the bedroom.

Rich wallpaper pictured the darkly lit interior of the various cabins on a ship stretched around windows which were purely aesthetic. Oil lamps hung low on the walls, throwing more shadow than light over the corners of the Grand Galley's red carpeted room. There was little privacy for the customers, but most there enjoyed indulging in their exhibitionistic tendencies.

For once, Xavier Terenzio-Zhane, Deputy Director of Homeland Security for the United States of America, wasn't there to gratify his desires. A few women he had made a night of it with before his engagement to his fiancée stopped to chat with him, only to look briefly disappointed when he declined any offers.

Ignoring the animalistic sounds coming from the lounge chair behind him, he polished off his second straight bourbon while glancing down at his watch, in

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impatient intervals. Thirty minutes later, Xavier saw her walk in.

“Do you have it?” Xavier asked without preamble, his blue-gray eyes glancing from her generously exposed cleavage up to her face.

Red painted lips smirked devilishly as matching polished fingernails squeezed between her breasts and emerged with a mini CD. “Every word for the last twenty-four hours.”

It was Xavier’s turn to smile as his eyes focused on the tiny case. If there was one thing almost every Terenzio male had a sweet tooth for, it was a woman’s company. Some just didn’t choose theirs carefully enough. From the inside of his suit, he removed a thickly packed envelope and handed it to her. “Every penny, bonus included.”

The woman exchanged the disc for cash, opening it immediately to count every bill. “Thanks, X.”

“No, Lisa...” Xavier tucked the CD carefully into the same pocket, a thrill rushed through him at the thought of the information he carried. She had no idea how important it was, but she would soon enough. “...Thank you.” Standing a good ten inches above the woman, he bent to kiss her painted cheek before walking quickly out to the waiting car and his three-man personal security team. The razor thin cell phone was already against his ear as he climbed into the backseat; silence reigning for

CRYSTAL STORM

exactly thirty seconds until he heard the “click” which meant the other line answered. He only transmitted a short message.

“Our girl came through for us. I’m on my way.”

Chapter 2

“Science is always discovering odd scraps of magical wisdom and making a tremendous fuss about its cleverness.”

-The Confessions of Aleister Crowley, chapter 64

June 6, 2012

SVT Think Tank

Alexandria, VA 10:10 AM

Dr. Derek Vaughn III pulled off his glasses, pinching the bridge of his nose to fend off an oncoming migraine caused from lack of sleep. He glanced at his watch, then impatiently flicked his pen back and forth over the tops of his fingers. They must have found *something*. He risked not only their careers, but their lives, all because one night, a little over a month ago, everyone on his team had interconnected dreams.

Derek was a man of science, not some self-proclaimed New Age mystic. Nevertheless, he was too smart to grant mere coincidence to the fact all six members of his team shared the same experience. Each carried the piece of

some puzzle which days later, they still remembered in such vivid detail that they were able to draw pictures of what they saw and repeat conversations verbatim.

Derek tossed his glasses on the spotless surface of his desk, standing. He turned to the full wall window that provided a breathtaking view of the proud skyline of the nation's capital. Tucking his hands into the pockets of his jeans, he propped a shoulder against the glass, beguiled by his sudden obsession with discovering the truth.

He told himself over and over they had a lot more important things to do. There were vaccines to create (or acquire), terrorists to arm, weapons to manufacture to sell to the world's only superpower, and otherwise advance his employer in any and all areas. Making all of that happen was his job, not playing Indiana Jones.

The sudden ring of his cell phone pulled him out of his thoughts. He flipped it open, staring at the tiny screen where the face of Dr. Shirley McDermott appeared. Derek's heartbeat raced when he caught the expression on her face.

"Derek, you are *not* going to believe this..."

June 6, 2012

7 miles below Antarctica

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Rainbow City 9:11 AM

“We have to stop it, Menes!” Loki shouted, his aura glowing red with mounting anger and frustration. “Humankind was never meant to know the whole truth!”

Menes looked intently at his young protégé, though Loki was far from young. They were all tens of thousands of years old. “If you recall, the Mayans did very well with the knowledge we shared with them.”

Loki snorted, his hands slammed roughly on his mentor’s desk. “They did well, Menes, because we only gave them part of the information. As civilization progressed, we were not the ones to share those secrets with any other culture. They are evil and unintelligent! They should remain as slaves to the Anunnaki!”

Menes pressed two fingers against his temple and said, “Even with the veil wrapped around this planet, the Mayans ascended before the collective was ready. And the Anunnaki visited them frequently.” He smiled warmly at Loki. “Calm your soul, my friend, all will be well. If the time is not right, then the Cave of Creation will not expose itself and the Akashic Records will not be found, but I believe it is time.”

Aggravated with the response, Loki paced the golden floors of the office. “Menes, of those who came with us, only ten remain, and we have lost contact with ourselves

above! We are running out of time. If we let this happen there will be nothing left!" From the few hundred that escaped the destruction of Atlantis, fifty came to Earth. The rest traveled on to Mars, as instructed by The Source, the omniscient consciousness which possessed no beginning or end. Loki stopped pacing and pointed his finger at Menes. "It is a trap, just like before. The four horsemen have been unleashed. The war isn't going well; you and I both know this. They will destroy this planet just like they did Atlantis!" Panic edged his voice and made his aura burn so brightly Menes was forced to squint.

"Loki..." Standing, Menes walked over to his distraught brother and placed his hands soothingly on Loki's shoulders. "You can no longer hear yourself because of the fear in your heart. You must regain your trust in Spirit, in the goodness of God. You must remember we want nothing but the best for you. You must believe this completely. It is time. We keep secrets no longer. The Phoenix Cycle completes on the night of the winter solstice. This planet will ascend, and it will be marvelous."

Loki broke roughly from Menes' grip. "You're a fool," he spat. He waved his hand, and a section of the stone wall slid open. He stormed out. Menes sighed. Once again, a civilization was quickly approaching the end of an era, and he prayed the disturbing images recently

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plaguing his dreams were not solely all the future would become.

Menes was wrong. Sound was the universal language, and since the dawn of America, the world's great super-power, the first and second dimension's frequencies screamed in pain. For centuries, Loki and his people watched humans de-evolve. They just weren't ready. He had to stop it.

Loki stood on a deserted street corner, gazing around him. Rainbow City was constructed deep underneath the frigid waters, its protective dome iridescently radiating through the blackness of the ocean. It was a shabby suburb compared to the grandeur of Atlantis; modest buildings with roofs of ivory, walls of gold and a special red metallic material that had only been found on Atlantis. Atlantis and now Rainbow City was proof how technology advanced simply by using it in conjunction with the natural energy of a planet, which by its very nature provides for all children who inhabit it.

But out of fifty Atlanteans, there were ten. Their brothers and sisters chose to let go of their hold on physicality. Worse, some succumbed to dis-ease, which was what happened to a human body when the energy

portals, or chakras, became blocked. This made the situation far worse. If there were no Ascended Masters left to teach the humans *and* they discovered the Cave of Creation, it would be disastrous. They were not passive. They would immediately wage war on the Anunnaki for the part they played in the manipulation of their genetic code and the creation of the veil. The Promise would be forgotten and the world would end again. He could not, would not, allow that.

With his resolve steeled Loki's destination was the temple a pyramid in the center of their city. It stood out as clearly as a diamond glinting in the sand. Its power lay in the sacred geometry of its shape and the energy channeled by the two giant crystals inside it. By recognizing his connection with everything around him, he blended those energies and flew, much like a passing breeze, into the holy space. Loki descended, then dropped to his knees in a moment of silent reverence. A wordless prayer lifted to the pair of glowing crystals suspended in mid-air, touching at their diamond shaped tips. If one was removed, the balance of energy would shatter, and their city would fall.

"Forgive me for what I must do," Loki whispered. Rising back into the air, he closed his hand around one of the golden rods.

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June 6, 2012

5 Miles below Antarctica

Shackleton Ice Shelf 9:22 AM

Dr. Abe Donahue zipped through his college career, earning a degree in marine biology and a Ph.D. in internal medicine. Afterwards, he joined the Navy, just because he liked boats, then spent the next six years in an attack submarine. It was why he felt confident enough to nap in the tight compartment of the midget submarine. The pulsing lights of the computer system on autopilot, beeped in rhythmic quiet around him.

Suddenly, it became a cacophony of noise.

Every system released a high pitch scream, ripping Abe back into consciousness. He bolted upright as a wave of white light rolled through the pitch black waters, right into the thick titanium submarine wall. Metal whined as the tiny ship whizzed backwards, and smashed into a piece of rock.

“What the fuck was that, Abe?” Dr. Shirley McDermott emerged from the only other compartment in the submarine, seconds after the explosion. Worry clouded her dark brown eyes.

"I have no idea." Abe's voice held steady, but his fingers flew over the keyboard, running through system checks to make sure the weight of the ocean wasn't about to come crashing in on them.

Shirley jumped into the chair across from him, poking at the touch screens. "Looks stable. Guess we just banged her up."

"General Kahlo will be pissed if that left a mark." Abe winced while he shoved his hands back through his hair. "Let me see if I can figure out where the hell that came from."

"Abe." Shirley was suddenly digging her nails into his bicep.

"What?" He tried to make sense of the strange readings he received, but both the tone of Shirley's voice and the sting of her nails made him look up. For a second he thought he was hallucinating.

A man was floating through the water. In his hands he gripped a large golden pole. From the top of it, a diamond shaped crystal threw out a gentle, green light that surrounded his body.

Shirley possessed a Ph.D. in both physics and psychology. She knew what was possible and what wasn't. What was happening in front of them was *not* possible. The tons of pressure should have killed the man, but there he was, floating like a fish.

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“Get this thing moving, Abe! Follow him!”

“I’m...I’m on it.” Abe’s hands shook uncontrollably as he pressed a button on the control panel to turn the machine around. The bright spotlights from the vessel illuminated the man as they trailed slowly behind him.

June 7, 2012

SVT Think Tank

Alexandria, VA 1:11 AM

SVT Think Tank, subsidiary of the Dion Corporation, was only eight years old and created to utilize the vast streams of information gathered by SVT Securities, a corporate security watchdog which subsequently spied on the organizations it safeguarded.

SVT Think Tank’s mission was simple: improve weapons, design vehicles, update computer systems, and provide video and audio surveillance equipment—anything required or not yet thought of for the Dion Corporation and subsequently the Terenzio family. Since Derek was Director of the project, it provided he and his team the necessary privacy *and* clearance to pull those little “missions” off.

There were two floors connected by a winding staircase entirely devoted to Derek's group, and accessible by a limited number of personnel. Only two cameras were on the floor, and they were in front of the elevators. That deceptively simple gesture was a sign of trust from Derek's employer. Antonina Bianca-Vaughn, his grandmother, had been one of several personal bodyguards to the head of the Terenzio family. The Vaughns were looked upon by the Terenzios as blood relatives and Derek was very aware that trust existed due to the bond shared. Until he figured out what the hell was going on, he sincerely hoped they stayed under the radar.

He stood on the roof of the building, chugging down a cup of coffee as the helicopter landed. The implications of the find were mind blowing. He couldn't remember the last time he felt so skeptical, scared and excited all at once.

When the deafening noise stilled, Derek tossed the Styrofoam cup in the trash bin near the door and jogged forward to meet them. His steps faltered, and then picked up again when Shirley climbed out first, her arm around a man who looked as if he walked off of a movie set. Their stranger's hair was silvery gray and down to his shoulders. He wore a deep burgundy silk toga seemed to sparkle. When the man lifted his head, his eyes were an elegant feline green. There was no denying the man was

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beautiful. His appearance alone added a little credibility to the story of how he had been found.

"Let's get him inside, Shirley," Derek said, eager to get to the bottom of this mystery. "Has he spoken?"

"In a language we can't understand. We can't even place it, Derek," Shirley stated, her expression incredulous.

Abe emerged from the cockpit of the helicopter, carrying the golden pole with the crystal attached to the top.

Derek gawked at Abe. The crystal he carried pulsed with some sort of energy. He *felt* it. "What the hell is that?"

"No idea. It was pulling him up to the surface."

Derek paused, shook his head, and follow Shirley. "Let's try to make sense of this."

Loki did it just as Menes envisioned in his dream. The moment the crystal was removed from its balance in the temple, Rainbow City collapsed. Menes ran from his office as the buildings of stone toppled and the dome that surrounded their city cracked. Baphomet, Thoth, Pyrrha, Laura, Phoroneus, Astrea, Enoch and Solon did nothing to save themselves, only smiled and waited for the inevitable. Astrea walked up to Menes, kissed him, her energy enveloped him in a great wave of love, and told him to go.

Baphomet brought the final crystal to him while the others channeled their energy together, recharging the crystal so it would protect him on his way to the surface.

Even though Menes knew it would happen and could accept it readily, tears of sadness and gratitude for their sacrifices fell from his eyes; but he consoled himself with the knowledge that soon he'd release his hold on the vessel of his body so he'd go with his loved ones to that mysterious ethereal plane and begin on this world, or even others, anew.

"Speak to them, Menes. Make them understand you."

The words entered his mind as naturally as the air entered his lungs. His spirit guides and his higher self. He closed his eyes and sagged against the stranger that led him. Humankind was still so primitive, it was a shame. Those scientists, though; he recognized them. He saw them before, in Atlantis, but understood they didn't remember him. That didn't matter; they were chosen. Through their research and the ability of their employer manipulating the reality of the world, mankind stood a chance through the difficult times ahead. A choice was upon them; it was imperative the choice be granted.

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To get into their department, a retinal scan and access card were required. Derek cleared them through the door on the rooftop, and the group moved quickly but cautiously to the main lab room.

As the soundproof door slid closed behind them, Abe gave the rod to Derek and helped Shirley get the man onto one of the examination tables. He gave their strange guest a brief examination after they pulled him out of the water, but Abe wanted to be more thorough.

Derek found it hard to take his eyes off the crystal as he followed the pair into the room. He walked over to the table across from Abe and snapped on the glaring overhead light. He pulled his glasses from the front pocket of his shirt, slid them over his eyes to investigate the strange artifact under the superficial light as Shirley stepped up beside him.

Menes eyes glowed in gentle amusement as he watched Abe pull out a stethoscope. It was like seeing the hammer of a caveman. He laughed, only to wince as a sharp, telling pain shot under his ribs. Time was of the essence. Lifting his hand, he pressed it against Abe's forehead.

Abe blinked, but did not pull away. An all encompassing warmth wrapped around his body that he felt in his pores and in his core. He gaped at Menes, trying to understand the overload of loving emotion he felt when he

noticed a second sensation. This time it was probing at his mind.

Probing at his mind? For a second Abe truly believed he went insane, but no, there it was again. Without control or resistance, he spoke; not for himself, but for the strange man touching him.

"I am Menes."

Shirley and Derek looked up simultaneously, eyes widening. Abe was *glowing*. A gentle green light surrounded him and the man they "found."

"Derek, is...?" Shirley couldn't form the words, but Derek understood the half-spoken question. He felt like he was crazy, because the longer he watched the scene in front of him, the more familiar it felt—as if he saw something like it before.

Menes smiled at the other two and spoke through Abe. It was easier that way; he hadn't spoken English in several decades. "A great age is upon you. You are closer to the truth than you have ever been." He hesitated, choosing his words carefully. "I warn you that what you uncover will shock you, anger you, and terrify you. It will also soothe your souls, and you will come to understand why the knowledge was withheld from you. You must find the Cave of Creation before the next winter solstice. It is this final step which will bring man into full consciousness. The Ascension must not fail again." He drew

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in a shaky breath, his energy wavering. He willed it to stay with him a little longer.

“Loki—you must find him. He will alert the Anunnaki, and they will try to stop you. Those you work for have means to protect you, to help you lift the veil so all will know, as above in heaven, so below on Earth. Do what you will. Love is law.” He could say no more. Sighing, he ruffled Abe’s hair affectionately, broke the connection, and lay back down on the table. He heard the other dimensions calling him, the voices of those he loved, welcoming him back. He closed his eyes, and with perfect trust and acceptance, he released his hold on his physical body. His heart ceased, his breathing stopped, and his soul peacefully ascended to the next plane, eager to decide what to return as.

The calm silence after Abe, Menes, whoever, stopped speaking brought undeniable knowledge; Menes was dying. Tears sprung to Shirley’s eyes as she walked over to Menes’ body, holding his hand through his final breath as if she had known him her entire life, and not just those few short hours.

Even though her heart ached, she couldn’t shake the feeling that death wasn’t the end. She would see him

again. The notion was completely illogical to an agnostic like her, but somehow she just *knew* she was right.

Derek sank down on the edge of an empty exam table, overwhelmed. Abe looked equally as torn as his back hit the wall, his face pale.

“What... what do we do now?” Abe whispered.

Derek swallowed hard and shook his head. “I don't know.”

Shirley turned to both of them. “Call Terenzio. As bizarre as this all is, we've still got work to do. And if Menes is right, we're going to need backup.”

Chapter 3

“Modern morality and manners suppress all natural instincts, keep people ignorant of the facts of nature and make them fight drunk on bogey tales.”

The Confessions of Aleister Crowley, chapter 57

June 7, 2012

Loyalty Airlines Airport

Alcyone Island 12:12 AM

In 1925, the United States Congress passed the Air Mail Act, which allowed private airline companies to place bids on picking up routes for delivery of U.S. mail. At the time, it removed a huge burden off the U.S. Postal Service and boosted a slowly growing airline industry.

In 1925, Stefano Vasco Terenzio saw not only a way to change the public image of his two-year-old freight airline company, but also a nearly foolproof way to bridge the gaps between the mob groups around the country and another step in solidifying his control over them. Under the cover of delivering mail, Loyalty Airlines transported stolen items acquired off the black market,

laundered cash, drugs, weapons, whatever was required. Backroom deals, boardroom meetings, constant bribes and the occasional roughing up of a few public officials ensured Loyalty Airlines' status as a powerhouse in the aviation world.

By 1930, the seeds were planted, and S.V.T. turned control of the airline over to his sister, Liliana. At the time her (fourth) husband, formerly of the U.S. Air force, then Colonel of Alcyone Island's AF, had a few friends in the engineering department at Boeing who were willing to share secrets for a hefty price, keeping Loyalty ahead of their competitors as far as technological advancements went.

By the late 1960s, the public had become comfortable with flying, and Loyalty jumped right into the commercial markets. In 2000, it bought out a major U.S. carrier and two smaller international companies, and then expansion stopped with no plans for anything further.

There was only one airline at the Loyalty International Airport on Alcyone Island, and that was theirs. No matter what other carriers tried to get a terminal, no amount of money would change a policy set in place by S.V.T. himself. No one got on the island that Terenzio didn't know about. As tickets were booked, the information was transmitted to the Phoenix Island Command Center, where background checks, credit checks, personal

histories, even medical records were run and shared with the Military Police, or MP database. Unbeknownst to the tourists who simply came to the island to have a good time- cab rides, rental cars, hotel rooms, and everything in between were bugged with video and audio surveillance. When the Terenzios brought someone into their home, they took no chances.

Alone Learjet sat patiently on the black pavement, two armed guards standing at the bottom of the metal staircase attached to it. Both men were dressed in white short-sleeved collared shirts and sharply pressed khakis. Wireless earpieces were hardly visible. The mens' gloved hands (weather not conducive) were comfortably wrapped around automatic rifles, a sidearm holstered to each of their hips. The words DION CORP were proudly displayed on the plane, and on the front of their shirts in tiny lettering on the right hand side. Once the sun set, any Military Police assigned to the airport were sent in full force around the Island to keep the peace. Consequently, Alcyone Island had been named one of the safest tourist spots for the last fifty years. Flights not meant for the public eye arrived during twilight hours, and airport security was tasked to the Alcyone Island Omega Cadre, an elite special operations force, or the private security personnel of the Dion Corporation.

No one from the Terenzio bloodline went anywhere without an armed escort. Neither were they given a random pilot for their frequent globetrotting trips. That was the reason Alcyone AF Lieutenant General Richard “Richie” Archer was present at such an hour. Archer either flew the Terenzios himself or handpicked the pilot to complete the assignment, which was a real honor. At 6'2, 225 pounds, the dark-skinned man was easily identifiable by the all black uniform. A blood red and ice blue stripe crisscrossed as it ran down the arms of his coat and pant legs. Instead of wings sitting on the shoulders of his uniform coat, three small emblems of a phoenix announced his rank.

Seven years ago, Archer, like a lot of the personnel on the island, had been a U.S. military man. He had never asked how he'd been so thoroughly scouted, but he clearly remembered the day the current Governor, Isabella Terenzio, showed up in his office. It had taken two short weeks to lure him away from duty to country.

Archer arrived two hours before the scheduled departure, to go over the flight plan. He was a meticulous man, nearly to the point of obsessive compulsiveness, with a steel demeanor, quick temper and zero tolerance for carelessness from anyone on the flight staff. By the time the limo pulled up, he inspected the plane twice, fired a mechanic and called in two fighter jets to escort them

THE AWAKENING

over international airspace. Ten minutes after the arrival of the three heirs, the jet was slicing through warm blue Central American skies and headed straight across the Atlantic.

Simone curled up into a ball on one corner of the leather sofa. A tissue was squeezed to in her hand, her bent knuckles set against her mouth as she struggled to control her emotions. It was a losing battle. The farther they got from their grandfather, the more she realized his death was inevitable. A small tear fell from the corner of her eye, unhidden by the long black waves that stopped just below her shoulders.

“How long did you expect him to live, Simone?” Vasco dropped his slightly taller six-foot-one form down into one of the executive leather chairs, stretching both legs in front of him.

“Fuck you, Vasco,” Simone’s tone was quiet but sharply, and she didn’t look at him. Instead, she continued to stare at the mp3 player which waited for them when they stepped onto the plane. Richie told them it was from Grandfather.

“We can’t all be as cold as you are, V.” Lucien sat next to his sister, loosening the knot in his tie and shifted his

gaze between his siblings. They looked so much alike as children; it was interesting how time and the business of life wore on facial characteristics. At the age of 32, they were easily distinguishable from each other, even the brothers. Vasco possessed more of his grandfather's and great-grandfather's traits: a slightly pudgy Italian nose and aristocratic facial features. Lucien and Simone took on the more exotic genes, with a deeper skin tone and smoother lines around their faces.

Sighing, Vasco tipped his head in the direction of the player. "Let's hear it."

Drawing in a deep breath, steeling herself for the voice that haunt them, Simone pressed play.

June 7, 2012

Alcyone Island

Holt Air Force Base 12:15 AM

Four military jeeps sped down a narrow two-lane road. The soft thickness of the jungle surrounded them, nature's nocturnal hum carelessly interrupted by the roar of the vehicles engines and the angry glare of headlights.

Five-emblem General of Alcyone Island's military, Amadeo Terenzio, sat in the front seat of a jeep, the thick

THE AWAKENING

air whipping around his officer's hat, one raised hand wrapped around the exposed metal bar above him. He always rode second in the entourage, and he always traveled with one. It didn't matter they were heading for one of the most secure points on the island, Holt Air Force Base, named after Colonel Jack Holt, war hero of the late nineteen twenties.

Well, not exactly war hero.

Holt allegedly had an affair with Liliana Terenzio, the Lieutenant Governor's wife. Holt was killed during the volcanic eruption of 1927, but not by lava. A traitor slipped onto the island and murdered those that evacuated with Terenzio. Despite Holt's alleged affair, he was given a hero's funeral and no one asked why. Right after, the Lieutenant Governor abandoned his position, his wife, and their two children. Liliana was given her husband's job, and anyone who knew the unspoken history agreed she should have been given the spot from the start. S.V.T. never put a limit on how far the women in his life advanced, despite what society, tradition, even the Cosa Nostra deemed as appropriate female behavior.

But that was then.

Now, at three feet the control tower knew how many were in each vehicle and how they were armed. One foot before the fog lamps became visible, fingerprints were lifted by remote scan off the dashboard, the interior door

handles, and the steering wheel. By the time the vehicles stopped at the security gate, the base had a ninety-three percent success rate at identifying who was in the car. Those with no record found in the allotted time had their personal information subjected to a different process which delved deeper. At that point, visitors were held at the gate and security was put on high alert until they were identified and cleared.

When their entourage pulled up, the tower was giving the signal for the fence to slide open. The base Sergeant met Amadeo at the Jeep with a sharp salute. Behind him, two mechanical robots were unloading supply crates from a landed plane. "What time are they expected to be here?" Amadeo asked without preamble.

"We have just been informed that they're not coming here, sir."

Amadeo blinked, and his eyes darkened. "Come again, Sergeant? Where the fuck are they?"

Unconsciously, the Sergeant took a step back. "We were told, sir, the information is above our security clearance."

Amadeo's right hand balled into a fist at his side. "Get Olivia Terenzio on the phone. Now."

Chapter 4

“A human being is part of a whole, called by us the “universe”... he experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest — a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few people near us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”

-Albert Einstein

June 7, 2012

Dion Corp Executive LearJet

Somewhere across the Atlantic 12:22 AM

For the longest time, I wondered how many moves ahead my father really saw. Wondered how many things I thought I'd done on my own, were really his doing. Then I realized the blatant truth in his infamous statement, "I make you do nothing, the choices are your own."

My father started the game for ego and control. Typical Stefano. I didn't change it because I've gone soft, though my silence over those motivations has left a lot of mistrust and doubt floating through the family you now have control over. But healing that rift is not your goal.

I changed the game for checkmate, at first for nothing more than vengeance. The why of that, you will learn soon enough. There was nothing noble in my actions, merely a personal score that needed to be settled. It was only after, in the loving arms of a wife who forgave me for a year's absence I realized we would never win if it became a matter of tit for tat. It was at this point I began researching in depth what we, now you, are up against; and what needed to be done to heed the words of a friend who wisely informed me of my soul's purpose. It was here I uncovered the truth about this world we thought was ours for the taking, and it solidified my choice to turn this family from one who rides the fence milking both sides for all they are worth to finally pick one.

That is why I am sending you to the Vault, a place where you will remember who you are. There is also something I wish to impart to you of extreme importance.

THE AWAKENING

You will not win this battle without complete acceptance of a single emotion, and that is love. Through that emotion you will be able to forsake all else and ironically, do what is necessary. Love, yes. Don't roll your eyes. Love of yourselves and of the souls in this world you are tasked with helping. It is time for them to make their choice, time for you to decide whether or not you will give it to them. The Ascension will not happen without Terenzio support. Soothe your egos with that.

Once you're done at your destination you'll find the rest is simply a game of chess. I can say with certainty while pieces have been lost, no Terenzio has ever walked away from a chessboard without uttering the word, checkmate.

Finish it. Good luck my grandchildren.

June 7, 2012

Undisclosed location

Alcyone Island 4:44 AM

The clock on the nightstand ticked away mockingly. Every snap of the second hand was a cruel reminder for Demetrius he'd lose another whom he loved. As a family,

they controlled so much, or at least they thought they did. They were powerful creatures; they moved like it, they spoke like it. The knowledge glinted like the fine edge of a razor in the back of their eyes. But there were things, so many things, no one could control. He couldn't save his sister, only carry the scar of a bullet. He couldn't save his wife, only sob soundlessly as his children were handed to him and the doctors attempted to console the grieving new father. He couldn't save his own father, the rock which kept him from collapsing under the weight of emotion his entire life. He was empathic without a shield; for whatever reason he was never able to form a protective one.

He looked so much older than his years; older than his father, at times. The wrinkled face was weathered by life, not time. He sat in a chair next to the burning fireplace, his elbows resting on his knees, hands clasped together and pressed tightly against his mouth. Broken gray eyes watched his sleeping father with such intensity, as if by his mere will he could keep the dying man in this plane of existence a little longer.

"If we could hold each other here by thought alone this family would've been saved so much grief," Marcello mumbled, gradually opening his eyes to focus on his son's face.

THE AWAKENING

What did it say about a man thirty years later it still hurt him to think of the wife he had lost? Agony streaked briefly across Demetrius's eyes, and he drew in a long breath, shaking his head and replying quietly, "Including Amanda."

Amanda, his twin sister. She died at twenty through no fault of her own. Sadness clouded Marcello's eyes, and he reached out for his son's hand, waiting until it was accepted before he spoke. "It was not your job to keep her safe. It was mine. I failed, not you. "Amanda, who would have been a more suitable heir, took two bullets. One was meant for her, the other for her brother. Plenty of people had a vendetta against Terenzio; it was the nature of the business. But the men who murdered his daughter hadn't been part of anything 'meaningful.' They were mere thugs, pissed off that a backroom deal hadn't netted them as much money as they wanted. Four lines of coke and too much alcohol later, getting back at Terenzio sounded like a great idea. The thugs assumed Amanda and Demetrius were either Liliana's or Julian's children.

The way life worked was both strange and cruel. The twins always had bodyguards, but that one time, Mari was in the States on business and Marcello had allowed brother and sister to have a night out without a 'babysitter.' He thought, perhaps too arrogantly, they would be safe on their own island.

Guilt was not a color a Terenzio wore, Demetrius the exception, but Marcello nearly came apart at the seams for good that day. In his darkest moments, he wondered if Mari blamed him for it, because he did so himself. She wouldn't have allowed their children to go out that night unguarded, and Amanda might still be with them today if her mother's logical, ironclad sense of duty to her children won out over a father's tendency to spoil and give in to mundane requests.

Demetrius squeezed his father's hand tightly, watching the faraway look seep into his eyes. "Don't, Dad. Not now."

Marcello snapped back to the present, smiling slightly at his son. "You care too much. That has always been your strength, Demetrius, regardless of what others say."

Demetrius opened his mouth to respond, but was interrupted by the loud musical ring of his father's cell phone. Demetrius looked surprised; Marcello did not, nodding at his son to indicate he should answer it. Demetrius pulled the tiny thing to him, flipping it open. "Demetrius Terenzio."

"Demetrius? I'm sorry for calling at such an early hour, but is Marcello there? I've got to talk to him," Derek said in a rush.

Demetrius's brows shot up, ready to reprimand Vaughn for his cavalier attitude while his father was

THE AWAKENING

dying, but realized because they hadn't been able to reach him, Derek didn't know. "Derek, now is not a good time. We've got bad news here-"

"I'll speak to him." Marcello struggled, pushing himself into an upright position, and held his hand out for the phone.

Demetrius's expression turned curious. "Hang on, Derek, here he is." He handed the phone to his father, looking at him in question as to whether he should stay or go.

Marcello motioned for him to stay. "What did you find, Derek?"

"Sir, I don't know if you would believe me if I told you. Do you have access to your computer? You're going to want to see him."

June 7, 2012

Delgado Apartment

Bronx, NY 12:15 AM

The cold, metallic black Cadillac didn't fit in with the rotting neighborhood. It was grossly out of place parked in front of the dirty brick, rat-infested apartment

building in a block too small for the structures crammed onto it.

The three people who alighted out of the tinted-window luxury car were as out of place as the vehicle that brought them. Annoyance twisted the only female's features as the trio entered the building and were forced to take the stairs to the fifth floor, because once again the elevators were out.

New York was not Terenzio territory anymore. Only one piece of Terenzio control sat there (aside from Loyalty Airlines having terminals at JFK and LaGuardia) and that was SVT Securities. One of the first subsidiaries of the Dion Corporation, SVT Securities was the best idea Stefano Terenzio ever had. The corporate security company bloomed in the lawless years of the Twenties, under the clever guise of protection. While not nearly the largest of its kind, it was one of the most successful.

Senior Vice President Olivia Terenzio was in charge of all the SVT Security offices along the eastern coast of the United States. On the side, discreetly, for her own amusement and profit, she ran a tiny loan sharking business on the New York City streets. It was something to do to pass the time, but on occasion it assisted in recruiting new faces into the company. After all, she never knew who she was going to meet, and who she could end up learning how to use.

THE AWAKENING

Collecting money owed was the reason for her visit to this shitty part of town.

When they reached their floor, she motioned to one of the men behind her, a broad-shouldered brute with a nasty scar that was born at the corner of his eye and curved down the side of his face. A knife barely missed taking his vision from him three years ago, all in a day's work. He walked up to the apartment door, and with a strong kick, tore it from its poor excuse of a lock, causing it to swing wildly open.

The three stepped inside just as a woman went sprawling to the floor, sent there by the vicious slap of her husband. Hector Delgado jerked his red-rimmed, drunken brown eyes from the collapsed form of his wife to the sudden intrusion. His anger was quickly abated to fear when he saw who it was.

It made Olivia smile.

Her eyes flicked over the interior, past a roach crawling up a dirty beige wall to the woman on the floor with a hand against her face. She struggled not to cry. In the archway, fearful, tear-filled eyes peeked around the corner. A child no more than seven watched helplessly as her mother was once again victim to her husband's drunken anger. Innocence corrupted with every cruel blow. Olivia was told the little girl was extremely bright, a math whiz.

When she grew up, she'd be useful. Right then, the woman and child were not her concern.

Hector was.

"Miss Terenzio, I was gonna call you."

She ignored him, cruel eyes wandering over the apartment. Finally, her hand extended to the right, and Scarface placed the butt of the gun in her palm.

Hector's fear grew at the sight. "Miss Terenzio, I swear I was gonna--"

She silenced him when she backhanded him with the gun. Hector twisted violently to the side, letting out a high pitched whine of pain. She followed his stumble, hit him again, and watched as he crumpled to the floor.

He started begging. Rather, he tried.

Standing over him, Olivia set the ball of her high-heeled foot against the back of his neck, pushing his throbbing face into the dirty carpet. "Shut it, Delgado." The sharp echo of the gun cocking caused Delgado to start trembling. She thought it was amusing his wife never made a sound of protest. The woman probably hoped her husband might be taken off her hands.

"If you're late with my money again...." When she pulled the trigger, the bullet ripped into the floor right above his head. Both child and mother jumped, but bravely watched on. Hector pissed himself.

Olivia smiled. "You understand, now. Go get it."

THE AWAKENING

She stepped back, laughter in her eyes at the obvious stain on the front of his pants. Hector stumbled into the kitchen, knocking things off the counter as he attempted to bend down and reach underneath the sink. He came back with a thick stack of bills, messily rubber banded together.

She passed the gun back to Scarface. "Every dollar, Delgado."

Delgado was quiet. Sweating, bleeding from the double strike to his face, his hands visibly shook as he watched Olivia slowly count the hundred dollar bills.

A cell phone interrupted the tense silence; the man standing next to Scarface, thinner and not as rough looking, pulled the phone from the inside of his suit jacket. He answered without speaking, listened for a moment then held the phone in Olivia's direction. "Ma'am, General Terenzio on the line."

She made him wait, finished counting then traded the money for the phone. "On time next week, Delgado. "Turning away from the scene, Olivia put the phone against her ear. "What's the crisis now, cousin?"

Chapter 5

“What good fortune for governments that the people
do not think.”

-Adolf Hitler

June 7, 2012

The Vasco Resort Hotel

Alcyone Island 12:22 AM

Xavier was an Indigo child. Part of a generation of highly sensitive, psychic children who entered the world in the 1970s with a shared, voluntary purpose: tearing down every old system and paradigm which no longer served humanity. Their warrior spirits and inability to conform made them quite the headache for their parents growing up. Frowned at for having rebellious, “arrogant” natures, they were also frequently mislabeled with ADD and ADHD. Regardless, they kicked past the barriers put in front of them, and as adults they were infiltrating the system to rip it apart from the inside out, or working on the outside, brandishing machetes and cutting away the mess.

THE AWAKENING

Xavier was aware of his soul's voluntary mission on Earth since his birth to the son of Kyle and Liliana Terenzio-Zhane, Christopher. While his father never really understood him, Christopher saw the potential in his son and focused on that, not his often times erratic, baffling nature. Xavier was thankful the upbringing he received was exactly what he needed to prepare him for his role as an adult. That, too, was no coincidence; much like the face on fifteen inch flat screen TV hanging from the roof in the back of the limo he was seated in. Picking up the remote, Xavier turned up the volume, brief amusement settling across his face as he listened.

Jim was at it again. A rogue investigative journalist who had his own hour of nightly talk time on one of the Satellite Cable Stations (SCS for short), he exposed secrets cleverly kept away from the general populace for centuries. Five years ago, Jim was containable; a nuisance, but not a threat. The Brotherhood hadn't realized the effect the internet would have on the world, how quickly it would bring them together. That outlet and the continued technological advancements literally connecting the world made it impossible to limit his exposure. Three times a week, Jim's face appeared for millions of viewers to see, and his radio show aired nightly.

Day after day, he ratted out the government and police forces around the country when they tried to strip

away pieces of the Constitution. Every time Operation Urban Warrior was released for testing purposes on real American towns, Jim reported on it. When RFID was passed off as the “safe” technology of the future, it gave him something else to passionately rant about, exposing it for the tyrannical tracking device it really was.

RBK, a subsidiary construction company (whose shareholders included the Vice President of the United States), was given a two hundred and fifty million dollar contract to build illegal immigrant detainee stations. A small article was posted in random publications across the country. Two days later, at least fifty popular websites aired the true version of the story, telling everyone they were concentration camps for terrorists; a.k.a anyone who did not adopt the formation of the North American Union, the last step in turning America into a true police state.

It wasn't just the easy outlet for conspiracy theorists causing problems. Xavier couldn't help but smile at the slew of “blunders” which plagued the Powers That Be the last few years. N.E.S.A.R.A. miraculously passed in 2005. Smartly, the Supreme Court put a gag order on it and it was lost for a while. Then word leaked out. It was a huge mess. More than usual were removed from the Brotherhood after that, and their deaths were never kind.

THE AWAKENING

The fuck ups continued when a sarcophagus was found underneath an apartment complex in Iraq in 1980 and very skillfully hidden from public view for over twenty years, suddenly came to the nation's complete attention in 2007. It caused a quiet fury among the Bloodlines, especially when it was proven to be the final resting place of Jesus' family, which included his wife *and* son.

That revelation still made Xavier chuckle in private delight, but it was the future he was the most concerned with, and why he was in such a hurry to get back to the Capital. The limousine pulled to a stop in front of the hotel. Flanked by two stoned faced, black suited men, Xavier moved quickly through the lobby, into the glass elevators, and up to his penthouse suite. Inside, another agent was scanning the room for hidden listening devices; besides the typical bugs that SVT Securities installed in all Terenzio-owned holdings. At a small table away from the windows, Xavier's fiancée, Kelly Palagio, a striking woman with soulful brown eyes, sat in front of a laptop computer. An Indigo child herself and an energy worker, she looked up as Xavier walked in, a loving smile spreading over her full lips.

Her energy was almost palpable and pulled him from the foulest moods almost instantaneously. He walked

over to her, bending to kiss her as his bodyguards got their luggage together.

Kelly touched his jaw as she returned his kiss, and then stood up to let him sit. "Alexandro is waiting on the line."

"Thanks." Xavier took the chair, looking at the LCD screen, the face of his mentor in a small box on the other side. "I didn't expect to hear from you so soon."

"Xavier." Alexandro DeMarco III was the Director of Homeland Security, and a double agent. The DeMarco family had a long history in politics, dating back to 1928 when his great grandfather, Alexandro DeMarco I, beat Huey P. Long for Governorship of Louisiana. It was quite the accomplishment, considering at the time Alexandro's brother, Antonio, was the Don of the DeMarco crime family. Alexandro and his wife, Mona, were both intimate friends of Stefano Terenzio and his wife, and the DeMarcos secretly kept their friendship with the Terenzio family alive over the last century. Alexandro smiled warmly at Xavier. "When are you going to marry that beautiful woman?"

Xavier glanced over his shoulder, watching as Kelly coordinated their departure with his men. A private smile slid over his mouth, and he looked back at the computer screen. "If all goes according to plan, January 1, 2014."

THE AWAKENING

“A good date.” Alexandro chuckled, then grew serious. “The Bloodlines are getting very anxious, as they should. I’ve received word *They* are speeding up the formation of the NAU.”

Xavier expected as much. Because the last ten years had been one critical leak after the next, *They* knew they needed to ensure no one thought long enough to work up the intent to do anything about something like the formation of the NAU. The North American Union would erase the borders which separated Canada, Mexico and the United States and form one nation that would have its own judicial and executive branches, which would supersede those of the individual countries. Neither Congress, nor the people were given a say in its formation. All meetings were held in secret with the heads of each country, along with the CEO’s of the world’s leading conglomerates and select members of the Council on Foreign Relations. The NAU was a key step in the formation of a World Government which would make Nazi Germany look like a democracy. “Any plans to slow them down?” Xavier asked.

“I’m working with Antonio on that,” Alexandro said, referring to his brother. “Since the Bloodlines are so proficient at keeping the populace unaware of their sinister intentions, even with the Veil lifting, it is difficult to

convince the masses to take appropriate action without giving ourselves away.”

Alexandro was right. Most Americans never heard of the NAU, and even if told its purpose, not many believed it. That, along with the dangers of the Patriot Act V and every right “freemen” gave away to be “safe” were continually kept hidden. The Brotherhood was putting tremendous effort, especially now, in keeping the average citizen from ever believing the agencies created to protect them were just the opposite. It was imperative for the New World Order that people continued to willingly give their power away by remaining and participating in the thought-controlled systems surrounding them. “Another well placed leak, perhaps? The little bombs we drop bring more people into awareness and once begun, awakening has no choice but to follow,” Xavier offered.

“Perhaps. The public hearings into 9/11 have been derailed again. They are celebrating that small victory,” Alexandro said.

Xavier frowned. Ten years later, that event was still a thorn in the Bloodlines’ side. Enough of the populace was not willing to let it go, and every year more evidence was exposed to bring it back into the limelight. September 11th had almost turned into the worst fiasco of them all for the Brotherhood. The plan had been so beautifully devised, and if the third plane hit the White House, the general

populace wouldn't be a problem. Martial law would have been declared, and half of America would be in those concentration camps as intended. But no, it hadn't gone as planned. The cover up story was badly thought out (an understatement), and anyone with a high school education knew the government's explanation was a lie. Xavier still found it frustrating that event alone hadn't shocked a nation awake. Amazingly, the Brotherhood had gotten away with it. "Not quite enough have awakened, then," Xavier sighed.

"Fear is still a powerful tool. Security sells, and religion is the icing on the cake. Don't worry too much, the world will see it for the illusion it all is soon enough. We'll see to that," Alexandro assured him.

Xavier rubbed the back of his neck. The educated and the non educated. The Democrat, the Republican, the Independent. The Advocate. The Conformist and the Activist. The Patriots who proudly condemned those who complained but never voted or served their country.

The Bloodline called them suckers.

Parties were a smokescreen. Elections were not decided by the population, and the Electoral College had the same boss as everyone else. The presidential election of 2000 made that glaringly apparent, but the irony was that the majority of humans *wanted* to be manipulated. Centuries of conditioning, lies, and secrecy ensured

human beings didn't believe in anything past the mundane. It was inconceivable a government might be as evil as the conspiracy theorists claimed, and anything to prove the ordinary reality still existed was latched onto like a crack pipe. No matter that the evidence proved otherwise.

"What do you have on my to-do list, sir?" Xavier finally asked.

Alexandro smiled. "First, I have some good news to share. When you return, I will be away for several days. All twelve Ascended Masters have taken on physical form, and I am meeting with two of them. The Veil has lifted enough they can exist in the lower density without the forgetfulness. It only further proves it's time."

Xavier grinned. "Really? That's wonderful. That will help tremendously. "In the beginning, what was called The Veil, was necessary. Keeping humans in a competitive, hierarchical system based on a string of half truths was part of the grand plan which dated all the way back to Sumer and before. Xavier knew very soon, everyone would be clued in on the little secret the Powers That Be tried to keep hidden; it was time to release humanity. However, the problem of fear existed on both ends; *They* feared the loss of control. The "illuminated" ones were, ironically, just as ignorant as the population they enslaved, but for different reasons. Even the Brotherhood

had nothing to worry about; there was no heaven and hell. No checklist you must complete to get into Heaven. No eternal suffering after death for the “bad” people. No one was left behind because judgment was a human emotion, not Gods, or rather, The Source. “That’s a dangerous meeting to take now, though. Be careful.”

“Sì, don’t worry. I’ve lined my ducks up enough my absence won’t cause suspicion, and the Sirians have assured me they will keep the Brotherhood’s Seers blind to my actions. Regardless of the iron-handed clutch the New World Order had on humanity, the Universe would not be denied. Planets and races throughout the cosmos formed a coalition and visited Earth since the beginning to help.

“All right. We’re leaving here within the hour. I expect to hear from the triplets after they’ve gone through their Awakening, and I’ll share what news I’ve got.” Xavier felt the subtle weight of the CD in his pocket.

“Excellent. And the scientists?”

“Marcello believes they are still on the correct path. I’ll follow up with Roberto when I get home. I know he’s being kept in the loop.”

“Good. Stay safe and watch your back, Xavier. A demon screams the loudest as it’s about to die,” Alexandro warned.

"I will." Xavier cracked a grin. "Nothing we Terenzios can't handle. Especially my side of the family."

Alexandro chuckled. "Indeed. Espavo, Xavier, I will see you in a few days."

"Namaste, Alexandro. Xavier set his hand on the keyboard, a single keystroke terminating the secure connection. They were in for a wild ride, and his excitement over it all was nearly uncontainable. After all, The Awakening really began picking up speed in 1987. It started out small, and the Brotherhood hadn't worried about it too much. It was a phase that would come and go.

Wrong.

With the help of technology, the information spread faster and the numbers grew from a few scattered hundreds to concentrated thousands. Bit by bit, small clusters of the populace around the world stopped believing in the thought-controlling systems and the power-stealing organized religions. From all walks of life, humans healed themselves, which released such a powerful vibration it lifted those around them. And, the slow bridging of science and mysticism proved the impossible for those who cared to learn about it.

For the Brotherhood, the Awakening presented a big problem. Conditions used to be set so that the process would take lifetime upon lifetime. Now, the human body

THE AWAKENING

was reaching full kundalini activation in as little as six months, and that made the body impossible to fuck with. Lightworkers were taking their power back, using their energy for the greater good of all souls. The mind couldn't be manipulated or fooled into believing the lies anymore. They no longer feared death because they understood the truth of the body. They realized as the Elites knew for centuries (hence why *They* were in control) that all were Gods. Sparks of divinity from the Source. Powerful co-creators of the reality of the third dimension.

Who believed that? Really? It was more than laughable, even if proven. The answer was the Brotherhood's problem; too many. And with the Terenzios' help, everything the Shadow Government wanted to do wouldn't happen as planned, and that meant the Ascension would occur, as predestined.

It was a hell of a lot better than a New World Order.

Chapter 6

“The seeker should not stop until he finds. When he does find, he will be disturbed. After having been disturbed, he will be astonished. Then he will reign over everything.”

-Gospel of Thomas

June 7, 2012

Dion Corporation Private Retreat

Madeira Islands 4:44 AM

Why didn't we get invited to this place sooner?" Lucien asked as the limousine pulled to a stop. Even at the early hour, with morning barely pushing into the darkness, the scenery was breathtakingly beautiful. Exotic greenery scattered across the cliffs settled along the coastline, white-capped waves rolled against the rocks and disappeared back into the calm, limpid blue ocean. The Villa they pulled up to sat secluded at the top of a hill, partially hidden by the clusters of dragon trees.

"Good question," Vasco agreed, peering out the window.

THE AWAKENING

"I'm pissed off this is a boy's retreat. Oh wait, I'm in charge now, too. That just changed," Simone said with a smile, but the look in her eyes gave credence to her statement. She climbed out of the car first, turning her face to the breeze. "The ocean smells different here."

"Hey hey, Co-President. Get your own retreat," Lucien protested good-naturedly, getting out of the car after her. He carried his wrinkled suit jacket in one hand.

"Guards are well hidden," Vasco commented, closing the limo door behind him. He almost missed the dark camera lenses in the trees and in corner beams along the wraparound porch. One Dion Corp security guard was standing in front of the four-car garage, and Vasco was certain he saw another near the front door as they arrived, though he didn't know where the man was now. Probably walking the perimeter, he thought.

"Your grandfather loved it here," said Tom Wilkens, head of security. For the last thirty years, the bulky, white-haired man had been in charge of the Terenzio Ranch, as the guards posted there called it.

"I can see why. Did he ever bring Grandmother here?" Vasco asked Tom, walking towards the front door.

"Marilyn? Twice. Himself, he spent little over a year here at one point." Tom shook his head remembering. "That was a bad time for him."

"Well, you know we're a moody bunch," Lucien said with a mock frown. Simone elbowed him as they walked inside.

"If you say so, Mr. President," Tom replied nonchalantly, smoothing a hand over his full, neatly trimmed beard. He turned to them in the open foyer. "Your pass codes to get in and out are your Dion employee numbers. There are two cars in the garage, keys are hanging up if you want to explore. Your helicopter leaves at ten p.m. sharp. Pack light, I'm told the journey you're taking is a bit...uncomfortable."

"Nice." Lucien rubbed his hands together, looking around. "I need to know where the infinity pool is and where the bitches are. There's a wine cellar too, right Tom?" the Madeira Islands were famous for their wine.

Simone rolled her eyes. "Keep it to your own section of the house. I'm going to call my husband." Of the three of them, Simone was the only one married. Her husband, Victor, worked at Dion in the marketing department.

"Phones are everywhere. Pool is out by the gardens. Let us know what type of 'bitch' you want and give us an hour," Tom said. He received stranger requests from the Terenzio men that visited over the years.

"Thanks Tom." Simone smiled and walked up the spiraling staircase.

THE AWAKENING

“Don’t hate,” Lucien called teasingly after his sister. He grinned at his brother. “If the journey after sucks, my morning I’m going to enjoy. Want to join me, Vasco?”

“No.” Vasco set his hands comfortably into his pants pockets. “Tom, show me where my grandfather went most often when he was here.”

Tom nodded. “No problem.”

“What’s on your mind, V?” Lucien canted his head at Vasco curiously.

“Grandfather,” Vasco replied simply. The mp3 player they heard on the plane was sitting in his pocket; he intended to listen to it again.

“Right. You know where I’ll be if you want to talk.” Lucien set a hand on his brother’s shoulder briefly as he walked past him. “Tom, come see me when you are done. I’ll be in the pool with my Christmas list.”

“Sure thing,” Tom said to Lucien before motioning at Vasco to follow him. “Your grandfather spent most of his time in his office, Mr. President, this way.” He led Vasco down a short series of hallways to a pair of closed doors. Tom held a string of keycards on his belt, and he flipped through them until he found the one he wanted, waving it past the unseen security strip built into the doorframe on the right side. The door beeped quietly, and when the latch clicked, he pushed it open, but didn’t walk in. Instead, he stepped aside to let Vasco pass. “I’ll have a

keycard made for you. I believe the envelope on the desk is for you, too.” Tom winked at him, then walked away.

Vasco quirked a brow, his curiosity piqued when he stepped into the room and saw that Tom was right. A mid-size manila envelope sat on the spotless desktop, his name scrawled in familiar handwriting on the front. He shook his head slowly, a wry smile on his mouth. “You never bore, Grandfather, that’s for certain.”

June 7, 2012

SVT Think Tank

Alexandria, VA 6:22 AM

“No fucking way!”

Derek jerked his head up from the lab table, Abe’s excited shout ripping him out of his brief nap.

Two hours ago, Derek secretly updated Marcello on everything they had done. To Shirley and Abe’s knowledge, the head of SVT Think Tank was Roberto Terenzio, Isabella Terenzio’s (current Governor of Alcyone Island) son. From their group, only Derek was privy to the knowledge Roberto was more a figurehead than anything else, and it was the mysterious Marcello who he reported to.

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Derek was more than a little surprised when their enigmatic boss gave them a green light on everything. He was also deeply saddened by the news Marcello was dying. Even though they hadn't been close, Derek never met Marcello in person, he knew his brother Leone did work closely with him and would take this especially hard. Derek made a mental note to give his brother a call when the hour was decent.

He glanced down at his watch to note the time, then asked groggily, "What happened?"

"Hang on." Abe stood at one of the lab tables, his eyes glued to the microscope. Slowly, he adjusted a dial on the instrument, then moved away to work on the laptop next to him, his fingers pounding the keys. Ten seconds later, the computer beeped sharply, causing Abe to shake his head in amazement.

Derek rubbed his hands across his face, slapping his cheeks to wake himself up. Finally, he picked up his glasses on the table next to him and walked over to Abe. "What is it?"

"In its most simplistic terms?" Abe scratched at his chin. "Menes was the healthiest man alive. Menes is also the first specimen I've seen with three DNA strands, instead of the two that are found in, oh, every human currently on the planet."

Derek's jaw gaped slightly. He looked over at Menes' body, as if the dead man could confirm that, then back at Abe. "That's not possible."

"Course it's not. It's also impossible for a man to live five-plus miles down in the ocean, and then suddenly float to the surface carrying a crystal rod." Abe shot him a look. "Come see for yourself, the testing is accurate. Menes' DNA is just... not of this world."

Abe slid to one side, and Derek stepped up to the computer, reading through the test results. It filled him with a childlike wonder, reminding him how much mystery existed in something so impossibly small. And then, he felt like the world tilted and tossed him into a place he no longer understood when he realized Abe was right. "Holy shit."

"It gets weirder." Shirley walked back into the room carrying a few computer printouts.

"Menes's DNA has three strands. You can't beat that." Abe flopped down into a rolling chair, lacing his fingers behind his head.

Derek couldn't help but smile a little at the appearance Shirley made. They'd been working around the clock, and her cherry red hair was half piled on top of her head, half hanging loose around her face. She looked tired and touchable, but he kept his hands to himself. "What have you got?"

THE AWAKENING

“Remember when Menes said someone named Loki would alert the Anunnaki?” asked Shirley, stopping at the table in front of them.

Derek and Abe nodded.

“In a nutshell, they are referenced primarily in Sumerian culture. According to Sumerian writings, the Anunnaki were gods that came to Earth from the Planet Nibiru, also referred to as Planet X, or the twelfth planet.”

Derek leaned his back against the table’s edge, folding his arms across his chest as he listened. “I’ve heard of Planet X. Orbital calculations have showed there is something pulling at Neptune and Uranus, and it’s not Pluto. NASA has looked for years for the large body and theorized it’s probably being way out past it.”

“Exactly,” Shirley continued, “The story about the Anunnaki gets better, though. They are described as tall beings with wings and a round disc above their heads.”

“Sounds like a biblical angel to me,” said Abe

“It does, which means it was probably borrowed by Christianity like it did with a plethora of other religions,” Shirley continued, “As the story goes, the Anunnaki came to set up mining colonies because they needed the gold to repair the atmosphere on their planet. When they saw primate humans here, a.k.a homo erectus, they decided to use their superior knowledge of genetics, tinker with

us, and make themselves a working class to do the mining for them, resulting in the current human.”

Derek rubbed his temples, as if such action would jumpstart his brain into understanding, but he remained silent.

“Fuck, is the Tooth Fairy real, too?” Abe tossed his hands into the air.

“Probably, Abe.” Shirley pulled a chair over, sitting down next to them. “Really, it’s not impossible, guys. Summer appeared out of nowhere. They show up right after the Stone Age and were incredibly advanced. Their knowledge of astronomy was amazing. They accurately recorded where the planets were in our solar system and what they looked like, right down to the color and the rings around Jupiter. They claim the Anunnaki taught them how to do it. The interesting thing is the Sumerians never called them Gods. They were teachers, geneticists, kingmakers, etc. They weren’t worshipped, they were *worked for*, the correct translation of the word.”

Derek stared at her, then over at Abe’s computer. He didn’t know what to think anymore. The world was spinning, and suddenly the reality in which he existed his entire life was not what he thought it was. “Okay,” he started slowly, “I’ll agree it’s not impossible. Statistically speaking, space is so infinitely large there is probably one if not hundreds of planets that exist somewhere out

there, hosting life probably more intelligent than us,” he reasoned. “But, aliens on Earth?”

Abe didn’t comment yet, trading glances with the two.

“Well, why not?” said Shirley, dropping the research papers she printed out on the table top. “Sumerians were a highly intelligent civilization. Why does it make any sense for modern science to simply pass off where they got their knowledge as myth just because they claim it was from beings from another planet? That makes us rather ignorant, don’t you think?”

Derek didn’t respond, a strained, thoughtful expression on his face. Then again, Menes had three strands of DNA, a modern marvel. It seemed today, anything was possible in the world.

“Do you know what Menes meant when he said Ascension?” Shirley cocked her head, looking at the two of them.

Abe answered. “I’ve heard of it, you can’t help it nowadays with all the New Age conspiracy theorists running around. Love, light, the higher self and all that.”

Shirley laughed. “Close, but we can do better than that. We’re all familiar with Quantum Mechanics, right?”

Derek spoke up. “What does that have to do with this Ascension?”

“Everything, if you can connect the dots.” Shirley gave them a tired smile. Later, she’d call her grandmother and

thank her for being that strange New Ager all those years. It was making it easier for her to see the relationship between seemingly unparallel things. "We all know there are some weird things that go on when you study the quantum world. On the subatomic level, it shows all things are connected. Basically, we are all one. So far so good?"

Derek mulled over that a moment. "All right."

Abe shrugged his shoulders. "Sounds good."

"That is what the 'crazy' New Agers have been telling us all along. Ascension on an individual level is the process of activating the energy portals in the body, called Chakras. There are a hundred different ways to do this, however, no matter how you spin the process, all teach we humans create our own reality. What is in our heads is then reflected in the world around us. In a very literal sense, we are creators of reality."

"Oh c'mon, give me a break. You're telling me thinking happy happy joy joy thoughts is going to make my world a bunch of roses?" Abe rolled his eyes.

"Well, it's a start, but there's a better way to explain it." Shirley looked amused at the expression on Abe's face. "Quantum basics show us electrons can act like both a particle and a wave. But what's really fascinating is how they act is dependent upon whether or not someone is watching."

Abe dragged his hands over his face, sitting up a little in his chair. "I've seen that experiment. When no one is paying attention, electrons don't have a measurable location, they're everywhere."

"Probability fields." Shirley added.

"Right, fine. Probability fields. But that can't have anything to do with the pot smoking hippies meditating and saying we are all one, spirituality. It just makes sense on a subatomic level we are all made up of the same stuff. That doesn't make it mystical."

"Yes, but the science and mysticism are linked up Abe," Shirley argued. "Unobserved and unmeasured electrons are nothing but probabilities, little pockets of energy waiting for something to tell them what to do. As soon as we peek at them, the probabilities all collapse into one. The wave becomes a particle again, acting exactly like we *expect* it to."

Derek frowned slightly, letting his mind process what Shirley told them. It was hard to come to grips with the notion science might be proving an idea as radical as humans ascending. "You're saying that we can affect the very building blocks of reality with what, thought?"

"Yes." Shirley nodded vigorously. "David Bohm was Einstein's protégé, and his view of Quantum Mechanics also supports the theory we are all 'connected'. When you look at it from that perspective, things like psychic

phenomena don't sound so fantastical, either. If we're all connected, that means our brains are, too. Which means a mind reader is simply getting information they should already know because nothing truly separates us. To move through this 'psychic' space, you have to go inward instead of outward, such as described in meditative practices. When you have those moments of enlightenment, what you're really doing is getting a glimpse of the quantum world, which is wholeness and the very fabric of reality."

Derek and Abe remained silent, struggling to comprehend the implications of Shirley's explanation.

"Did you know Nicholas Tesla and Rene Descartes claim inspiration for their discoveries through dreams and visions? Or maybe they were just experiencing the quantum realm. Doesn't sound so off base when you phrase it like that," Shirley said.

"Looks like we got a glimpse of it ourselves, then," Derek said, referring to the dreams they had which started them on this crazy journey.

Shirley smiled. "Have you ever heard of Masaru Emoto?"

Both Derek and Abe shook their heads.

"Masaru is a Japanese researcher, and he did experiments on how words affect water. His findings are incredible." Shirley grabbed the computer printouts off

the table top and shuffled through them as she spoke. "He put water in jars, attached different phrases to each, froze them, then took pictures of the water crystals with a microscope. In every single experiment, the words put on the jars affected the water. Meaning..." Shirley stopped when she found the picture she searched for and held it up. It showed a dazzling water crystal, frozen in the shape of a star. "Beautiful, right? He put the words *I love you* on this one." She waited a moment, then showed them another. It looked like frozen clumps of mud stuck chaotically together. "This looks like it was taken out of the dirty Potomac River, right? Wrong. Same water. He just wrote *I hate you* on this one."

Derek reached out and took the printout to inspect it closer. "Oh, that's just weird."

Abe held out his hand and took a few other printouts from Shirley, slowly flipping through them. "Wow." He shook his head, then looked back up at Shirley. "What does this have to do with the present conversation?"

Shirley grinned at him. "Water comprises more than seventy percent of the human body. So doesn't it stand to reason if words affect water, we can affect our bodies with the same?"

Abe was silent at first, the wheels in his head spinning almost out of control. Finally, he said, "Fine. Say I dig all this crap. I can affect my body with the power of my

mind, and somehow create my own reality, not just be affected by it. So, are all humans going to magically ascend before the next winter solstice unless the aliens from Planet X stop us?"

Derek almost laughed. It all sounded like the plot of a bad science fiction movie.

"We might. Unless we don't find the Cave of Creation in time," Shirley said. "Oh, by the way. Do what thou wilt, love is law? That was a phrase used to sum up the Law of Thelema, revived by famous occultist Aleister Crowley."

Derek blinked in surprise. Then something seemed to jog his memory, because he snapped his fingers. "That's right. He wrote the Book of Law, apparently under guidance from some voice over his shoulder when he was in Egypt."

Abe eyeballed the two of them, and then sighed. "Why do I suddenly feel like everything I know is wrong?"

The phone at Derek's hip exploded into musical noise, startling him. Shirley looked over at him when he jumped, her sleepy brown eyes taking on a note of concern. She reached out, briefly and silently touching his arm in small comfort.

Derek cast her a small reassuring smile as he pulled the phone from his belt and looked down at the caller id. "It's Grams." Grams was the affectionate nickname they had given to Angela Knoxx. She was a seventy-two year-

old neuroscientist with additional studies in Anthropometry, still went spelunking and sky diving any chance she got, and showed no signs of slowing down any time soon. She was also Shirley's grandmother. Angela and the last two members of their team had gone to Piedras Negras in Guatemala. Derek flipped open the phone and pressed a button to bring her face onto the LCD screen.

"We were getting worried about you guys," Derek said.

A mud-streaked, wrinkled, but still elegantly beautiful face looked back at him. The pair of spectacles seemed to sharpen the intelligent stare of her green eyes. A wide-brimmed straw hat perched on her head, and she was smiling with barely suppressed excitement. "You'll never believe what we found, lovey."

Derek laughed. Even Abe and Shirley chuckled. "Try us."

Chapter 7

“It is not my intention to doubt that the doctrine of the Illuminati and the principles of Jacobinism had not spread in the United States. On the contrary, no one is more satisfied of this fact than I am.”

- George Washington

June 7, 2012

Dion Corporation Private Retreat

Madeira Islands 6:11 AM

So, when you coming home?” Victor Russo’s deep voice echoed out over the phone.

Simone stood out on the balcony adjacent to the room she’d claimed for their brief stay. She smiled at her husband’s question, leaning back against the wrought iron railing. “I wish I knew. I don’t even know where I’m going yet.”

“That sounds like an adventure,” said Victor. “Don’t worry, Cassie already offered to keep me company while you’re gone.”

Simone laughed musically. "Yeah, tell her I'm still not sharing you, so visitor rights only." Cassie was her personal assistant and close friend.

"Aw, you're no fun, Si. I still say we should either be swingers or polyamorous. Especially with you being Italian and mafia. You're supposed to have a Friday night guy, then leave Saturdays for me."

Simone rolled her eyes. "What about *I'm not sharing* didn't you hear the first time? I'm grossly disappointed my husband doesn't want me all to himself."

"Now, don't think that. You know I do. Hang on a second, baby..." There was a brief silence for some reason made Simone edgy. She started pacing the small space on the balcony while she waited for Victor to come back on the line. He sounded a little out of breath when he did, minutes later. "Sorry about that, needed to move something. Listen, baby, I've got to run. Call me when you get to wherever it is you're going?"

"Sure," Simone said quietly. "Talk to you later." She snapped her cell phone closed, staring down at the tiny screen. Something was off. But then again, she'd felt like there was something off in their relationship for the last year. They were both busy people, she a little more than he, for obvious reasons. While time apart made her miss him, she was no longer sure if that feeling was reciprocated.

Frowning, Simone crossed her arms over her chest, walking back into the bedroom. She could no longer put her finger on what had gone missing in her relationship with her husband, but she felt like there should be something more, that there should be a spark which ignited between them no matter how long they were together. If she was completely honest with herself, it was the same feeling the moment she'd said "I do" five years ago, when they were fresh and still terribly in love. She often had the strange sense she was making a comparison to something else, but there were no other relationships in her past she could have compared it to.

Simone sighed in frustration. There were other, more important things to think about, like the strange message their dying grandfather left them, but at the moment she couldn't shake the feeling her husband might not be trustworthy. Dropping her cell phone back into her purse, she left her room, heading downstairs to find her brothers.

Their grandfather preferred watching the sunrise. Vasco was instinctively certain of this when he'd accidentally hit the tiny button underneath the desk with his

knee, and caused the row of books on the east wall to slowly sink into panels on the floor. It exposed the only full wall window he had seen in the house, just as the horizon was preparing to explode with color. At the hour the unseen sun announced its approach by setting the sky on fire, the vibrant flames reflected off the face of an endless ocean. Vasco sat behind the desk that was positioned so it faced the hidden window and the awe-inspiring view, contemplating everything dropped in their laps.

Being handed the reins to the empire had been expected, just not so soon. They were groomed for their positions since birth, even though their father hadn't been the best mentor in regards to Terenzio business; too emotional to handle the level of decision-making required. Vasco always thought of Marcello as more of a father than their biological. Simone and Lucien felt the same way.

Life hadn't been terribly difficult for the triplets. The family grew so much the younger members were shielded from how ugly the job got at times. Hell, no one had been "taken care of" in almost eleven years. Technically speaking, neither he nor his siblings ever got their hands dirty. Being thrust so intricately into the game was both exhilarating and frightening.

He rolled his shirt sleeves up to his elbows and went into a slow stretch, dropping his hand to lightly massage his left leg. Strangely, since he was ten, arthritis set into the limb, and it was bothering him today. Rain was probably coming. His thoughtful gaze traveled leisurely around the office, noting that, like most places his grandfather inhabited, decorations were not a priority.

"So, c'mon, tell me something I don't know. You've been in here for over an hour." Towel around his neck, wearing nothing but a pair of black trunks, Lucien came into the office.

Pulled out of his thoughts, Vasco glanced over at his brother, then down at the open manila envelope on his desk. "No revelations. Just more orders I don't understand yet." He wasn't sure what to think of Grandfather's cryptic message. The talk of love as if it were an actual tool that would aid them in fighting their unknown adversary was, frankly, a bit nuts. He chalked it up to a dying man's sentimental feelings. Additionally, Vasco had no idea what it was they were going to "remember," or how they of all people were going to save the world. None of it made any sense.

"What orders?" asked Lucien, dropping himself comfortably into one of the chairs in front of the desk.

Vasco paused, his brows knit together. He tapped his fingertips lightly over the envelope. "I'm to deliver a letter

to Kayla, and I'm to keep Caleb Kincade from revealing himself to Simone. Until I feel the time is right."

Lucien quirked a brow. "The Security Director? What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

Vasco shrugged a single shoulder. "I have no idea." He lapsed into a brief, silent introspection before he asked his brother, "What do you think Grandfather meant with that whole little speech he recorded for us?"

Lucien mulled over it before he answered. "To be honest, I don't have a friggin' clue. How the hell are we going to save the world? And from whom?"

"I can't find anything in here which would lead me to those answers. I think we're just going to have to wait until we get to the Vault."

"Maybe he was just talking about whether or not we would accept our promotions. And maybe he was referring to the extended plan to start moving into the European Mob, too. That might be the whole saving the world bit," Lucien said.

Vasco slid a hand over his mouth to stifle a yawn as he contemplated his brother's words. "No, I don't think that's it."

"You're mumbling into your hand, I can't hear you."

Vasco dropped his hand to repeat himself, but was cut off when Simone charged into the room.

"I think my husband is having an affair," she said with a stone cold expression on her face.

Vasco frowned deeply, and Lucien sat up, concerned and asking, "Are you sure, Si? How do you know?"

She shook her head, pressing her fingers against her temple. "I just... I just do."

"Want to put a tail on him?" Vasco asked quietly.

Simone folded her arms protectively over her chest and paced. "Do it. Not knowing will drive me insane, especially since we don't have any idea how long we'll be gone."

Vasco reached behind him to pull his cell phone out of the pocket of his hanging suit jacket. He hesitated before opening it, because that sort of knowledge was a double-edged sword. If Victor was cheating, and caught red handed, he didn't know how well his sister would handle it. "Are you sure, Simone?"

She stopped pacing to look at him. There was something wounded in her eyes, something unsure and scared despite the fact her voice was sharp, determined. She was a Terenzio, after all. "Do it."

Lucien pulled her over to the arm of his chair, nudging her gently. "You know I never liked him much, but for what it's worth, if he is, I'm sorry."

Vasco made the call as Simone took the comfort her younger brother offered, leaning against him.

THE AWAKENING

"I don't understand. Why not just leave me?" she asked.

"Because you might shoot him," Lucien said lightly. "Or get your mean brothers to do it."

Simone offered Lucien a weak smile, then caught her lower lip between her teeth, contemplating in silence. Finally, she shook her head. "The imagination can be cruel."

"Don't do that to yourself, Simone. Wait for confirmation." Vasco placed his cell phone back into his pocket after the call was made.

Simone hesitated, but Tom appeared in the doorway. "Mr. President, Mr. President, Mrs. President, I need you to be prepared to leave in the next ten minutes."

Lucien blinked in surprise. "Why? What's the issue?"

"I am under orders not to explain, but to move you immediately," Tom said.

"So much for swimming and bitches," Lucien sighed dramatically.

"We'll be ready, Tom, thanks," Vasco said, standing.

Tom nodded and turned, walking briskly back down the hallway.

Vasco came around the desk and up to his sister, his grandfather's mysterious orders where she was concerned pushing to the forefront of his mind. Though he was not the affectionate sort, he kissed her on the

forehead. "I hope you're wrong about him." The corner of his mouth kicked up. "At least for his sake." He winked.

Simone couldn't help but laugh. Her older brother wasn't as heartless as he made everyone believe. She smiled slightly. "Thanks, V."

"Enough with the moment. I want to know what's in the Vault." Lucien hopped to his feet. "Let's get going, kids."

June 7, 2012

Loyalty Airlines Headquarters

Alcyone Island 6:00 AM

"You can appreciate what a busy time it was for us. Yours wasn't the only family we forgot to warn. Don't worry, they didn't suffer."

Our bad. Bummer. Sorry you lost your family in the attack we planned. Ten years later, Nicholas Terenzio-Fidelio still burned with a fury that outweighed his hatred for his father.

When Kayla approached him years ago, Nicholas joined the side of the family supporting The Brotherhood. He had seen it as the perfect opportunity to show

the senile old bigot that was his father what type of man he really was, what he was capable of. But after his family was murdered, those motivates changed.

Nicholas played both sides, flawlessly, like the Terenzio he was for the last seven years. His father remained none the wiser, and that filled Nicholas with a sense of bitter pride. Marcello wasn't the only one who manipulated pieces into a desired position.

Nicholas picked up the coffee mug next to him, waiting for the encrypted message on his computer screen to finish downloading before he called Olivia. As Senior V.P. of Loyalty Airlines' Eastern Hemisphere Sector, he'd arranged for the first flight to take the triplets to Madeira. He'd expected Olivia's call that morning and pacified her by telling her the triplets were at the boys' retreat, then called Tom to have them moved to their final location (which Marcello had not shared with him) before she tracked them. He'd call her back shortly and give her the bad news: sorry cousin, we lost them again.

His computer beeped when the download completed, and Nicholas flicked his eyes over the screen. The dull blue glow caught on the slight curl of his lips. He picked up his cell phone and called Olivia.

CRYSTAL STORM

June 7, 2012

Somewhere in the South Pacific

Phoenix Isle 6:10 AM

Loki felt the deaths of his brothers, sisters, and finally Menes, from miles away. Even though there was sadness in his heart, he felt neither guilt nor shame from his actions; he did what he must, no more. Since Atlantis, Loki learned that fear was necessary. Fear was the key to survival while in body. Without it, there would be chaos. Menes hadn't understood.

He crash landed after his energy drained him to the point of exhaustion. Loki rested, meditated in the serenity of nature only to find, once he felt sufficiently recharged, that he could no longer fly. He could no longer sense the elementals, the salamanders, the fairies. As he carefully trekked through the jungle and attempted to connect with the Goddess, Earth, to find out where he was, he was met with silence. Something blocked him, but that was impossible. He ascended long ago. He couldn't *descend*.

Perplexed at this turn of events, he almost didn't hear the sound of the approaching car engine. Quickly, he whispered a few words and was pleased when he found he could still make himself invisible to those who were

THE AWAKENING

“sleeping.” The black Hummer rumbled through the pathless wildlife, driving right by him, none the wiser to his presence. As the truck passed, Loki caught a glimpse of the two faces in the vehicle and was immediately struck with the feeling he needed to follow them. He sat down in the grass, propped his back against a tree and placed the crystal rod by his side. Remote viewing, the mind's ability to extend out from the body like a ghost and visit different places, was a simple parlor trick, and extremely useful. Loki followed them.

“How is it okay?” Amadeo’s temper hadn’t calmed since he’d found out they didn’t know where the triplets were. He pulled the Hummer to a stop in front of his house and looked over at his cousin. “The Brotherhood expects us to control our family.”

Olivia sighed and climbed out of the car. “And we will. Nothing ever goes exactly according to plan.”

Amadeo slammed his door and glared at her as he walked toward the front steps. “Olivia, this isn’t as simple as sticking a bomb under our father’s car and pressing a button. What if the triplets find out about us before we’re ready?”

“Do you or do you not have the entire army under your thumb? Yes? Good. So please, please, shut the fuck up and learn to improvise,” Olivia said calmly, but the color of her eyes sharpened.

“Don’t start that shit with me. One of us has to worry about the consequences if we’re not able to contain our family and prevent them from allowing the Ascension.” When they reached the porch at the top of the stairs, Amadeo stabbed the keypad with his thumb to unlock the door.

“Energy follows thought, you know. You really ought to control yours,” Olivia said as she walked in and stopped in front of the small mirror hanging on the wall in his foyer. She adjusted the short mousse-filled strands of her bleached white hair.

Amadeo sneered, despite the truth of her statement leading the way into his living room.

“You look so much like Papa Julian,” Olivia said, looking at him through the mirror. Amadeo was a man who carried the silver streaks in his black hair well.

Papa Julian was the affectionate term they used for their grandfather, Julian Terenzio, little brother to Stefano Terenzio. Julian, also known as JT to his friends, had been a notorious playboy and what Stefano often called his best kept secret. From its conception, JT ran the baby of the Dion Corporation, SVT Securities. Since

Olivia could remember, she'd been attached to her grandfather's side. She loved Papa Julian more than her own father.

Amadeo glanced at her, his temper lowering to a quiet simmer. "Think he would be on our side?"

"You read the letter; S.V.T. would have, so Papa Julian would've been there, too. You heard the way he used to talk about his brother. The god Stefano," Olivia said with mock grandeur.

"Don't knock him. He started all this."

"And we're going to finish it," Olivia said firmly. Seven years ago, Olivia discovered a letter, written to Julian from Stefano. Then, Kayla approached them. Ever since, they waited for the right moment to take over. Terenzio's were not Robin Hoods, they never had been. For a century, they did as they pleased, and more often than not their actions were in no way honorable. The sudden desire to change didn't make any sense. Why empower the rest of the world when they could control the slaves? Why become equals when they could sit higher up the ladder? Now that they possessed the opportunity to ally themselves with the Powers That Be and reap the real benefits, fuck the rest of the world, Olivia thought. Marcello had lost his mind. Her plans, along with Amadeo's, would not be compromised, and they weren't the only members of the family who thought that way.

“There’s not going to be anything to finish if we don’t get caught up. You heard the Seer the last time we were in Denver; the triplets could pull this off.”

Olivia held up her hand. “Stop. They won’t. Period. There will be no Ascension. Lean on Vic. Find out if Leone mentioned what his brother is working on. Nicholas tracked the triplets to Madeira, but lost them after that. Kayla might know something, I’ll find out. If I don’t hear anything by nightfall, I’ll go see Marcello myself.”

Amadeo raised a brow. “That’s a serious offense if you’re caught, Olivia.”

“We are way past that now, don’t you think, cousin?”

He opened his mouth to answer her, but was forced into silence by the sudden appearance of a man in the doorway. Automatically, Amadeo’s hand went for the gun at his side, but his fingers never touched the metal. Olivia read the look on Amadeo’s face, whirled around, and gasped. Their unexpected visitor had long, light blonde hair, with random streaks of white. His eyes were a deep indigo which pulsed with a life all their own. Even odder, in his hand he carried a long golden rod with a crystal on top which radiated quiet power.

Loki smiled at the shocked expressions on their faces. Slowly, he spoke in their language. “Do not be afraid. I will help you stop the Ascension.”

Chapter 8

“I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.”

-Galileo Galilei

June 8, 2012

Undisclosed location

Undisclosed location time unknown

It was not commonly known Derek Vaughn the First designed and then participated in building the compound, all without knowing he was doing so. The compound was the first assignment handed from S.V.T. to his son, and the greatest task Marcello completed. It was the ultimate safe house for the family, if the game went wrong and checkmate came from the other side. The escape plan was set up so elaborately family members wouldn't know the location until that time came.

It was the perfect place for the Vault.

The journey was conducted as if the triplets were being followed. They traveled from Madeira by boat to the coast of Morocco. From there, they took two short helicopter rides to destinations in what appeared to be the middle of nowhere. The final leg of their journey were with a string of non-English-speaking guides that drove through extremely beautiful, ancient country. The triplets were more than a little exhausted by the time the dusty black Explorer stopped in front of the gates of the stone-walled compound.

No guards were present, no visible intercom, but someone obviously expected them as the gates opened. Their current guide, a bald, dark-skinned man who had not given a name, drove the car down a two mile paved driveway. It ended in a spacious circular courtyard, with a fountain in the center and a small pyramid inside of it. Water cascaded smoothly down each side.

"No shit. Castle Terenzio." Lucien rolled down the backseat window, pushed up his sunglasses, and squinted in the hot desert sun and up at the massive stone compound before them.

The estate was elevated, sitting in front of a high desert hill of rock. Terraces wrapped around the house, and two imposing statues of phoenixes about to take flight perched in front of the double door entrance.

THE AWAKENING

Their tour guide wordlessly got out of the vehicle and unloaded their suitcases at the base of the stairs. All three heirs climbed out of the car. Then, without looking twice at the three, the man got back into the car and drove away.

Lucien blinked at the turn of the events. "Huh. No tour?"

A voice came from behind them. "No need." A five-foot tall woman with tangled gray hair and a multitude of colored robes tossed onto her tiny frame wobbled towards them, carrying a bucket of water.

The triplets turned towards the new stranger and Simone smirked, watching the woman. "Don't tell me, this place doesn't have plumbing?"

"Grandfather wouldn't do that to us, I don't think," Vasco said unconvincingly.

"Do you need some help?" Lucien offered, as the woman walked right past them, up the short stone steps to the front doors.

"Help? Me?" The woman paused, then started laughing so hard her whole body shook and water sloshed out of her bucket. "No. You do, though. Come now, come on."

"Guess that means follow." Lucien grinned slightly and along with his brother and sister, picked up their bags and followed.

Their strange bucket-carrying host spoke little as she pushed open one of the doors, almost slipped on the polished marble floor in the grand foyer, muttered to herself, and kept walking.

The rooms were typical for an estate of its size, bright, airy and suited to the environment outside. Soaring beamed ceilings, alabaster and gold light fixtures, artist murals, Greek statues and floor-to-ceiling stone fireplaces decorated the rooms they passed. After navigating through what seemed to be a maze of hallways, the little old woman finally came to an abrupt halt in front of a wooden door. She set her water bucket down and pulled out a key tied around her neck with an old piece of string to unlock it. On the other side, a pair of closed elevator doors with a keypad on the left waited. She muttered something unintelligible under her breath and flipped open the cover on the keypad, pressing the number three, three times.

A quiet computerized voice confirmed, "Code accepted."

Instead of allowing access to the elevator, the keypad pushed out from the wall and flipped itself over to reveal a bright blue screen. Opening her right eye unnecessarily wide, the little old woman leaned into the light, allowing the retinal scan.

THE AWAKENING

Once more a computerized voice confirmed, “Scan Accepted. Hello, Rosa. Please state your last name.”

“Mercia,” Rosa said proudly. Vasco shrugged at the curious looks Simone and Lucien gave him. He didn’t have any idea who she was, either.

“Accepted. Welcome back, Rosa.” The keypad flipped back into the wall, and the elevator doors opened. Rosa picked up her bucket and waddled into the car, looking at the triplets impatiently as they followed.

“So, Rosa, does this elevator go up, down, sideways and zigzag like Willy Wonka’s?” Lucien asked with a grin, noting there were no buttons to press.

Rosa looked up at him oddly. “There’s no reason for elevator to go zigzag,” she mumbled. “Stupid Terenzio.”

Vasco and Simone laughed. Lucien chuckled, shaking his head. “Touché, Rosa.”

The elevator lurched, then began what felt like a slow descent. Simone asked, “Okay, so how far does it go?”

“Not far, about the middle.” Rosa alternated her weight between her feet, always fidgeting.

The triplets exchanged curious glances, which ended in unanswered shrugs. The elevator ride lasted three minutes, and every second which passed seemed to re-spark the excitement in the three heirs as a grandfather’s cryptic message sat forefront in their minds. Even Vasco

CRYSTAL STORM

was slightly surprised to find himself holding his breath as the elevator dinged and the metal doors slid open.

June 7, 2012

Mayan Ruins

Piedras Negras 6:22 AM

Dr. Angela Knoxx, though a scientist, had always been a little bit of a New Ager. Traditional religion never sat well with her, so she'd gone on her own path and studied Hermeticism for years. Its teachings that inner transformation was the key to the outside reality, and anyone willing to turn their mind to contemplate "the things that are" could master it, made strange sense to her. Recently, Noetic Science emerged, and she'd bought a mound of books on that subject, too. She found it fascinating science seemed to be merging with mysticism. The Noetic Institute was devoted to studying the effects of consciousness and how it related to the outer world. While she couldn't call herself a devout follower of any religion or spirituality, after seventy-two years of the bullshit called life, a person needed something that made sense

THE AWAKENING

to believe in, or, in her opinion, spend the rest of one's existence a very grouchy, lost individual.

What happened to she and her team the-last few weeks drastically challenged the thought process of the rational scientific thinker. Even so, Angela couldn't contain her excitement at their recent discovery. Her own dreams and those of the two men working with her, Scott Meyers and Dr. Phil Nichols, hadn't left much doubt in her mind they absolutely must go to Piedras Negras.

Deep in the heart of the Guatemalan jungle, the site was accessible by either a five-hour walk from the Mexican town of Corregidora Ortíz, or a two-day rafting trip down the Usumacinta River. The ruins weren't a secret; they simply hadn't been given too much attention by archeologists over the years. They would be getting a lot of attention soon, if Angela had anything to say about it.

"Try us." Derek smiled through the screen.

Angela grinned widely down at her phone. "All right. Scott called a friend of his, I can't tell you who, but long story short we got satellite imaging. Longer story short..." Her voice pulsed with excitement. "...there's a world underneath this mountain."

Shirley and Abe came to stand on either side of Derek when they heard her. Derek responded, "Send me what you've got?"

"Tech Geek Phil, gods love him, is sending all that to you now."

"Where's the entrance, Grams? Is it where the Association for Research and Enlightenment claimed it was when they visited the site?" Shirley asked.

Abe blinked at her. "Since when do you follow all that stuff?"

"Since some guy floated up from the bottom of the ocean," Shirley answered quickly.

"Exactly where they said it was, lovey. We also sent you our wish list so we can get in there. From the imagery, it looks to be a rough start, but it opens up pretty soon," Angela said, then added, "Our mysterious Cave of Creation could be down there. Something definitely is."

"Send me your list," Derek said, his mind reeling with the implications of it all if they *did* find it. "Terenzio gave us a green light on anything we need. I know that area isn't the safest, so if you want security we can get you that, too. We actually might come down there and join you."

"We hope you do!" Angela smiled. "Before I ask what's got you all looking as if you just saw Jesus the Christ himself, have you ever heard of the Brotherhood of Light?"

There was a collective pause, Derek, Shirley and Abe exchanging curious glances. Derek answered, "We haven't. What is it?"

THE AWAKENING

“Thought not. I’ll tell you later. Share your news first.”

They looked like mosquitoes. The military called them HI-MENS, beautifully hi-tech unassuming spying devices that followed Angela’s team since they landed in Guatemala. Caesar Medici let the bugs go ahead and stayed behind in Corregidora Ortíz with running water, and showers.

Wide rimmed, black sunglasses and a white, wide brimmed hat shielded his face, but they weren’t meant to block out the sun. Images relayed from the HI-MENS filtered through the lenses, allowing him to watch and listen to what went on at the scientist’s camp. It was just about that time. Caesar knew the Anunnaki. Terenzio’s team wouldn’t be allowed to get any closer. Caesar removed the sunglasses, setting them down on the table, and picked up his beer bottle. Rising from his spot on the tiny balcony, he went back inside the hotel room. His glance settled on the gray, leather-like skinned creature sitting on the bed, its wings tucked against its back. A remote control was held in its four-fingered hand, its wide black eyes set on the television. This one liked watching Jerry Springer. Go figure. The Brotherhood

called them Igigis; humanity thought of them as the mythical gargoyles.

When someone wanted to talk to the Brotherhood, a cell phone would do. When someone wanted to talk to the Anunnaki, they needed an Igigi.

“Go back and let them know Knoxx is close. I’ll need instruction,” Caesar told it.

The Igigi didn’t move. The animal-like eyes remained glued to the TV until a commercial flashed on. Only then was the power button on the remote control pressed. It snapped its eyes to Caesar, and without a noise, hopped off the bed, teeter-tottering unevenly on two stubby legs, through the open balcony doors, and jumped off. Its wings extended, shooting the beast out of sight.

Caesar eagerly watched the creature depart. He hoped this new information would send back an order that allowed him to leave this third world country babysitting assignment and make a move against Terenzio. Reincarnation was a beautiful thing, and he had a score to settle.

Two generations ago, a man named Stefano had a mortal enemy. As cliché as it sounded, no two men hated each other as much as Stefano Terenzio and Roman Moretti did. In the late 1920’s, the Moretti crime family operated out of Miami, Florida. Because of its proximity to Central America, Roman also conducted business with

THE AWAKENING

Stefano's second wife. When Stefano began his quest to solidify control of the American Mafia, Roman not only opposed his efforts, but vainly attempted to steal Stefano's wife out from underneath him. Always one to play on the desires of men to get what she wanted, Stefano's wife encouraged his advances, but never let them succeed. This only served to increase the tension between the two men, and it boiled over to the point they couldn't be in the same room together without coming to blows. They never drew guns and never let their men get involved. It was personal. Eventually Terenzio, with the help of the DeMarco family, who ran New Orleans and Baton Rouge, gave the Moretti family a choice: submit to the new order, or be removed from Miami completely. Roman went into hiding, which infuriated Stefano. Stefano died before he tracked Roman down, and the feud was left unfinished.

That was something Caesar intended to rectify this lifetime. If the Seers were correct, Stefano was back on Earth and with his family in some new body. When Caesar found him, Kayla wouldn't be the one pulling the trigger.

That happy thought foremost in his mind, Caesar flopped down on the bed, picked up the remote, and turned Jerry back on.

Chapter 9

“It is the secret of the world that all things subsist and do not die, but only retire a little from sight and afterwards return again. Nothing is dead; men feign themselves dead, and endure mock funerals... and there they stand looking out of the window, sound and well, in some strange new disguise.”

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

June 8, 2012

Undisclosed location

The Vault time unknown

The cave the triplets found themselves in was manmade, bits of crystal and limestone causing what could be seen of the walls to glimmer. Bright, overhead lights illuminated certain parts of the room, while shadows lurked in others. The area was circular shaped and appeared to take up as much square footage as the house. Steel shelves had been built into the walls, everything sitting on them protected by the locked Plexiglas front.

They started a foot off the ground, and from best guess, stretched up about twenty feet in height.

Every transmission SVT Securities had ever picked up, every document copied, photograph taken, video recorded, the history of the family and each person they had touched—it was all there. There was so much, it would take years to physically go through every piece of information. All that, while impressive, was expected. What was not, were the three bizarre structures in the middle of the room.

“It’s called a holon, or octahedron,” Rosa explained in a conversational tone. She left them gawking and walked briskly across the stone floor into the shadows.

The triplets didn’t notice when she left them, their full attention focused on the three pyramids suspended in mid-air. Each square-based pyramid was part of a pair and appeared to be made of solid gold, one pointing up towards the ceiling, the other reversed, the pointed tip somehow balanced on the stone floor. A slab of dull frosted crystal existed between the pyramids.

“What the fuck are those?” Lucien finally broke the silence, and like his siblings, dropped his bags, stepping closer to the strange structures.

“They’re holons,” Vasco replied in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone, walking past his brother to examine the pyramids. “How are they standing like that?”

“What are they for?” Simone wondered aloud in a tiny, awe-filled voice.

“Magnets. You, Terenzio. You.” Rosa returned without her bucket, answering two of the three questions.

“What are we going to do with them?” Simone asked, looking over at their eccentric host.

Rosa stared inquisitively at the three of them, for a full minute. Then, the expression dissolved off her face in a fit of childlike giggles. “Balance, Terenzios. Above. Below. Balance. You go in the center, and Lemurian crystal will help you remember.”

“What’s a Lemurian crystal?” Lucien asked, raising a brow.

“Help us remember what exactly?” Vasco shot off after his brother’s question, casting another glance back at the holons.

Rosa giggled again, walking over to Simone and Lucien. She took their hands and dragged them over to the pyramids. “Remember who you were, Terenzios. Go on, get up. Get in. Go. Go.” Releasing their hands, she shoved Simone towards the holon on the left and Lucien at the holon to the far right.

“What are the chances the magnet thing you’ve got holding these up stops working and I get smooshed?” Lucien’s mouth twisted wryly as he reached out and set his hands on the slab of crystal. As soon as he touched it,

an odd tingling sensation shot up his arms, and he drew his hands back. He hesitated, then shook his head and hoisted himself up, ducking down so he was lying on his back. The sensation continued, and he wondered if it was because of the magnets.

“All right, all right, I’m going.” Simone shrugged off Rosa’s push, climbed up carefully between the pyramids and laid on her back. She cast an apprehensive glance at the solid gold hovering above her.

Rosa patted Lucien reassuringly on his arm, then walked over to Vasco. She looked up at him in silent contemplation, her face twisting in thought. She took his hand and led him over to the holon in the center.

It was rare for Vasco to openly show reluctance about anything, but as he got closer to the pyramids, he couldn’t shake whatever was making the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. Something profound was about to happen, and it terrified him. He felt his heartbeat speeding up in his chest, a cold sweat clutching at his body.

Rosa grinned at the look on his face, pulling him a little harder the rest of the way. “Don’t be scared. Fear will block you. It won’t hurt.”

“Yeah, c’mon, you pussy,” Lucien called out, even though his own voice didn’t sound as confident and playful as it normally did.

Vasco shot his brother a dirty look, but forced himself to hop up onto the crystal slab. "Now what?"

That "I know something you don't know" expression was plastered over Rosa's face. She literally scampered away from them into the shadows and returned several minutes later with three diamond shaped sparkling crystals in her hand. "These are yours. Made for you, so put them on your foreheads. Go on, put them on now." She stepped up to each of them, handed over the crystals, and waited for them all to place the stones on their foreheads.

"This is crazy cult shit right here," Lucien said.

"You better be extra careful, Lucien, all this magnetism might reduce your penis size," Simone snickered at him, though the playful jabbing was just a distraction and not a very good one. She didn't understand what they were supposed to remember, and a weird knotting sensation in her gut heightened her fear of the unknown.

Lucien stuck his tongue out from the side of his mouth, not moving his head so he didn't drop the crystal and get scolded by their loopy host.

When Vasco took the crystal from Rosa, he didn't place it on his forehead right away, instead examining it curiously. The piece of rock felt incredibly warm in his hand, as if some energy source existed in its center.

"Wrong eyes, arrogant Terenzio. Look here. Here where your memories are. Here." Nearly every syllable

was punctuated with the stab of her index finger into the center of his forehead.

Vasco twitched with every poke, finally reaching up and catching her wrist firmly. "Enough. I get your point."

Rosa canted her head, looking at him like he was a bug that both amused and frightened her. It ended in her own deep laughter as she stepped away, nodding her head. "Mmm hmm. Yes, she will see you now." At the wall next to the elevator, she pressed a button to plunge the room into darkness. "Close your eyes, Terenzios. Deep breaths, now. Slow. Back you go, back to where you remember."

The lights cut off and Vasco frowned. Seconds passed, then minutes and it felt like the crystal on his forehead was getting warmer. It brought a steady sense of relaxation that covered him like a blanket. He realized at some point he zoned in and out.

It started with sounds, which held some significance. The sound of glass hitting a solid surface, shattering from the impact. Voices gradually bled into his mind, strangely familiar. He recognized a woman's voice first. As he strained to hear the words, he realized the second raised tone was his own, shouting at the woman. Wait. No, he was wrong. That wasn't *his* voice...

"Why?"

"To feel something... other than...."

"What are we doing?"

"I don't... I don't know."

The answer came in a moment of hazy awareness. He listened to an argument between Stefano Vasco Terenzio and *his* second wife, the one who really mattered. They said things neither one of them should've said, things which shouldn't matter to people like them. Their fight was over an indiscretion; first him, then her. Both done to protect the secret of their relationship, even though, in the end, it was too big to keep.

But what Vasco couldn't understand was what the memories had to do with him...

Conversations from different moments suddenly became muddled together, and the faint whisper of images swirled around in his head until he willfully took hold of one and focused in on it. A man tied to a chair, blood and sweat dripping down his face, staining his shirt. Pitiful whimpers pressed apart his lips, fear glazing the one eye not swollen shut. Two men stood in front of their captive, one taking his time loading bullets into a revolver, the other rolling up his shirt sleeves.

As if he were viewing it all from a place of the dead, his vision rippled across the gloomy scene, showing Vasco the door to the room as it cracked open and a child poked his head through. He teeter-tottered between prudent patience and reeling disbelief as the memory unfolded

with undeniable familiarity. Again, this wasn't *his* lifetime.

Vasco watched as confusion marked the child's gray eyes when his father reared back his massive fist and struck the man in the chair. Disgust and fear soon spilled across the child's face as the captive's head snapped to the side, the sound of a bone cracking drowned out by the hoarse shout of pain.

Swallowing hard, the little boy walked farther into the room and up to his father, tugging on his pant leg. "Daddy?"

His father's eyes jerked downwards then narrowed cruelly. "*What'd I tell you, boy?*" The sentence ended as the back of a fist struck the child's cheek, sending him to the floor and pulling tears out of his eyes. "*Get back in bed! Now!*"

The brief solidity caved away and left Vasco falling through his own mind as the blanks magically filled in. He witnessed the first and last time Stefano Vasco Terenzio had ever went into his father's office without permission. Somehow, Vasco knew it hadn't been long before Stefano's father started inviting him, and by the time he was seventeen, those instances were no longer uncommon in Stefano's life.

Vasco struggled to make sense of it all, locked in his own mind. He thought he'd drown in the memories

poured into his head, but his fear was left hanging with no climax. Instead, abandoned corridors were unlocked and suddenly filled with life, and as he roamed around inside them, he felt he was both trespasser and gatekeeper.

The scene faded into another and shadows rose against the darkness, light skittering around the edges, teasing him with something he couldn't yet see. He smelled it, though; the sweat, the hunger. There was suddenly so much of it he could barely breathe. A moan reverberated in his ears, wavering, husky, and he knew instantly. He knew what it felt like to cause it, to control it, wait for it, tame it, then wring it out of her time and again.

Her. The cut of her nails, the grip of her thighs. He wasn't the only one who knew her so intimately; but he was. A veil lifted, pushing away the last of the darkness and surrounding him with the illusory effects of the moment. He saw oil lamps on stone walls, felt the humid air inside the tribute to the dead. A mausoleum. It was either morbid or just the right atmosphere for these creatures. Vasco watched someone else's big hands on her tiny waist. Then, he realized with brutal clarity he watched through *Stefano's* eyes; watching the illuminated depth of her emerald gaze as it urgently begged him, just a moment before another man drove deep inside of her. There

was such beauty in being undermined by the primal need to be used, to be fucked, to give into the violent lust bred within us all.

Erotic, the small tinges of jealously mixing with pure arousal at the sight of her taking pleasure in someone else's arms. Watching her love it, openly, guilty, unable to look at him, yet unable to look away. It was all-consuming, feeding his basic instinct to dominate her. To take her used, to reprint his own scent on her skin, the marks from his grip on her hips. To show her again and again, over and over, why a woman like her, chose a man like him.

The views faded, then shifted into focus so he faced her as if he were there again, reliving a moment long past. He felt himself, Stefano, leaning forward, the sensation of his cheek brushed over hers before he smothered her mouth with his own. Her eyes rolled back a brief moment as the suction of her breath quickened. If ever it'd be said about her, that she belonged to someone, she was his. Utterly his whore.

How foul, the truth. Yet, there was so much more.

The images crashed to the surface of Vasco's consciousness and brought with them the vortex of two powerful emotions. They welled up in his chest, slamming into his gut, his groin, a raging heat spreading through his limbs like a wildfire.

Something else controlled it; jealousy, lust. Something else surrounded the light and dark, using them as they were meant to.

Vasco vision narrowed in, showing him inside the back of a car. This transition of time revealed itself in clarity. Snow fell around them, lightly coating the private runway. Vasco heard her asking Stefano about his first wife. Then she said something Vasco knew Stefano never expected to hear. Even caught off guard, the response came naturally.

"Would ya want to marry me one day?"

"I already would."

"Then do it."

"Marry me."

It was the one thing everyone envied, yet never truly understood about those two; how they could possibly love one another so much.

After a moment of lingering in the aftertaste, Vasco recoiled. Suddenly and violently, he was yanked from that memory and shoved into the next, some unseen force propelling him further into his mind. It grinded to a halt just as a jagged blade sliced open the skin on Stefano's back. Blood oozed from the wound, staining his dirty, sweat-laden flesh. His torturer picked up a bottle cap and shoved it into the open wound, twisting and digging the surprisingly ragged edges into the soft tissue.

THE AWAKENING

Vasco realized, once more, he slipped into the role of Stefano Terenzio. He was both participant and viewer as Stefano's fists clenched and strained against the metal chains that kept him prisoner. Another cut, another shove, and it kept going until his entire back was aflame, his nerve endings writhing in agony as he struggled to bear it in silence.

The torture lasted for days. They tossed Stefano into a burlap bag at the end. The scene almost faded, but came back into focus when an Asian-accented voice spoke. *"Can you hear me in there? I hope you can breathe, will make it easier for the bag to fill with water."* His body was feverish, his mind a thin line bordering on insanity and his struggle to stay coherent. There were no smart ass words to say to his torturer. He heard their laughter from inside the bag a moment before he was kicked into the freezing waters of the Hudson River.

Nausea spilled into Vasco's gut as the memory was yanked from him, replaced by sudden streams of information which shot into his mind. Stefano hadn't died that day. He was saved, though not without a price and not without vengeance. The moment came when Stefano stood face to face with his attacker again. That day, he bashed the opium drug lord's head in with the cane he would be forced to use the rest of his life. The disfigured head was kept in a jar, both memento and warning.

Fuck, he felt tied to the back of a roller coaster, the way he was dragged through memories. He crashed into one unprepared, and just as he found something to hold onto, the earth dropped out below him, so he fell screaming into the next. Darkness faded to light, back to darkness, and at times a cacophony of sound drummed between his ears. Everything a person remembered over a lifetime all exploded back into his mind, exposing itself.

When it finally stopped, Vasco's eyes shot open. He yanked the crystal from his forehead and pushed off the holon, stumbling, calling out loudly, "Lights! Lights!"

A moment later, the overheads came back on. As they did, Lucien and Simone opened their own eyes with mirrored expressions of disbelief and shock.

What the hell was this? This was a trick, some grand twist on subliminal messaging. He inhaled suddenly, remembering how to breathe. Vasco wasn't a big believer in past lives; in fact, he hadn't given such a thing thirty seconds of thought, ever. But now he felt certifiably insane. How was it possible he carried the memories of his current life *and* those of Stefano Vasco Terenzio? S.V.T.? The legend, the one who had started all of it? Vasco bent over with his hands on his knees, trying to fight off the fit of nausea, trying to slow his heart rate. He jerked his eyes over to Rosa when she appeared, twirling a piece of her

hair around her fingers. "What the fuck just happened?" he demanded.

Rosa smiled intently at him. "You know."

"This is some cult shit," Lucien shook his head rubbing the back of his neck. "Can someone explain to me how I have Julian Terenzio's memories in my head? Holy shit. Holy shit."

"Understatement," Simone said to Lucien. She lapsed into silence. This was off the charts. What had their grandfather gotten them into? She never gave serious thought to reincarnation, but without question, the memories from the life of Liliana Terenzio sat in her mind as if she lived them herself. But how? Why?

Glancing over at Vasco, she realized in thirty-some-odd years she never saw him look so *off balance*. Then, she realized the expression on his face was one she *had* seen before, when looking at Stefano. She cleared her throat, then said gently, "At least now you know why you've always had arthritis in your left leg."

Vasco blinked at her, and then glanced down at the limb. "I'll be damned." The drug lord. The bottle caps. The damage done to his spine that nearly left him crippled. A century ago, S.V.T. walked with a slight limp. Vasco straightened, pressing the heels of his palms against his eyes, as if to force the memories out of his mind. They stayed, and his grip on reality loosened, leaving him lost.

CRYSTAL STORM

“Hey, Rosa, I know we’ve probably got other strange shit to do down here, but right now I need a drink.” Lucien smirked. “A really stiff one.”

Chapter 10

“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

-Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

June 7, 2012

SVT Think Tank

Alexandria, VA 11:11 PM

The purpose of the accumulator is simply a magnet for orgone energy. It only sounds like a strange word. In reality, orgone energy is the left-brained word for chi, prana, or life force energy. Energy which is already around you. It is made up of you and connected to everything else. You don't need an orgone accumulator to harness this force and draw it into you. It is you. It is your very breath.

But, to speed up this process, I sent you one. The healing effects of this machine are very real, for the obvious reasons explained above. If you need a little

assistance, and of course, you do- use this machine and do your meditations.

That's right. I'm assuming by this point you've done your research. You can scientifically prove the oncoming Ascension. Don't let another doubt pass through your head. Your next task is simple, and the hardest. Ironic we've left the scientists to do this part, isn't it?

Obviously, I haven't lost my mind. Neither have you. Give it a try. You've nothing to lose and you'll find a very interesting synchronicity in the way events in your lives shape up. You've seen glimpses of it already, haven't you?

See you at the party.

“What the hell is suddenly going on in the world, and who is MST?” Abe asked in an incredulous tone after reading the letter from MST.

“It's been going on, Abe, we just now noticed,” Shirley said quietly, circling around the plain, large rectangular box that had been delivered to them. “But I don't know who MST is, either.” She looked over at Derek.

“It would take too long to explain. He's a Terenzio, though. He ranks above Robert,” Derek said as he mimicked Shirley's motions, remaining silent, and battling

himself in his head. They hadn't stopped since they found Menes. For the last twenty-four hours, they went through any and all research available that discussed in any scientific language the supposed oncoming Ascension and the Anunnaki. Not only had the Sumerians made references to help from outer space, but other ancient documents such as the Nag Hammadi Codices also talked of alien intrusion into human affairs.

It was a little mind blowing. While Derek understood mainstream science's urge to toss this data aside as the fantasy-filled stories of a creative people, he agreed with Shirley. It made no sense to only take from these ancient cultures things believed to be true and ignore the rest without giving it fair scientific study. Just because it sounded fantastical didn't mean it was impossible.

Research on the Ascension got stranger. Most of it led them down the mystical path which couldn't really be proven; unless they started connecting dots like Shirley showed them. David Bohm's studies on the holographic universe provided scientific basis for discussion on reality. They found other studies that showed how the brain didn't make a distinction between what it sees as a memory and what happened in real life. This further snowballed into evidence where the eyes could potentially see more than the brain's capacity to comprehend. To Derek, this was a scary thought. It meant intelligence

levels, preconceived notions, beliefs, could all affect *eyesight*.

In 1999, a large study was conducted as to whether or not focused intent could affect reality. It was predicted over an eight-week period a group meditation practice would reduce violent crime in Washington D.C. by twenty percent. Data taken after the period showed violent crime was actually reduced by twenty-three percent.

Now, there was this present from MST, accompanied by the strange letter which indicated the dying man might know a little something more than they did.

Derek pulled open the door to the machine and stared inside. A simple wooden chair sat inside. The inner walls were made of some sort of metallic material. It didn't look like much of anything remarkable. "Tell me more about Wilhelm Reich?" Derek finally asked.

"Reich was a psychoanalyst and psychiatrist," Abe explained. "From what little I know, he was well respected for most of his life. They didn't start calling him a quack until he promoted the health benefits of his orgone machines."

"There's more to the story," Shirley added. "Reich claimed orgone is the omnipresent energy in everything and is responsible for the weather, gravity, the big bang, etc. He claimed the orgasm is one of many examples of the release of this energy. If you block it from naturally

being released, it caused illness. Things like cancer, for example.”

Derek’s brows shot up, and he looked at Shirley, and then the accumulator. “That sounds like the scientific explanation for the seven chakras and the result of having those energy portals closed.”

“Exactly. The blockage of the chakras is what leads to different types of dis-ease, as they call it,” Shirley said. “So, Reich built the box and puts his patients inside for its health benefits. Harper and the New Republic run articles on it, and then the FDA went berserk, and got an injunction to stop him from selling across interstate lines. Reich told them and the courts they have no authority to judge his work, and did it anyway. They throw him in jail, he gets two years, the FDA burns the books he wrote about Orgone, and he died a year later of heart failure, a few days before he’s due to apply for parole.”

“Since when does the FDA start burning books? Fucking government,” Abe muttered.

“That’s a happy story.” Derek took a few steps back from the machine, folding his arms across his chest. “What the hell are we doing with it?”

“Sit inside and meditate like Marcello suggested?” Shirley offered.

“Speaking of, anybody know what the ‘next step’ is?” Abe asked, suppressing a yawn.

Derek shook his head “No clue. Maybe he wants us activating our own chakras.”

“That makes sense. Plus, it fits his talk of irony in regards to scientists striving for a full kundalini awakening.” Taking Derek’s place at the door of the machine, Shirley walked inside of it. “How in the world does this attract orgone energy?”

“I don’t think I have the brain capacity left to tackle another mystery.” Abe let his forehead drop onto the table top.

“I’ll pull up what I can find in regards to research papers on it.” Derek glanced down at his watch. They were all beat and it was late. “Why don’t you both go home, catch a few hours of real sleep? Abe, please take a shower, you smell, and we’ll meet back up in the a.m.?”

“Don’t have to tell me twice.” Abe lifted his head and clambered to his feet.

Shirley stepped out of the machine, settling tired eyes on Derek. “Are you going to follow your own advice?”

Derek offered a small smile. “I don’t want to leave the area unattended, but I’m definitely going into my office and bonding with my couch like I never have before.”

“I’ll be back around six, Derek. I might not shower, though.” Abe cracked a smile at them, winked at Shirley, then walked through the automatic doors. Sleep sounded like the best idea the universe had ever come up with.

THE AWAKENING

Shirley waved at Abe as he departed, then asked Derek, "This is going to get a lot stranger, isn't it?"

Derek watched her movements, small sparks of awareness lighting up his sleep-deprived brain. "I don't know if it can get any stranger at this point. I feel like I've heard it all."

Shirley laughed softly. "I keep expecting to wake up. Everything we've found out makes so much sense, but at the same time...."

"I know. Guess this is what Neo felt like in the Matrix." Derek grinned.

Shirley smiled warmly and their gazes locked as a comfortable silence filled the gap between them, charged with everything that wasn't said. Finally, she reached out, sliding gentle fingertips over his unshaven cheek. "Don't stay up working. Sleep."

He was tempted to close his eyes and nuzzle. Tempted more to reach out and pull her to him. He did neither. "I won't. And I will."

Smiling, she dropped her hand, then approached the automatic doors. When they slid open, she paused in the entrance and called back, "Hey Derek?"

"Yeah?"

"If we do pull all this off, think you might take me out sometime? Like on, you know, a real grown-up date?"

Derek felt his cheeks growing warmer and just knew he was blushing. For a few seconds, he couldn't find anything to say, like a blubbering wide-eyed teenager awestruck by his first crush. When it passed and he found his voice he got out, "That's a reality I can't wait to create."

Shirley didn't say anything else, but he caught her soft smile a moment before she left his line of sight. As promised, he went right to his office and sunk into the well used leather. But it sure as hell wasn't work that occupied his mind in the moments before sleep took him.

June 8, 2012

Undisclosed location

The Vault time unknown

They drew into their own thoughts since stepping out of the holons. The triplets sat in the Vault, a few feet behind the pyramids at a long conference table. A decanter full of bourbon sat before them. Glasses were emptied, then promptly filled backed up again with the expensive liquor.

It was a lot to swallow all at once; to realize that something you didn't even believe in might be true. The fact

the memories were in his head so clearly were chewing up at Vasco's sense of reason. He was positive if he searched the shelves, he could confirm every event he just relieved through nearly a century ago. But did that really prove the existence of past lives? No, he thought, not conclusively. This must be some sort of test, there needed to be a better explanation. Something like that wouldn't be below their grandfather; he was a Terenzio, after all.

"You know..." Lucien was sprawled back in his chair, glass pressed against his temple, "...if you thought I had an ego before, I really have one now."

Simone shook her head in amusement, despite the fact she was still shaken by the events. It was so much to process. Little things kept popping into her brain, all of them about Liliana Terenzio. It was exciting, but admittedly scary. "I doubt that's possible, Lucien. Besides, Vasco has an ego bigger than both of ours."

"Rightly so. How's it feel to be the legend?" Lucien cocked a grin over at his brother.

Vasco shook the ice in his glass, looking at the amber liquid as if it would make sense of what they just experienced. "I'm not Stefano Terenzio," he said finally.

Lucien arched a brow at him. "What do you mean you're not? You've got a better explanation?"

Vasco glared at his brother. "There are a million, Lucien. For whatever reason, we need to know about the

original trio. That holon, crystal combination must have downloaded it into our brains,” he concluded. It all sounded far-fetched, but not as out there as the idea of reincarnation.

“V, I’ve got JT’s memories in my head.” Lucien stabbed a finger at his own temple. “I felt what he felt, right down to the sweat on his balls. Sorry, Simone.”

Simone didn’t offer any response yet, her thoughtful gaze going between both siblings, though her eyes did roll over so slightly at Lucien’s descriptive image.

Vasco frowned hard at the youngest. “You can’t be that egotistical, Lucien,” he said sharply. “You’d love to be JT, I don’t deny I’d love to claim the life of S.V.T. But we’re not. We just know them intimately now, like a really well written novel. We need to stop with the mystical shit and start focusing on why this is happening.”

Lucien finished off his third drink, mulling over his brother’s words. Finally, he shook his head and reached for the bottle. “No, I think you’re wrong, V. I’m not one to believe in UFO’s or ghosts or anything outside my little circle of reality, but that was real.” He lifted his fresh glass to his lips, adding quickly, “And I don’t need to be JT. I’m already the shit, asshole.”

“Down boys,” Simone chided. “Let’s put whether or not we are actually reincarnated versions of Stef, Lil and JT on hold for the moment. Grandfather said we knew

our enemy. Does that mean anything different to us now?" She tapped her glass, calling attention to her words. She slid her gaze between her brothers.

Lucien thought on the question with another swallow from his glass. Vasco set a bent elbow on the table top, resting his hand against his mouth as he contemplated. It was terribly strange having new memories you could suddenly explore. Not just one either, an entire lifetime's worth.

"That letter you wrote me—JT—before you died," Lucien suddenly said, sitting up a little straighter in his chair. "How did you find them?"

"What letter? Who do you mean by 'them'?" Simone asked. She couldn't remember, or find anything in Lil's memories about getting a letter from Stefano.

Vasco's brows knit together as he went searching through the warehouse of information floating around in his mind (and having them was going to take some getting used to). It wasn't long before what Lucien spoke about slammed to the forefront in a sudden moment of clarity. "Oh, my God..."

Chapter 11

“We have come to be one of the worst ruled, one of the most completely controlled and dominated governments in the civilized world. No longer a government by free opinion, no longer a government by conviction and the vote of the majority, but a government by the opinion and duress of a small group of dominant men.”

- Woodrow Wilson

June 6, 1925

Château des Amerois

Muno, Belgium 1:11 AM

Maranzano brought me here because he needs my help in following Don Ferro's orders. I *don't* need his help to complete those same orders. Let me remove the middle man completely and with my continued willing cooperation you'll have a much easier time controlling your scapegoat.”

His words were akin to blasphemy, but he wasn't dealing with Cosa Nostra anymore. A power existed which sat higher than that. The many names were all masks of the

same beast. The important facts were there wasn't a country in the world not touched by their power, and their control extended past the limits of Earths' stratosphere to a few planets close by. The impossibility of the sight clearly in front of him proved it.

The interior of the den had the décor expected of a castle. The air reeked of furniture polish, expensive cologne and lit cigars. Two United States secret service agents stood in the corner. Since entering the privacy of the room, their eyes remained a solid black. At random moments, they would widen, then slightly narrow into an oval shape.

Stefano Vasco Terenzio sat comfortably in the high-backed chair, a nearly empty glass in one hand, a burning cigar in the other. His gaze rested nonchalantly on the "man" in front of him. The impossibility of the situation was further exposed by the fact the eyes staring back at him were reptilian-like. The white pinkish cheeks, usually found on an aristocratic face, kept flickering to a dark, scaly green, like an uncontrolled twitch. Fifteen minutes earlier, the creature exposed its entire self. Stefano was certain the image meant to intimidate, and for a moment it had. To watch the Vice President of the United States suddenly transform into a eight-foot tall lizard thing was a little startling. Apparently, the human form was grossly easy to manipulate, but after the initial

shock wore off, the thing became just another piece on his chessboard.

They were called the Anunnaki. The myths and legends of the Gods were actually true tales. It was they who chose the thirteen human ruling families from the genetically altered slaves, whose daughters they'd whored and through whom they'd created bloodlines loyal only to them. It wasn't hard to believe for Stefano. To him, it sounded like a good idea (and it obviously had been), if one possessed the capabilities to pull it off. Besides, in his opinion, the universe was too big for humans to be alone in it. It was the height of arrogance for the stupid, easily manipulated suckers called mankind to think they were the only species that existed within it. Or that they were the smartest. Yeah, right.

It was the Anunnaki who played the ultimate chess game with humanity; the one opponent Stefano realized he couldn't beat, yet. That meant this was the kind of challenge worth getting a hardon over. And since he'd had never been afraid of making a deal with the devil...

"Oh, and one more thing," Stefano said. "My family, perhaps one other of my choosing, will be the last one standing in the western Cosa Nostra. You let me clean it up as I see fit. Don Ferro can claim control from afar, if you wish. After the eradication of the rest of the families, feel free to give the real credit to any law enforcement

agency you want. Twisting the story into something acceptable to put in a history book is up to you.”

The Anunnaki, the Vice President, smiled coldly. “Are you really willing to play slave, just to have your way, Stefano?”

“If I’ve got the story right, as a human, I’m your slave anyway. I’d prefer to have a say in the method of my servitude.” He finished his drink and lifted the cigar to his lips, spicing up the flavor of the alcohol on his tongue.

Silence stretched. When the answer finally came, Stefano’s lips curled up into a smile.

The cigar balanced between Stefano’s teeth as he came down the stone steps. Nina, his personal bodyguard, waited patiently at the bottom. When their eyes met, he nodded once. Malicious excitement reflected back at him.

He climbed into the car first, Maranzano sat next to him. The Sicilian’s bodyguard sat directly across from him, reading a newspaper. Nina sat next to the reader.

“Well? How did it go?” Maranzano asked.

Stefano shot an arrogant look. “I’m in.”

Maranzano smiled warmly, kissing both his cheeks, then slapping one. “Congratulations.”

“Grazie.”

Nina shot the bodyguard first, a quick single bullet to the temple. Maranzano received the second as Stefano rolled down his window, gently tapping his cigar to rid the ashes. He helped Nina kick both bodies out of the car. The Vice President wanted the corpses. Stefano hadn’t asked why, didn’t much care. He stuck the Habana back between his lips. “Let’s go.”

June 8, 2012

Undisclosed location

The Vault time unknown

“They gave him Alcystone Island and the renegade militia that was on it, too, to help him,” Vasco said quietly.

“Jesus Christ. You killed Maranzano?” Lucien’s jaw fell slightly agape.

Vasco frowned at his brother. “I didn’t do shit. But to properly answer your question, neither did Stefano.” He paused, and the frown bled off his face. *Fuck this was all too crazy.* Not just the memories, though they were enough to make him think he was really losing it. Vasco recalled the calm, malicious glee Stefano felt in those

moments. Not just recall it; the very feeling felt so familiar to him he realized he was having a hard time not smiling.

“Who shot him, then?” Lucien asked.

“Nina did,” Vasco responded quietly, and immediately another rush of sensation connected the memories of Antonina. He still didn’t understand any of it. What was the purpose of providing them with what the original trio felt, thought? For that matter, how did whoever put those holons together, know? It didn’t make any sense.

Simone leaned back in her chair, arms crossed comfortably over her chest. This story wasn’t just new to her, but to Lil, too. She realized Stefano never shared with either of his siblings how he really obtained Alcyone Island, which sounded exactly like something he would do. She clearly remembered Nina was loyal, intelligent, deadly, and always willing to shoot someone if Stefano asked. Liliana and Nina shared a love of firearms, and were good friends. Simone couldn’t help but smile at the familiar feelings the memories invoked.

“Nina?” Lucien slowly grinned. The more they got into the conversation, the more convinced he was those holons helped them remember their past lives. There were too many little details running around in his head that were intimate and personal, he needn’t know about JT. “I

slept with her. Before she married Derek. She was a hot little lay, too.”

“Aside from family, was there any female on the island that Julian didn’t fuck?” Simone canted her head at Lucien, amused.

Vasco remained silent, ignoring the reference to Lucien as Julian for the time being. “This is one hell of an enemy.” He pressed two fingers against his temple. His head pounded, and the alcohol didn’t help on any front. “The Anunnaki are, well...”

“Sci-fi shit right there. And don’t even try to jump on the doubting train, V,” Lucien warned, pointing a finger at him. “Those fuckers killed me. I can still feel their claws, their teeth...” Lucien grimaced. “Oh, revenge will be sweet.”

“Before we even discussing the, how did you say it, Vasco? Anunnaki,” Simone slowly pronounced the word, then continued. “Grandfather obviously knows about them. But if you, I mean Julian, didn’t tell him, Lucien, how did that happen?”

Lucien knit his brows together. “Marcello told me that he knew about them and it was time to remove them from the chessboard.” He pressed his liquor glass against his temple again, searching the newly expanded hallways of his memory banks. “I went to them and demanded to know what they’d done and subsequently got eaten.”

THE AWAKENING

Lucien shuddered. "It's so fucking strange to remember dying."

"Yeah, it is," Simone said quietly new memories pressing against the backs of her eyes. She shook her head and glanced over at Vasco. "Well, if Julian didn't tell him, did you leave a note for him?"

"Not that I recall. Did he ever tell Julian what they'd done, Lucien?"

Lucien shook his head. "He refused to say."

Out of the shadows, Rosa suddenly appeared, skipping towards them and carrying a small banker's box. She dropped it on the table, then patted Vasco on the head. Her eyes drifted over the other two in studious silence before she turned around and went skipping back to where she came from, calling out in a sing-song voice, "DeMarco."

Chapter 12

“The virtues we acquire, which develop slowly within us, are the invisible links that bind each one of our existences to the others’ - existences which the spirit alone remembers, for Matter has no memory for spiritual things.”

-Honore Balzac

September 11, 1958

Dion Corp Private Retreat

Madeira Islands 2:11 PM

It was no secret that the Madeira Island retreat was, ninety-nine percent of the time, just for men. However, when you were Mr. President, every now and again, you brought your wife. When you needed a secure private location for a meeting with a member of the politically charged DeMarco family, who strangely insisted your wife be present, it was the perfect place.

The not quite black hair rippled lightly in the breeze carried off the ocean. He stood out on the terrace, folding up a piece of paper and tucking it into his pocket.

Marilyn stepped to her husband's side, slipping her hand into the crook of his arm. She glanced at the pocket where the note sat, arching a slender brow. "Everything still in one piece?"

"Uncle Julian started a bar fight then he rented out the brothel for the other guy. I love my family, truly." Marcello chuckled. "He's never allowed to babysit again."

Marilyn rolled her eyes. Uncle Julian meant well, but his life's philosophy ground directly against hers. She lucked out to get Marcello when she had, before his uncle's seeds of debauchery had fully taken root, but patronizing affection lived in her smile. "You know I love him, but I don't really want our children imitate him."

Quiet laughter left Marcello's lips. "Noted and agreed, Mrs. Terenzio." He tipped his head down, brushing his mouth across her cheek. His voice lowered secretively. "But I am going to enjoy the time alone with you."

Marilyn made a soft sound, deep in her throat and wrapped her arms around his neck, leaning in closer to—

One of the guards pushed open the sliding glass door, clearing his throat. Marilyn took her slow, sweet time with a warm, promising kiss. It hadn't taken her very long after they met to learn to work with, around, and sometimes ignore, the frequent interruptions.

Both of Marcello's arms came around her, his hands clasped loosely at her back, holding her there as he

returned her kiss. Only after, he acknowledged the guard, who informed that their guest had arrived. Marilyn kissed him again, standing up on the tips of her toes after she broke away to give him a peck on the nose. "Should I change?"

"No. This suits you just fine." Marcello smiled softly down at her.

Matthew DeMarco, Director of the newly formed and Above Top Secret Interplanetary Phenomenon Unit, was the near mirror image of his father, with one exception; he carried his mother's wheat-colored eyes. Following in his father's—U.S. Senator and Don of New Orleans, Alexandro DeMarco— footsteps, he and his brother continued to insert the DeMarco name into American politics and the dark, dark world that ran it.

Matthew wasn't there to bring good news to his family ally, but it needed to be given. Armed guards, dressed in plain clothes with the Dion Corp logo on their shirts, escorted him through the open rooms and out onto the terrace. Dressed for Washington and not the islands, he held his suit jacket over his forearm and carried a warm smile, regardless of the circumstances of his visit, when he saw the pair. "You remind me of my parents."

Marilyn turned in Marcello's arms, smiling at Matthew. "Thanks, Matt, you really know how to make a girl feel young." She fanned her lashes in good humor,

stepped up to take his hands, and kissed his cheek. "How was your flight?"

"I secretly dislike flying, but your jet has excellent accommodations." Matthew tipped his head, returning her kiss. A Dion Corp guard came out and set the briefcase down on the table. Matthew turned his mother's eyes to Marcello, extending his hand. "We need to talk."

"I knew you hadn't come here just to say hello." Marcello took Matthew's hand and kissed his cheek with a hug. "What's the good news?" he asked dryly as they broke away.

Matthew broke their embrace, then turned to the case, using his thumb on the number pad to unlock it. The friendly expression on his face melted away in the sudden seriousness of his tone. "There are two parts to this." The latches clicked open. "One, you won't be able to do anything about. The other..." He opened the case, reaching inside for two file folders. Both had the words ABOVE TOP SECRET stamped in red on the front. "...we'll see about that one." Matthew paused for just a moment, then he picked up the first folder, handing it to Marilyn. "You were pregnant a year ago. You were told the child died at birth. She did not."

Marcello braced himself for whatever it could possibly be, but there was not a chance in hell he'd been prepared for what Matthew revealed. Marilyn paled, the words hit

her like a punch to the stomach; a knife to her pounding heart. She sank back in the chair, the straight line of her back, the proud square of her shoulders, bowing. She opened her mouth. Nothing came out.

Marcello spoke for her, his voice sharp. "You're going to have to do a hell of a lot better than this, Matthew." He remembered that day, vividly. How could he not? The crying. The pain. A wound which still stung. Marilyn had taken it especially hard. He flicked gray eyes to his wife, then dropped the steely gaze to the file folder.

Matthew sighed quietly. He hadn't gotten to the hard part yet. "Open the folder, Marilyn." Inside was a picture of a smiling, one-year-old girl with her mother's light blonde hair and shining blue eyes.

Marilyn shook her head. The second time, it actually showed. "No." She shook it a third time, but her eyes never left the folder. "No." So many memories flooded her. Someone was trying to get them, she thought. They had to be. "This can't—" The world went quiet. Marilyn drew a breath, much more shallow than she would have liked; it roared in her ears. She pulled the folder across the table and opened it. She looked right into her own eyes, and her hand came to her mouth, tears slipping over her knuckles.

For the first time in a long time Marcello was at a standstill. Their daughter was alive. Someone took her,

and lied to them. The mixture of emotions was so sudden, so vicious in its intensity, it was almost too difficult to contain. He forced himself to lock it down and focus on his wife, his brows pulled together in concern. But as he finally looked down at the picture, his world tipped again and just kept toppling, a clammy sweat starting to cling to his skin. He had been in the game for too long, now. Things were starting to piece together. Matthew was right. For the first time, Marcello Terenzio didn't want to know.

Matthew didn't say anything more right away. He gave them a moment to let it really digest before he dropped more bombs onto their world. "Tell me when you're ready to hear the answers to those questions."

Our daughter, Marilyn thought. *Our baby girl*. The child she knew for nine months, who had cruelly been taken from her. She had held their daughter's tiny, purple body; smoothed back her thin layer of soft, dark hair; kissed the small, stiff fists and touched her round cheeks. Stillborn, they said, though in the thick fog of dreams she swore she saw the needle and heard the sharp, thin, healthy wail as the doctor pricked her heel. Their daughter. Alive. Marilyn tore her eyes from the photograph and looked at Matthew, fingers pressed to white lips. He held answers. She wanted them, all of them. She nodded.

Matthew cleared his throat. "Infiltrating the hospital wasn't terribly difficult. They did send a few of their best. They're called Darkworkers." He paused, then continued. "Two hundred thousand children disappear every year in the U.S. alone. What happens to them isn't pretty. Your daughter is one of the lucky ones. She's in a program that will nurture, educate, and train her." Matthew looked at Marcello, then at Marilyn. "Your daughter's father is a high ranking Illuminati member."

It kept coming, one hit after another. His own island hadn't been hard for them to get into. Who were they?! Their daughter taken from them. From his wife. The knockout punch? Their daughter's father was Illuminati. Marcello was *not* Illuminati. He refused to push the sentence past that, because he wasn't ready for what it really meant. He couldn't move. He couldn't speak.

Marilyn jerked, eyes focusing and snapping to Matthew. "...what?"

"What happened that night went down one of two ways. We can't confirm which," Matthew continued calmly, delivering the information as needed. It wasn't fun. "Either the memory was wiped from your mind, or you remember but never told your husband. Regardless, her name is Kayla and she is *your* daughter, Marilyn. Not Marcello's."

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There were two moments in Stefano Terenzio's life in which he literally snapped. One resulted in the murder of a fifteen-year-old girl. The other was against his second wife. Marcello snapped once; the day he murdered his own grandmother. He felt like he was on the brink of that darker side again. His head swam. His vision blurred. He couldn't breathe. *He couldn't breathe.* He went to his feet so forcefully the chair skittered backwards and hit the railing.

Their daughter was not his daughter. His Mari had... he didn't even understand why. "No." He whirled around and looked at Marilyn like he just might..."Tell me he's a fucking liar. *Tell. Me.*"

The memory slammed into Marilyn like a freight train; harder and vivid than any other she ever had. A late night at the office. A quiet ride home. A dark house, but one filled with the warmth and sensation of family. She went straight into the shower and thought the silhouette on the frosted glass door was Marcello. She was too startled, frightened, to scream.

Marilyn held the chair so hard her knuckles went white. She flinched as Marcello's chair flew past her and crashed into the rail. She met his eyes and flinched again. *Tell. Me.* The second wave of memory crashed into her. The struggle. The threats. The stranger's blood in her mouth, and the sharp prick in the side of her neck. She

woke the next morning naked, in her husband's bare arms, sore from lovemaking she didn't remember. But the third wave came with gut wrenching nausea. A stranger's lips. Teeth. Hips, and... Marilyn barely made it to the railing before her body revolted against the memory and emptied her stomach.

Her reaction was confirmation for Marcello. He grabbed the same railing, squeezed it so tightly the blood drained from his hands. He clenched his eyes shut, trying to drown it all out and wake himself up from the sudden reality that he had neither intended nor created, but was there all the same. "How? Why? What?" The single-word questions flew out of his mouth on a harsh whisper.

Matthew straightened from his leaning, walking over to Marcello. "It's complicated, Marcello. The implications here are bigger than your wife having an affair." Whatever was necessary wasn't solely a Terenzio motto. It was *the* motto in those days.

Marcello whirled on Matthew, grabbing fistfuls of his shirt, and shook him hard. "Bigger implications? How fucking dare you!" He wanted to hit him. He wanted to strangle his wife. "Who was he? WHO?"

"I'm going to tell you," Matthew said calmly. "I'm sure your wife wants like to know who effectively raped her. But you're not asking the right questions, Marcello. What

you really need to know is why. Why you. Why her. Do you even know what the Illuminati are?"

The darkness drew back, Marilyn opened her eyes. She wasn't far from Marcello and Matthew. She heard them arguing, but couldn't make out the words, not yet; only the pained, angry growl of Marcello's voice, and the steady undercurrent of Matthew's. Marilyn carefully straightened, turned and yelled, "Stop! "She ran back to the two men, shoving Marcello from Matthew. "Stop it!"

It was decades since Marcello had been violent with his wife. He grabbed her by the throat, felt the tender skin under his rough touch and wanted to squeeze until he heard a snap. He pulled her closer to him and demanded between clenched teeth, "Tell me."

Marcello was a dangerous man. Marilyn never doubted it; never tried to convince herself otherwise, but shock struck her hard. Her eyes widened, and by instinct, she reached up and pried at his fingers. "Marcello..." He killed her once. Or would have, if the gun was loaded with live bullets and not blanks. He pulled the trigger just the same, and was attempting it again. She begged then. She was different now. Marilyn slid her hands to his wrists and held them. She looked into his eyes with steady, pained sincerity. "Marcello. Please."

Matthew winced inwardly, stepped a little closer behind Marilyn, looking at Marcello over her shoulder.

"Marc, she didn't know." Of this, he was decently certain. Of course, he might be wrong. For her sake, he hoped he wasn't.

A muscle in his jaw twitched. *She didn't know. How did you not know? You're not asking the right questions.* What other question was there to ask? His wife fucked another man. *Marcello. Please.* His fingers tightened for just an instant, but he finally released her. Anger. Betrayal. Pain. He didn't understand. The man at the top with all the information was fucking clueless. Marcello stepped away from her, set the hard steel of veiled eyes on Matthew. "Start talking."

Matthew blew out a breath of relief. "You might want to sit again." He cast Marilyn a sympathetic glance, walked back over to his open briefcase. Marilyn leaned against the railing until the shakes steadied and her strength returned, then she sat. Marcello remained standing, impatiently waiting for the answers.

"You cannot under any circumstance see, visit, or otherwise acknowledge Kayla's existence. Eventually, she will contact you both, but her purpose will be to stop you, Marcello," Matthew explained.

Marilyn's eyes snapped to Matthew, a mother's instinct clicking into play. She couldn't see her own daughter? Did... did she even want to? Could she take her

child into her arms, knowing her father... was not... Marilyn's brows drew together as Marcello laughed bitterly.

"Nice." He touched his finger to his nose, then continued. "So I am perfectly clear, my wife was fucked by an Illuminati member whose sole purpose was to impregnate her, take the child and use it against me. Have I covered it all? Yes? Why? What the fuck is she stopping me from doing? Who are they?!"

Matthew reached into the briefcase and pulled out the second folder. "Why? Because the Brotherhood's Seers told them you will prepare your family to allow the Ascension."

Marcello blinked, then simply stared at Matthew in rude, impatient misunderstanding. "What?"

Matthew tossed the folder at him. "Marcello, what do you know about how your father obtained Alcyone Island?"

Matthew left. The friend of their family dropped a bomb and left them cold. It was too much to process at once. All she knew right now was her child was alive.

Her heart pounded even faster. Marilyn's eyes snapped to where Marcello stood. "What did you mean when you told Matthew you would 'take care of her'?"

Marcello's hand dropped from the railing to his side, head slowly cocked. "What do you think I mean?" That was said calmly, the rest was not. "I was just told your bastard fucking child has every intention of killing me and you have an issue with what I'm going to do?!"

Marilyn sprang out of the chair and slapped him, open palmed and hard, right across his face. No playful punch. "Don't talk to me like that. She is a year old. Don't be so short sighted."

Marcello had never hit his wife. He wanted to as the red imprint stained his skin and sent short little streaks of inconsequential pain through his face. It was so pale in comparison to what was going on inside. "I see. You've drawn your line in the sand quite clearly, haven't you?" He straightened fast from the railing, leveled his eyes on her. "I don't give a fuck if she's six months old. No enemy of mine will have the last say."

"So you want to kill me. Is that it? Because that little girl is me. "Marilyn's palm burned. She hit him hard enough to make the other side of her knuckles hurt. "Think, Marcello. What if this was Amanda? Would you kill her, knowing what she might one day do?" Aquamarine bored into gray. She grasped at straws. Fought for the life of her child. "Where is the man I married? Where is my husband? He'd rise to this challenge, not take the coward's way out and kill a helpless child."

"The coward's way? The coward's way?!" He growled in fury and grabbed her by the shoulders hard enough to leave a mark. "Your child..." The words were like acid on his tongue. Not his. *Not his*. "...is going to try to kill me. So you better get used to the fact that when that day comes and that pretty little face that doesn't look a fucking thing like mine steps into the arena, I *will* pull the trigger. And if you stand in my way, you can join her." He didn't mean it. Or maybe he did, and he was more like his father than anyone gave him credit for.

"Don't." He would make her choose. No, he would choose for her. Marilyn's eyes burned. She winced under his grip, but she didn't back down. She leaned into the crushing vise of his hands. "Don't."

Marcello didn't release her, not yet. "Did you know? Don't fucking lie to me, either. Did you?"

Marilyn met his gaze. "I thought he was you. He came into our house, and our bedroom. He threatened me, and forced himself on me, and when I wouldn't lie there and take it, he injected something into my neck." Tears slipped down her cheeks. "He raped me. When I woke up, you were there, and it was just like any other day. I didn't remember a single thing until now."

Marcello didn't know what answer he was looking for. What did he really want her to tell him? The truth was ugly, and so much more than infuriating. He never not

trusted her, except once, and he was manipulated then. There was no excuse now. He stared at her in silence and dropped his hands from her shoulders, but he didn't pull her into his arms. An interruption prevented him from saying, or doing anything else. The guard from before appeared in the sliding glass door, informing him of an urgent phone call. Interruptions never ended. Marcello looked at his wife a moment longer, before calling out, "I don't care, not now. Take a message." The guard hesitated, but orders were orders, and he disappeared back into the house.

Marilyn's hand fell to her thigh. The ocean breeze rippled her clothing and pulled at her hair; sensations she loved, but didn't feel. She closed her eyes against the setting sun and bowed her head.

"What would you have me do, Mari?" Marcello asked, watching her.

Marilyn opened her eyes and looked at him, wiping the tears from her cheeks. "Don't be rash. Don't do anything without asking me." She drew a breath and was relieved when it didn't shake. "Let me kill him."

His response to her words did not come immediately. "I can't promise the first," he said quietly, "But maybe the latter."

"No." Marilyn shook her head. "You promise me the first, Marcello. You promise me!"

Marcello dropped his head between his shoulders. Christ, he felt like his whole body was stretched over a barbed wire fence. He didn't look at her as he raised his head. "I'm a man, not a saint. I love you, more than I think you know. But I cannot promise you I will make the right choice. Not because of you..." His tone hardened. "...because of him." He sighed. "I hope you can understand that."

"You are my husband." The confrontation gave Marilyn something else to focus on; gave her heart a different emotion to feed off of. It distracted her. So, she pushed. "Don't punish me because of him."

"Do you think I want to do it? "Marcello finally snapped his eyes to her. "Do you think I want to hurt you like that?" His teeth bared. "You have two other children, I am their father. Would you rather me dead?"

Marilyn didn't give herself the time to allow his words to sink in. She forged right ahead. "You're not giving yourself enough credit. You are a Terenzio. By blood. If there is anyone, any family, that can overcome this, it's you and yours."

Marcello frowned at her words. Silence echoed. Eventually, he sighed hard and ran his hands over his face. "All right, Marilyn. But if my hand is forced..." She knew. He was a Terenzio. By blood.

Marilyn sighed, letting the silence fill between them before she asked quietly, "What do we do now?"

"Try to rest this evening. We'll go back tomorrow. Start the boys working on him." Matthew was very wrong to assume that they wouldn't find this man. Very wrong.

Rest? Marilyn thought. Her lips twitched. She touched the side of her neck. "Bliss is just an injection away."

Marcello's eyes hardened at her words. That was eating away at him more than anything else. His own house. His wife. His Island. A fuck you in every possible way. "I'm sorry he... that I wasn't there."

"If it hadn't been then and there, it would have been another time and place." Marilyn had been a little reckless in the later years of her adolescence, especially when thrust into the world of business and the mafia. Then, she met Marcello, and she hadn't wanted, needed, or been with anyone else. Until... A small shudder ran through her.

Marcello saw it, imagined it; her struggles against the strength of another man. The hands all over her. He wanted to scream with the sudden fit of rage he felt. It was a selfish reaction, he knew it. She had taken it, and he hadn't been there. He was going to kill every single one of them, Ascension be damned. But, where did that leave her? He turned his head to look at his wife, really look at her, in stretched out moments of silence.

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He was finally able to speak. To pull out of his own rage, if only for a little while. Gray eyes slightly softened; just enough. He paused and then said, "They don't get another point. Your daughter will be your call."

Your daughter. Marilyn buckled again and barely caught herself. "Marcello." Many years ago, he told her things would be harder before they became any easier. She thought those hard days were behind them. "When will it be easier?"

The conversation came to mind the instant she said it. It seemed like yesterday, how long had it really been? Decades? Marcello slowly shook his head. "I don't know, Mari."

Then there was nothing else to do but bear it, Marilyn thought. She breathed a single, long breath and drew herself upright. "Could you do it?" He pulled the trigger on her, but that was before they were married. Before that night on Phoenix Isle, when he told her he loved her and she said it back. Did that change anything? "Could you kill your own child?"

She still knew how to do that; ask questions he hadn't yet asked himself. Real questions. Marcello ground his back teeth together, stared sightlessly out at the beautiful scenery over her shoulder. It offered him no comfort now. He knew his answer wouldn't bring any, either, when he finally said to her, "I'm not my father."

No, he wasn't. That fact was one of the reasons Marilyn let herself love him. It was unsettling, though, to find herself thinking like her father-in-law; considering options he would execute without a second thought. Perhaps experience, in this lifetime and others, guided her to her decision. "If it comes down to it, *I will kill her.*" Marilyn's hands tightened. Her entire body was taut as a wire. "I wouldn't be able to forgive you. But I can live with never forgiving myself."

Never, never had Marcello expected to hear those words from his wife. Visibly troubled eyes shot to her face, settling there. Gradually, he looked away, back to the view before them. "We'll see how this new side game plays out. Twelve years is a long time."

"It won't play out well." Marilyn heard about an African woman, from the days of the plantations and the cotton gin, who cut their children's throats to keep them from a life of slavery. If anyone was going to kill her child, it would be her. Her hands again tightened. Her jaw worked. A single blink spilled the fresh tears which welled in her eyes.

"Maybe," Marcello said after stretched-out moments. "You don't know that yet." He paused again, then continued. "Matthew DeMarco didn't tell us twelve years in advance to make us suffer. There is definitely more at play here." He slid his eyes over to her, "Show her you love

her first. When she does get here, I'll be vastly improved at being the man who doesn't exist."

Marilyn wiped her face and turned to him. "We have twelve years." She came close, in that familiar way. Touching without. "Make me forget about the last hour."

Marcello recognized it before she spoke. Felt it close in around the darkness and warm him. Her. For the first time, it didn't ease his restlessness.

The last hour became a new piece on the board that must be given time and attention in order to manipulate it. It wasn't just a game anymore. Still, he touched her, with a quick tug and she gasped at the harsh press of his mouth she willingly accepted, because he always calmed her fears when words could not, and she needed it now.

He lifted his hands, framed her face between them and parted her lips with the insistent push of his own. She felt so good, but it didn't matter. He broke away from her and whispered, "I can't. Not yet."

Marilyn's eyes closed. Her face pinched. She pulled out of his hands and walked away.

Chapter 13

“Men should continue to fight, but they should fight for things worthwhile, not for imaginary geographical lines, racial prejudices and private greed draped in the colors of patriotism.”

-Albert Einstein

November 6, 1959

Dion Corporation Private Retreat

Madeira Islands 10:10 AM

It's a simple question, DeMarco. Can you do it or not?" Marcello Terenzio asked curtly, but not unkindly. His arm draped comfortably over the back of the chair. He sat casually, like a man with nothing to lose, despite the magnitude of what he asked. No one knew he was near his breaking point.

Matthew clasped his hands in front of him, his elbows resting on his knees. He was not surprised at the request; he knew it would be asked, eventually. The problem was while the success rate for Terenzio was high, the retaliation rate was even higher. He opened his hands and set

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his mother's wheat-hued eyes on Marcello. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"I'm not going to ask you twice, Matthew."

Matthew drew his hands over his face and sighed, leaning back in the chair. He dropped his arms dejectedly into his lap. "All right, Marcello. I'll have the information delivered to your command center."

"No." Marcello reached into the front pocket of his loose white shirt, removing a folded piece of paper, which he slid across the table. "Send it there."

Matthew snatched up the paper and read it twice. When he was finished, a lighter was produced from his pants pocket, and he set the small thing ablaze, letting the flames die out in the ashtray. "Give me forty-eight hours."

Marcello Terenzio smiled for the first time in three hundred and ninety-four days.

November 12, 1959

Old Town

Alexandria, VA 11:12 PM

For someone like Marcello, it wasn't terribly difficult to get close to Deucalion. Most just wouldn't dare go after a high ranking Illuminati.

As promised, forty-eight hours later, a sealed black envelope arrived at the smaller command center inside the Villa on Madeira Island. Ninety-six hours after that, the '57 Chevy pickup was rumbling through downtown Alexandria, Virginia, in a section commonly referred to as Old Town. Quaint antique shops, little boutiques, and dusty old book stores ran up and down the red brick sidewalks, finally ending at the Potomac River.

The truck stopped across the street from a small Italian café, engine still running. Ciro, personal security for the President of Dion Corp, drove the monster, the low-set brim of his fedora throwing a half shadow over his wrinkled but sharp face. Marcello sat in the front seat on the right hand side, silent. Marilyn sat in the backseat, a gun in her hand, her eyes following the gleam of the streetlights as it rode the length of the silver barrel and disappeared around the muzzle.

The Brotherhood called check. It was Terenzio's move.

At precisely 11:11PM, Deucalion and two other men came out of the café and into the deserted streets, drunk and laughing. Inside the truck, three strong clicks interrupted the silence. Ciro kept the lights off and inched the Chevy closer to their targets.

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More laughter from the men echoed out, and Deucalion stumbled toward the back door on the right side of the black Silver Cloud Rolls Royce.

Ciro slammed his foot on the gas, and the pickup obeyed, shooting forward. The three men at the Royce turned, startled, two reaching for weapons underneath expensive pinstriped suit jackets. As the Chevy slammed into the back of the car, all three men went scattering backwards, tripping over themselves to avoid the impact. Before the truck rocked to a complete stop, Marcello stood at the open door, the silencer on the gun barrel barely muffling the sound of the two bullets fired in rapid succession, landing in the chest of the man at the passenger side of the Royce. Just as he dropped, Ciro's arm extended out of the window, his gloved finger pulling the trigger once to put the bullet squarely in the forehead of the man on the driver's side.

Deucalion was not armed and rose quickly to his feet. He narrowed his eyes on Marcello with his hands slightly raised. For a moment, Deucalion clearly didn't recognize him. When Marcello came closer, it finally sunk in, and his laughter resonated through the night.

"You know, I almost expected you sooner. I knew you were dumb enough to try a stunt like this," Deucalion said, amused.

Marcello stopped in front of Deucalion, studying the man who raped his wife and now laughed at him. With handsome blue eyes and a matching face, he stunk of expensive cologne and an off rack suit. Pathetic.

Marcello didn't respond with words; he hit him with a gloved fist hard enough to send Deucalion stumbling backwards. Marcello advanced on his target and hit him again with vicious intent, sending the Illuminati to the pavement.

Deucalion grunted in quick pain when he landed on the concrete. He leaned up on one elbow, drew his fingertips gingerly over his bleeding lip, looking down at the blood. His eyes shot cruelly up to Marcello. "It won't change your reality, Terenzio. Just between us, she liked it after a while." He smiled callously at the memory. "I know how soft Marilyn is. I know how she tastes. I know how wet she gets, how much of a whore she really is. I felt her nails digging into my back when I made her cum." He sat up completely and spat out, "And one day that child that she had just for me is going to kill you. Live with it."

Every word sparked an image in Marcello's mind, the same which nearly drove him insane for four hundred days. To explain the depth of his rage was impossible. It burned in Marcello's chest, crushing his heart with its fury. He wanted to tear his fingernails into Deucalion's

flesh and rip him apart. It was enough negative energy to damage his karma for several lifetimes. He didn't care.

Marcello kicked Deucalion in the center of his chest, sending the Illuminati onto his back, and stood over him. "You're right," Marcello said, eerily calm. "This won't change anything." His tone turned to ice. "But it's going to make *us* feel better."

The sharp, rhythmic tap of high heels striking concrete echoed. Marilyn stood next to Marcello, gun in hand. Hate hardened her face as she looked at Deucalion.

Deucalion opened his mouth but Marilyn didn't let him say another word. She put her foot under his chin and jerked his head up; made him look at her, remember her, and burn her image into his mind. Her eyes bore into his. "Checkmate," she pulled the trigger, four times.

Marcello took his eyes from the dead man, and looked at his wife. She was breathing hard, that fire back in her blue eyes. He gently touched her shoulder. "He won't hurt you again."

Marilyn put her hand over his, but shook her head, tears welling in her eyes and spilled over. "I can still feel him, Marcello. I remember every mark he made. He took everything from me," she looked at her husband. "That hurts every day. Just because he's dead doesn't mean it will stop."

Marcello swallowed hard, wishing he could take her pain away. He leaned into her and gently kissed one of her tear stained cheeks. "Tell me what I can do," he said quietly.

"Come home," Marilyn whispered.

"I will," Marcello promised. "I will."

Marilyn squeezed his hand. She turned and walked back to the car, wiping the tears from her cheeks. Marcello followed. Ciro got out of the Chevy and leaned casually against the side of it, a cigarette between his lips and three red sticks taped together in his hand.

Neither offered commentary as Marcello reached inside the truck bed and returned with a monstrous blade and small square black case. Ciro pulled a lighter from his pocket and lit the fuse. Nonchalantly, he strolled across the parking lot, over to the restaurant. The faces in the windows quickly retreated as they saw him coming. He didn't open the door; he took an elbow to the glass, and after it broke, tossed the dynamite inside. His footsteps were a little quicker as he walked back behind the truck.

The building exploded seconds later. Nothing personal, it just ensured there were no witnesses.

When Marcello came back the last time, he was breathing so hard it was as if he ran a mile; the blade was splattered with crimson and the case was no longer empty (police would have a hell of a time trying to

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identify the body). He pulled off his gloves, shoving them into his pocket, and muttered a curse when he saw the red stain on his sleeve. The machete was tossed carelessly back into the truck bed, and he nodded once at his wife.

In continued silence, the three of them walked down the still empty streets to the end of the corner, not a glance spared at the burning building. Ciro reached inside his pocket and removed the keys to a '59 Cadillac convertible. Just as the sirens sounded in the distance, the car was speeding away towards the freeways, heading south.

Check. *Their* move.

June 8th, 2012

Undisclosed location

Undisclosed location time unknown

A thoughtful silence descended upon the siblings. Going through the box Rosa left for them offered a rare, unseen glimpse of their grandparents. All three of them agreed it was definitely a little more than odd to have two sets of emotion about the same person. After all, Marcello became their grandfather, son and nephew.

Deciding to take a break from the Vault, and feeling a bit more than overloaded with information, they went upstairs and were now sprawled in the padded chairs around a table, out on the veranda closest to the kitchen. Lucien's stomach caught up with him, and he retired to the kitchen to rustle up a late breakfast. He'd always loved to cook, a trait uniquely his. He was relieved by that. Lucien was realizing a lot of tendencies he exhibited in this life he'd also shown as Julian. It left him internally panicked in short bursts, balancing two men inside of him and trying to hold on to the memory of which one he was now.

Lucien already passed out the coffee, and Vasco sat with his hands wrapped around an untouched mug, staring sightlessly out at the scenery. He was the first to break the silence. "Do you really think we reincarnated as those three?"

As soon as the question left his mouth, he immediately recalled a previous lifetime comparison. Stefano and Lil were closer than he was with Simone, but Vasco always found it easy to talk to her in the rare moments he opened up. That felt incredibly familiar, and with good reason. Stefano and Lil had been the same way.

"The way things are shaping up..." Simone had her own cup of coffee and sucked down the caffeine boost like it was a shot. "...I don't know, V. Is it really so strange?

Especially in comparison to the Anunnaki? It's obviously true. You've got memories of it, and grandfather sparked the war against them."

Vasco lapsed into another silence. She had a valid point. More than that, a strong swell of pride bubbled up inside of him at the thought of Marcello and everything he accomplished. A sense of arrogant triumph the risk he took on his unknown son had been correctly followed. Vasco knew those feelings were Stefano's, but the more time passed, the more that kind of thing got harder to differentiate from present reality.

Grandfather or son, with the memories in his head, Vasco was confident the move against *Them* was a good one. Though, it must have been torturous for Marcello to know an enemy struck so close to home. Vasco had never been in love, so he couldn't quite fathom what that sort of news would do to a man. Relationships over the years hadn't been his strong suit, though Simone and even Lucien made out just fine. Hell, Lucien almost got married once. Unfortunately his bride-to-be decided, on their wedding day, that she couldn't handle becoming a Terenzio.

No, the majority of Vasco's life, girlfriends and in-betweens were sparse, and it wasn't because of his reputation of being "heartless." Too often, he felt as if someone waited for him. It sat like a small splinter in his

conscious mind and made relationships nearly impossible. It was an irrational thought to hold onto for thirty years. It also made him even more conflicted about their little experience, because the one thing that kept pushing him towards the fantastical idea of reincarnation was *her*. Stefano's second wife. There was more than he needed to know in his brain; intimate sporadic memories that revealed the softer side of two known killers. But more than the thoughts contending for attention were his growing feelings. At random moments, ever since he climbed out of that fucking holon, Vasco found himself missing her. Desperately. The smell of whiskey on her breath. Her husky whisper in his ear, drawing him into her effortlessly. If it continued, he thought it might drive him crazy.

"This could be bad for my marriage," Simone said, pulling Vasco out of his thoughts with her own similar ones.

He looked over at her, and his mouth curled upwards slightly. "Going to start killing your husbands again?"

Simone laughed. "No." Liliana Terenzio killed her first three husbands. Her fourth got away safely, then Kyle came along and ended a black widow's career. Simone grew serious. "I'm suddenly comparing Victor to Lil's Kyle. He's not doing so well."

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Vasco paused, searching his mind like he would a filing cabinet. It only took seconds before he said, "Stefano thought he was a pussy. But good for you." Again, he wondered why he needed to know that, unless...

A wistful smile crossed Simone's lips. "I know."

"Food is served." Lucien reappeared, carrying three dishes with all the skill of a waiter. He set one down in front of each of his siblings, and then dropped into an empty seat. "What are we talking about?" he asked as he picked up his fork and dug in.

Vasco opened his mouth to respond but the words never left. His head cocked to one side, his ears perked, the hairs on the back of his neck tingling.

"V?" Simone looked over at him curiously.

He didn't hear her. Without conscious thought, Vasco pushed back his chair, rising to his feet and walked into the house. And there he waited.

He didn't wait long.

She stepped into his line of vision seconds later. Tiny, but voluptuous. Dark-skinned and exotic. A voodoo queen from Jamaica that controlled the flow of drugs through Central America and parts of Southern Africa. Subsequently, the CIA was one of her biggest clients. But how she lived with barely a sign of aging was an unspoken, and unanswered, question. What he knew was she was *his*.

Jesus Christ. He *was* Stefano Terenzio. He felt his other personality suddenly consume him, thrusting him back so completely into himself the only difference was the face was the mirror. A sudden swell of emotion came at its heels. It expanded in his chest, and for a few seconds, he couldn't breathe. The steel slate shifted, melting back into the gray as he focused with inhuman intensity on his true mate. And he knew. He knew what he waited for his entire life. Her. His wife from a time past. He whispered her name.

She hadn't seen this one before and had no interest in meeting him now. She had lost all interest in the Terenzio spawn the day Stefano died. She was only there because forty-two hours ago, she received a letter. In *his* penmanship, seventy-eight years after his death. The request was postdated, set to arrive when it did. The sentence he'd written was simple, "*See you soon.*" An address and day was provided. Curiosity formed in place of her natural apathy, which led her to fulfill the request. She expected nothing from it; at most, a very foolish and soon-to-be dead person playing a game with her. What she saw before her, however, wasn't expected.

Emerald eyes fully focused on the one standing in the doorway. She momentarily braced herself as the heart she forgot existed wrenched in her chest.

THE AWAKENING

It was not so much in his physical appearance to a man long dead appeared before her. It was in his eyes. The mask of color that could hide *nothing* from her. She was unaware of her own actions, but the stilettos carried her forward, closer to this apparition. A sharp whisper emerged from her mouth. "Stefano."

June 8th, 1919

Murray Hill

New York, NY 11:11 AM

She found little to fear as she slowly circled the den, observing the game with an inhuman scrutiny distinctive to those of her kind. Of course, there were not many of her kind, and he knew it. Others discovered the hard way. It was an unjust advantage she never failed to make use of, but she'd be just as treacherous stripped down to her primal, human self.

Stefano broke the silence, assuming she was done with her inspection of his office. "I can sweeten our arrangement. We need a secure holding place between transactions; I've just bought a small acquisition that makes it possible."

While processing the remark, she didn't bother to respond, instead watching him prepare a drink. The dim light of the room offered an enticing ambiance as her gaze drew over the strong expanse of his back, fighting beneath the starched shirt. His hand wrapped carelessly around the weighty glass as he faced her, his eyes questioning. She continued tracking his distinctive movements, regardless of his knowledge, her chin tipping up just a bit as she swallowed the scent of the air and moaned softly. There was nothing more primal than the lure of prey.

"It only gets better," he said with a classic smirk.

"We'll see." His reputation preceded him all the way into the dark corners where she lurked. She questioned whether this meeting would turn into a clash of supremacy. Now, she eagerly waited for it.

However, she finally returned to business, the click of sharp stilettos drumming across the floor as she moved to sit in one of the wingback chairs, slouching back into the cushion. "Given by whom?" she asked curiously. The details could be handled by someone else; her interest was in the underlying workings.

There was a humidor on the table next to where she sat. It put Stefano beside her, his glass set on the table top as he opened the polished box. The expression on his face was half regretful, half impressed. "Families I can't kill.

It's more beneficial to me to work with them." He reached into the box, pulling out a cigar.

"But, is it beneficial to me?" Which was really all she was ever concerned. She reached her sharpened nails down into one of her many hiding places and drew back a sterling Dunhill lighter, offering it up to him between two fingers.

Sharp edges collided as he snipped the end of the Habana. "I wouldn't waste your time if it wasn't." The clipper was put into his pocket; harsh eyes catching onto her offered gift. But it was her he glanced at when he stepped closer to accept it. "Let's just say I'm going to save you hundreds a month in bribes."

She laughed outright, the tone husky and unconcerned. "Wha would make ya tink I be givin' out bribes?" Stretching up slightly from her seat, she reached across him to pluck his glass off the table, bringing it to her lips for a deep sip.

Amusement exposed itself in Stefano's gaze, watching the theft as he struck the flame. "If you don't, you're better than your reputation gives you credit for." He stuck the cigar between his lips, bringing the fire to the end, and pulled the smoke into his mouth, savoring the flavor on his tongue before it was exhaled in an easy breath. "Do you have a necklace of shrunken heads, instead?"

“My reputation was created by fools, most of who’ve been added to my necklace.” She laughed through the corners of her plump lips, though her words weren’t inaccurate.

A grin slid across Stefano’s lips. “How much do you charge? I’ve got one or two who need a creative ending.”

“Not even you...” She stood, draining what was left in his glass, then heading for a refill as she finished her sentence. “...Stefano Terenzio, could afford me.” She let the glass hit the bar top with a sharp clank, helping herself to her bottle of choice, which she steadily poured to a hair or two from the brim.

If there was a remark to be made, Stefano kept it quiet. His patience and his arrogance took the same shape, in the easy way he leaned his form back against the edge of the table, wisps of smoke concealing the answer in his eyes as she slinked back towards him.

June 8th, 2012

Undisclosed location

Undisclosed location time unknown

She still couldn’t hide from him, though he was surprised to find it more difficult to penetrate her layers,

watched her tremble before him. It was a miniature crack in concrete, barely breaking through seven decades of fury, pain, rage. It simply hurt for too long, and now, she was tired. Nearly numb.

Nearly. She didn't reach for him, but she didn't look away, either.

The silence stretched and thickened, threatening to combust. For the first time, there was regret. A perfect understanding of Marcello's words. Vasco's brow creased with the intensity of emotion. Raw. Pure. To speak was to cheapen it. He didn't know how to melt ice, not Stefano Vasco Terenzio. He didn't right wrongs, he'd never much cared. But to say he hadn't loved...

When he couldn't stand it any longer, he closed the distance between them. He raised a hand slowly, curving his palm around her cheek. Their gazes broke when her eyes snapped closed. He heard the ragged intake of her breath; thought, briefly, for just a moment, she might stab him. It wouldn't have been the first time.

She probably would have, if his mouth hadn't covered hers at that very moment. Her hands jerked up, sharpened nails digging into the fabric of his shirt, which offered little protection against the bite of those claws into his skin. A low growl rumbled in his throat. She pushed, and he didn't budge. He parted her lips instead, swept his tongue inside. She moaned in furious defeat,

painful triumph, and bunched his shirt, pulling him closer.

They didn't need words.

His hands spanned her waist, jerked her roughly back against the archway, pinned her there between the wood and the solid surface of his body. He devoured her mouth in those moments, as if he could take back every minute lost from them. He drew his lips away and kissed the silent tears from her cheeks, her closed eyelids, her mouth again, until they were both panting.

It was she who finally wrenched her full lips away from him, turning her head to one side. Storm clouds rolled through his eyes, for her, the emotion in their depths clear. He brushed his lips across her exposed cheek, trailed back towards her ear and whispered, "I love you."

Raw, deeply tired emerald eyes snapped sharply toward him. Fingers flexed against his chest, nails digging again, though this time lightly. "Not as much as a son you never knew." She wouldn't hide the acidic bitterness in her tone.

His face creased at her words, at the blow delivered. There had been so much more to it than that. But he'd never had the chance to tell her. He didn't know if he ever would. "C—"

THE AWAKENING

Her finger suddenly pressed against his lips, her lids hooded slightly as the moment stretched between them. When she dropped her hand, her mouth was quick to smother his own. He immediately swept her up into his arms and turned, climbing the staircase.

Rarely, were they ever gentle with each other. In their final moments together, which should have been claimed a century ago, it was no different. Nails and teeth left their mark upon soft skin, glistening with sweat. His grip was urgent and bruising; her deep, throaty cries reverberating throughout the room, licking at the flames of his memory and making new ones. He lost himself as he had done a hundred times before, in the slick, wet heat of her, trapped there by the intimate clench of small muscles and the pull of her thighs. It was in those moments, when two became one, that Stefano Vasco Terenzio truly knew what it felt like to be connected. To be at peace and simply, in love.

When they were both sated, he fell onto his back and pulled her against his chest, remembering how good it felt to have her heated, bare skin pressed against his. He tipped his face against her hair, nuzzled in the softness of it, and told her again.

She looked up at him, her hair hanging in soft disarray around her face, her mouth swollen from his kisses. She gently traced his cheek with the touch of her fingertips,

then drew that hand over his eyes. He slept moments later.

She did not, but watched him instead; woke him once to feel him inside of her again, then let him slip back into peaceful unconsciousness. There were tears in the second silence, and her soft whisper to invade his dreams. "I love you, Stefano."

When he woke, she was gone.

Chapter 14

“You too shall prevail in the hereafter. The body will turn to dust but it is only a costume for the real you. That which you perceive as you inside your head will remain. It is true. I am proof.”

-Thomas Johnson

June 8, 2012

Undisclosed location

Alcyone Island 11:11 PM

When it's all over, you'll learn beginnings don't matter. Not even the end does. What matters is what you did in the middle, how you wielded the story you were responsible for telling. What matters is who you want to remember you and if they do. What matters is what those you care about most thought of you, if at all. The rest, my son, is simply life.

His father's journal was like a bible in his hand for the majority of his life. Whenever he sought answers to life's toughest questions, there was always something in the old worn pages that would put him at ease. Even now,

Marcello found comfort in the words of the man he'd never met, but loved regardless.

Well-aged, deeply tired eyes slid to his son, who slept fitfully in the chair by his bedside. There was a curve to his mouth; the movement brought the beginnings of his smile. Most men in his position would've been ashamed of a son that wasn't a fit heir, but Marcello was not most men. Not once had he ever been disappointed in his children, especially Demetrius, who had always been emotional, unable to repress or control what he felt with any measure of success. It didn't matter, not to Marcello. Demetrius contributed to the family in his own way, period.

Marcello carefully closed the journal, running his palm over the scuffed leather. He supposed in the end it was fitting to start thinking about the beginning. Especially when death made a man aware it was coming, then took its sweet ass time arriving. In his mind, it boiled down to pivotal moments, the ones profound enough to push at the veil hiding what a Terenzio really thought.

Most of it was his Mari, not the business, but there were moments for that, too. To have pulled off being the man in the shadows was a family history-making feat. To this day, most of their suppliers and everyday associates had no idea what was on the 52nd floor of the Dion Corp building, or who Mr. President really was. He sat in

boardrooms and back alley deals, unnoticed as the hand that pushed it all into place. That still made him grin privately in prideful delight. One move forces another, then another. A step back returned two forward on the next turn. Before it was realized, the pieces were neatly manipulated to where he wanted them in the first place.

Checkmate.

The hunt, the choice of the kill, never failed to excite him. But Mari excited him, too, in so many other ways.

"Just one question," he asked quietly, with a smile. "What do you want for breakfast?"

Marilyn melted. She had so much liquor inside of her, she felt like one big puddle and was amazed she didn't drip through the rungs of her barstool. Her eyes darkened. She dipped her chin. And her hands moved, slightly, higher. "You."

Marcello couldn't help but smile at the memory. It came gradually over his bearded face, and he turned his head to settle his eyes on that single picture on the nightstand. His vision blurred slightly with unshed tears as he reached out and pulled the picture towards him.

Life was full of firsts. The first date, the first kiss. The first time he made love to her, an event that surely sealed their fate even if their first meeting hadn't. Loving his wife was the easy part. Attempting to make a relationship work with so many factors stacked up against them was

the real challenge. They couldn't go out to many social gatherings together; he was off the map. Bodyguards were required, and that didn't always afford a lot of privacy. They were sneaking around, but they weren't. More than once, he told her he understood if she wanted to walk away from him, if it ever got to be too much to take. He always loved her a little more when she looked angry at him for even mentioning it.

"Marilyn, this will get harder before it gets any easier. I may not be the one you want to have a relationship with."

Marilyn tensed. Her features hardened. She leaned in and took his face into her hands. "Don't say that," she said quietly, but fiercely. "If I didn't want this, if I didn't want you, I wouldn't be here. I would wait three weeks, however many it will be next time, and I wouldn't come with you the time after that."

She made him do it, hold his breath while he waited for her answer. Then it came. Perhaps it was too soon, but it didn't matter. It was a choice made entirely on his own, without any guiding hand or veil to hide him. Marcello drew his arms tighter around her and whispered, "You won't do it for nothing. I'm in love with you."

It seemed like yesterday he whispered those words to her for the first time. How long had it really been? Nearly

sixty years ago? Human time came and went so quickly these days. The decades they were married weren't long enough. He lost a year with her, because of his own stupidity, and lost her for good when the Brotherhood decided to remove her. Partly because it appeared a mother's love was overriding the programming they'd done on Kayla, partly because he'd killed one of their own. His eyes darkened at the memory, but that moment passed and was followed by another.

Kayla.

Her appearance, though predicted, was a terrible strain on their marriage. Thankfully, it was only a short while. Neither of them forgot her true "purpose," of course, but Marcello was unable to stop himself from loving his wife's child with the same fierce emotion he extended to his other two children. Even Demetrius welcomed his new little sister with open arms.

To this day, he didn't know if Kayla was ever given the order to kill him. After she arrived, he told Matthew he didn't want to know, for fear of what he would do. Instead, he took a risk much like his own father had with him. Whether or not Kayla actually thought of herself as a member of the family would be determined soon.

Marcello laid the picture of his wife against his chest and closed his eyes. He let his thoughts drift to Mari again, the day after he murdered Deucalion and finally

came home; to a rare moment when he gave into the notion the strength of their emotion could stop anything. It was with that memory he intended to release his final breath.

"I can't tell you that you'll never have to be afraid of them again. I can't tell you everything will be okay with Kayla, that we'll beat this." He hated that. It was a demon he couldn't slay, laughing at him. Even so, the next words slipped from his mouth in a different kind of helpless, broken whisper. "But I want you anyway. Selfishly."

Marilyn tore her eyes from the window, tears welling in them. "Show me," she said, voice soft and trembling. "Look at me like you used to, Marcello. Touch me like you want me. Please. I can't—" Her fingers closed in the cotton of her shirt. "I've missed you so much..."

A year ago he let her walk away. Yet, after everything, when it was more real than it had ever been, she still...

He came forward in two short steps, wrapping his arms around her and she fell them. Her tears came again, damp on his chest as she whispered, "God, Marcello, you feel so good."

He trembled and pulled her closer; set his lips at her ear and whispered back, "I love you."

THE AWAKENING

Marilyn lifted her head, and their eyes met. "I love you, too."

There was nothing Marcello could do when the door to his room was kicked open. A suit sleeve raised before he snapped open his eyes. The trigger was pulled before he could make out the face. A single shot from the muzzle of the silencer landed in Demetrius's knee.

Feelings of helplessness slammed into Marcello as his son's scream echoed out. Demetrius clutched at his leg, bending slightly forward in the chair, his face twisted in agony. Scarface didn't even glance in Marcello's direction as he strode over to Demetrius's side, steadily holding the gun on him.

"That has to hurt," Olivia said casually, standing in the doorway, with a smug look of triumph on her face.

Marcello's eyes narrowed to slits. He was aware of which side she played on. He knew a lot more than either she or her cousin thought he did. It was an advantage handed over to the next players of the game.

"You are terribly unimpressive, Olivia." It was one of the hardest things he ever had to do; ignore his son's anguished sounds as he spoke. As a sudden, knife-like pain shot through his chest, he realized this would be his final move.

"It was never you I felt the need to impress, Marcello." Olivia's voice dripped with disdain as she walked over to

his bedside. "You don't look well, so we'll make this quick. Where are the triplets?"

Demetrius shot his head up at the question, shaking from the intense sting that was burning through what felt like every cell in his body. "Fuck you, Olivia."

Scarface made a motion to hit Demetrius, halted only by Olivia's lifted hand.

Marcello arched a brow, and then shook his head. "You'll have to do a lot better than that."

Olivia's eyes narrowed. She canted her head, sizing up her prey. She returned his smile, devoid void of any humor. Dropping her hand, she nodded once in Scarface's direction. The ugly man dropped his arm, pressing the muzzle of the gun against Demetrius's opposite knee. Demetrius' struggle wasn't good enough to stop the pulling of the trigger or the bullet from ripping through the bone.

Demetrius's hoarse scream reverberated through the room. It bounced off bare walls and struck Marcello's ears so harshly he felt his son's agony. It was a testament to how fully Stefano's son he was when needed; the appearance of unconcern for his own son and cold fury at his niece's insolence never left Marcello's eyes. She wasn't good enough to play with him, yet. "Tell me something I've always wanted to know, Olivia. Was it you or Amadeo that pushed the button to kill your fathers?"

THE AWAKENING

Unmovable Terenzio resolve. Olivia saw it quite clearly in her great uncle's eyes. He was as heartless as his father to not even glance at his son when he was shot. And how the fuck, she wondered, did he know about...?

Sharp annoyance slapped Olivia's features as she stalked over to Demetrius. She ripped the gun away from Scarface and pressed it against Demetrius's temple herself. "Let's play chicken, Marcello. One more time, where are the triplets?"

Marcello followed Olivia's movements and zoned in on the gun. So very slowly, he pulled his eyes away and looked directly at Demetrius.

Sweat dripped down Demetrius's wrinkled face, and the sharp jolts of pain running through his body made him tremble irregularly. He struggled to keep hold of consciousness, but there was no mistaking the look in his eyes. From one father to another, what a parent will do to protect their child. Just barely, Demetrius's lips twitched into a sad smile. He tipped his head, just enough.

The veil almost dropped. For a few seconds, Marcello's vision blurred with impending moisture. In glance alone, he told his son what he could not express in words; how proud he was, how much this son was loved. It was a small comfort to see that emotion reflected back to him.

Another stabbing ache shot through Marcello, a tell-tale sign of death sneaking closer. The gaze of steel,

hardened over the years, impenetrable, settled on Olivia. The final move was made. “Nowhere you can find them.” Marcello lips curled up into a cruelly omniscient smile. “We will die to see our will done, Olivia. And it *will* be done.”

Her face twisted with rage. “No parent should live to see their child die twice. Let that be your last thought.”

Demetrius did not shy away from the inevitable. His eyes remained on his father until the bullet came, killing him instantly. One single word slipped from his lips in a whisper, just before the gun exploded.

“Checkmate.”

Because just before Olivia Terenzio pulled the trigger, Marcello Terenzio died.

Chapter 15

“The real menace of our Republic is the invisible Government which, like a giant octopus, sprawls its slimy legs over our cities, states, and nation.”

- John F. Hylan – Former Mayor of New York City

June 9, 2012

Undisclosed location

Undisclosed location time unknown

Vasco was ripped from sleep, and he suddenly knew. His wife. His son. His father. Gone.

A Terenzio wore the veil, even alone. In one lifetime, he had been the master of it. The example set for all the rest. Maybe it was because it was not that lifetime. Maybe it was because they had all been so deeply loved, even if it was rarely expressed. Maybe it didn't matter why, but he was overcome. He shielded his eyes, as if hiding the truth of his tears and silent shaking.

He wasn't sure how long he stayed that way. Eventually, the tears stopped, and he composed himself enough to face his siblings. He took a quick shower and dressed.

Using his cell phone, he called Lucien, asking to meet him at the Vault elevators.

Five minutes later, Lucien greeted him, red-eyed but alert. "She leave?" He smiled as he asked, but the expression dropped off his face when he glimpsed his brother's expression. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Vasco replied quietly, "She's gone. For good." He didn't want to tell his brother about what he felt concerning Marcello and Demetrius. It would be confirmed soon enough.

Lucien blinked in surprise. "For good?" Realization set in, and he said, "Shit. I'm sorry, V."

"It's all right. What are you two working on downstairs?" Vasco followed Lucien into the elevator.

It wasn't all right, Lucien knew, but he didn't expect to get much more out of his brother. He grinned slightly at the question. "Updates on our Anunnaki friends and what I'm calling their thirteen bitches."

"Good." They both exited as the doors opened, and Lucien led the way past the holons and towards the conference table. Three laptops were set up, and in the hours that passed, Lucien and Simone cluttered the table with boxes filled with paper and digitized information.

Simone held a pen in one hand, a notepad directly in front of her, where she furiously scribbled as she read from a thick binder next to her. She looked up when her

brothers appeared and smiled at them both. The expression froze on her face for the same reason Lucien had. She tilted her head at them in question, but Lucien shook his head and diverted her away from asking. "Tell him what we found, Simone."

She hesitated, looked at them both a moment longer, then plunged ahead, dropping her pen. "I just want to reiterate not only was I the shit in previous lifetimes, but I am in this one, too. Combined with what we remember..." She thought it was still weird as all hell to say that. "...and the information down here, it's all falling into place." She paused as they both sat down at the table, and pulled her hair back into a messy bun. "The Anunnaki and the Brotherhood are about the same as you remember them, Vasco, and, no surprise, they are the ones standing in the way of us allowing the Ascension."

Vasco figured she'd say that. Thirteen bloodlines, all fanatically loyal to their "Gods" and for good reason; thirteen bloodlines he knew a lifetime ago, his own family couldn't afford to war with. He knocked his back teeth together in thought, failing to notice it was a common habit he possessed when he lived as Stefano. Finally, he asked, "How are they divided now?"

Simone picked up her notepad. "All over the place. They are the Trilateral Commission, The Bilderberg Group, The Council of Foreign Relations, The Bohemian

Club, The Club of Rome. There are also a few ‘think tanks’ of note, like the Tavistock Institute, and the Rand Corporation. The infamous Illuminati has breakdowns in each American city, starting with thirteen board members at a local level. Most are the politicians we’ve thought we owned in our pocket for years.”

“Shit,” Vasco said quietly. How the hell would they going to pull this feat off? He leaned back in the chair, stretching his left leg out as he folded his arms over his chest. He clucked his tongue, then looked at his siblings. “What else?”

“They’ve been busy.” Simone dropped her notepad and pulled the binder closer to her. “They have 140 deep underground military bases in the United States alone, also known as DUMBs. There are 1,500 worldwide. They are all connected by an oxygenated magneto leviton train system that can reach speeds of Mach Two and higher. Above ground, there are eight hundred prison camps, the largest in Fairbanks, Alaska. They finished building the last of them a year ago. It’s a very effective way to stop the Ascension and generate negative energy. Almost as good as a war.”

Vasco arched a brow. “Generate negative energy?”

Lucien grinned, so did Simone. She said, “We’ll come back to that. The plan to strip away rights and imprison us all has been on record for some time. It’s called Rex-

84, which stands for Readiness Exercise 1984. It was passed off as something to have in case of a massive flood of illegal immigrants. Really, it's there in preparation for a rebellious uprising that might occur, say, if they get away with forming the NAU. If it were to happen, FEMA arms and controls the camps, and a presidential signature invokes Martial Law and the death of constitution. But Americans have been slowly losing their rights for years, now."

"It's worse in Britain," Lucien added.

Simone nodded in agreement. "There are two sub operations under it: Garden Plot, which deals with population control, and Cable Splicer, which is the plan to take over the state and local governments with military personnel during the transition."

Vasco whistled low. "That's a decently scary thought."

"Understatement," Lucien picked up his half empty glass.

"Tell me about the Ascension we're allowing," Vasco said.

Simone motioned her head at Lucien, who picked up his own notepad. It wasn't nearly as organized as his sister's, but he read from it. "You'll love this. Humans are Gods and Co-Creators of the universe." He shook his head a little every time he read it. It was nuts, but so was lying between two pyramids and remembering his past

lives. “I don’t really understand a lot of the details on this, but all that crazy metaphysical talk about multiple dimensions and the universe as a mind, and all being one, it’s all correct. Atlantis was actually a planet once, now it’s the asteroid belt. That’s what happens when a planet goes boom, a destruction we human caused because we didn’t ‘ascend’ correctly. Imagine having godly powers, but being an asshole, so all you do with those powers are bad things. Quantum Mechanics, whatever that is, proves intent creates reality on a scientific level.”

Vasco stared hard at his brother. It sounded insane, utterly and completely, but that didn’t mean it wasn’t true. Still, it was a lot for him to handle while he still dealt with the fact he lived multiple lifetimes, and aliens who shape shifted really lived on the same planet. “Understood, sort of. Keep talking.”

“So,” Lucien said, “because of this failed experiment, per se, we tried again. Welcome to Earth. According to what’s down here—and I have no idea how the hell we got this information, by the way—it’s actually the destruction of Atlantis that knocked the Anunnaki home planet in our solar system. Conditions were set to keep us from accessing our power until the time was right. That is the purpose of the elite and the Anunnaki. So, now the time is right, we’re supposed to be released, and get our knowledge back, but the powers that be are acting like a

bunch of stingy bitches. Regardless, it's going to work this time. So says everything I've read. Oh, and end date is December 21, 2012."

Vasco blinked in surprise. "What exactly is going to happen?"

"Couldn't tell you, because I'm not completely sure. We humans simply activate our seven chakras, connect with our Kundalini energy, and voilà, welcome to being cooler than the X-Men."

Vasco pressed his fingers to his temple. "How does one go about activating their seven chakras?"

"Lots of different ways. The path you take is your own choice. You can read up on all that yourself." Lucien grinned and waved his hand at all the boxes. "There is also a note here, when we're ready for more, we call Vaughn Junior."

"Huh." Vasco lapsed into silence, retreating into his own thoughts. Once more, his back teeth knocked together in succession. He finally asked, "Does Alexandro DeMarco III still work in Homeland Security?"

"Oh, good call, V. There was another note when we got to this point, we should call DeMarco." Lucien rummaged around in front of him, lifting various papers.

"Why don't we just call Xavier?" Simone suggested, then she paused, and a soft smile spread over her face. Xavier was Liliana Terenzio-Zhane's great grandson.

Jesus, she thought. It was weird to suddenly feel a swell of pride for someone she always knew as just a numbered cousin.

"Didn't he just get promoted? I think I saw a memo about that at the last board meeting," Lucien said.

"You're right. I think I have his number." Vasco pulled his cell phone from his pocket and lifted it to his ear. "Name dial Xavier Zhane." When it rang, he pressed the speakerphone button and set it down on the table.

It was picked up on the third ring. "About time you called me," Xavier's voice rang through so they all heard him.

"I didn't realize you expected to hear from us," Vasco said, then glanced at his sister. She smiled, wider, as if she remembered something. He wondered again about the note Grandfather left him, concerning her and Mr. Kincade, but he let it pass, for now. "We need to get in touch with Alexandro."

"Yes, you do," Xavier answered, "but first, I need to give you all an update. Especially about your family."

Lucien cocked his head. "What about our family?"

"Not everyone with the last name Terenzio is on your side. Some people want the New World Order to succeed. Listen up, reincarnated Terenzios. Time to play the game as you do best."

THE AWAKENING

June 9th, 2012

Undisclosed location

Alcyone Island 1:11 AM

Caleb Kincade wasn't unfamiliar with crime scenes. His career in law enforcement started in Denver's FBI division, as a profiler tracking down serial killers. After that, he was recruited into Homeland Security. A few years later, the opportunity to come to Alcyone presented itself, and he took it. As the Director of Security for Dion Corporation, a.k.a Mr. President's personal army, he was the first one to get the phone call that Marcello *and* Demetrius Terenzio were found dead. No security guard wanted to be the one to tell the rest of the family, especially when one death hadn't been expected.

Fifteen minutes after the call, Caleb stood in the doorway to Marcello's room. No one else was permitted entrance; the list of those assigned to guard that particular area was so short it wasn't hard to ensure it was adhered to. Sharp blue eyes flicked to the lifeless form of Marcello first, and he sighed.

Caleb carried a lot of memories of the man, and not just from his current lifetime. Kyle Zhane had been around when S.V.T. was alive, and he was there when the

son took his place. It had been a mind fuck to meet Marcello again, in his old age as a completely different person.

“See you next lifetime, Marcello,” Caleb said quietly, then looked at Demetrius’s body. Careful not to touch anything before the crime scene technicians (the island recruited some of the best) arrived, he examined the bullet holes in both knees and the one in the temple. Caleb wondered darkly if Marcello was forced to watch his son die before he died himself.

Shaking his head, Caleb stepped back out of the room when he heard the voices in the hallway. He unclipped his Nextel from his belt, nodding in greeting at the four-man CST crew he passed. He pressed the button on the top of the phone, to use the walkie talkie feature. “DC#87, I need to send a message to the Don.” The Don was a term they used when referring to the Island’s Governor, Isabella Terenzio.

The phone made a chirping sound before the voice came back. “What is the message, DC Alpha One?”

Caleb paused to watch the stretcher wheel down the hallway and into Marcello’s room. He pressed the button again and responded, “Tell the Don, Phoenix is down. So is Gryphon.”

The silence stretched out was so long Caleb was about to beep the dispatcher again, but the voice finally came

through. "We are very sorry to hear that, sir. Message will be relayed. Confirmation will be sent to your phone."

Caleb nodded to himself, replacing the Nextel. Once Isabella got the message, the island locked down, and that would alert the rest of the family. He knew he needed to call Vasco next, but he hesitated. If the triplets were where he thought they were, they would be hit especially hard by the news. That also meant Simone would remember...

He snapped out of that thought, his jaw setting. He watched as Marcello's body was put on the stretcher and a white sheet pulled was over him. It was hard to believe a short five years ago, Caleb walked into Marcello's office on a recommendation from the Director of Homeland Security, Alexandro DeMarco III. A year before, Caleb began the process of Ascension. He liked to think he was about halfway through the process, but reaching a full kundalini awakening was not his goal that incarnation. Making sure the rest of humanity did was. More specifically, he was there protecting Simone Terenzio, and that was the real reason he was hesitating in making that phone call. Not because he didn't want to do it. He couldn't *wait* to do it. Initially, Simone probably wouldn't suspect who he was, but eventually, she would know two generations ago, he lived as Kyle Zhane. That was a day

he was anticipating as eagerly as the collective Ascension.

A siren screamed in the distance, and Caleb sighed. It would last for exactly thirty seconds, then throw the island back into silence, then uproar. That particular sound only sounded when the head of the family fell. It hadn't been heard for a century. A minute later, another went off for thirty seconds in a different pitch. Martial Law was next. Even though the killers most likely left the Island, the authorities would shut down air and sea ports for at least forty-eight hours, so a full investigation was initiated. Military Police were trained to be civil to tourists, locals were used to it. A few were jailed for becoming rowdy, but were usually released after the initial investigation was complete.

No more stalling now. Caleb pulled the phone from his belt again. "Name dial. S.V.T."

Chapter 16

“However many holy words you read, however many
you speak, what good will they do you if you do not act
upon them?”

-Buddha

June 10, 2012

Alcyone Island

Residence of the Chief of Police 2:30 AM

Some women in life settled. Some compromised. Others, like Victoria Vaughn, decided to have their cake and eat it, too. It wasn't she didn't have all the material things she wanted. After all, her husband was the Chief of Police, and even though he wasn't a Terenzio by blood, the Vaughns were adopted members of the family since Stefano Terenzio's bodyguard, and later, chief of Police herself, Antonina Bianca-Vaughn married one. There was money and lots of it. That was why she married him in the first place, though she was certain he was none the wiser. It wasn't that Leone was a bad husband. He wasn't bad looking, wasn't neglectful, but after seven years of

marriage, Victoria was bored. Amadeo was a welcome distraction. Eight months ago, he made his true intentions in regards to what he wanted to do with the family known. That was when she betrayed her husband, when she started feeding Amadeo information. Life was certainly no longer dull, but quite exciting.

Since Marcello's and Demetrius's deaths, the island was on lockdown. She didn't mourn either of them, though Leone cried like a baby that night. The MPs forced everyone into their homes, tourists into their hotels. She didn't mind the brief house arrest. She expected someone, anyway.

When the back door to her kitchen opened, a sultry smile appeared on Victoria's face. A short silk robe was belted around her slender frame, barely touching the top of her thighs as she stood up from the kitchen table. There was nothing underneath it. "You're late."

Amadeo set the card key she gave him down on the countertop. Still in uniform, he walked over to her, pulling her into his arms, and pushed his mouth roughly onto hers. He didn't stop until she moaned, her arms tight around his neck, her body arching in clear want against his own.

"You're forgiven," she whispered breathlessly when he finally pulled away. God, she thought, he was everything Leone wasn't, the best of both worlds.

"I don't recall needing your forgiveness." Amadeo said it matter of fact. He pulled back from Victoria, dropping his hands to the front of her robe and pulling it open. "Does he have any leads regarding the investigation?"

Victoria shivered in pleasure when she felt the cool air from the house hit her bare skin, contradicted by the brush of his warm rough hands as he pulled the garment down her shoulders and let it fall to the floor. "No, nothing."

Amadeo took off his suit jacket, slinging it over the back of the chair. He unbuckled the front of his pants. "Good. I want to know the minute he or Caleb finds out anything."

Victoria's dark green eyes clouded with lust, her tongue tracing over her lower lip. She nodded mutely to his request.

Amadeo grabbed her by the waist, putting her up on the kitchen table. "Has he told his brother, yet?"

Victoria wrapped her legs around his waist, urging him closer. She felt his lips sucking her neck and whimpered, trying to focus on the question he asked. "Y-yes. Derek knows. They're working on something, something big M-Marcello approved before he died."

Amadeo's motions halted and he looked at her. "What are they working on?"

Victoria shook her head, running her hands down the front of his chest and popped open the buttons on his shirt. "I don't know. Leone didn't say."

Amadeo took a fistful of her hair and forcefully tilted her head back, to make her look at him. She gasped in soft surprise and went motionless, unable to hide how much it turned her on. He knew it and often used it to his advantage. He pushed his other hand between her legs and ran his fingers lightly over her. "What fucking good are you to me then? Hmm?"

Victoria swallowed hard, her breath coming in short pants. She was already so wet, aching, more than ready for him. "I-I know. I'm sorry. I'll find out."

"Soon. Real soon. "Amadeo moved his hand, let go of her hair. She cried out fully when he grabbed her hips and pushed inside of her.

"Mmm... yes." Victoria wrapped her arms around him, attempting to capture his mouth under hers. He pulled away, and made her cry out again when he started taking her with short, hard thrusts.

"Has he heard from the triplets?" Amadeo's voice slightly strained as he asked.

Victoria heard his question, shook her head in a daze of lust. "Amadeo, please, God, fuck me."

THE AWAKENING

His fingers closed around her throat, and he stopped, keeping himself fitted snugly inside of her. "I asked you a question."

Victoria groaned and wiggled her hips, trying to tempt him into continuing. "He... n-no. He hasn't talked to them. But I think, I think he knows where they are."

Amadeo went still. The pleasure of her squeezed around him suddenly paled in comparison to what she said. "How does he know where they are?"

Victoria whimpered in quiet protest. Amadeo squeezed her neck tighter and another rush of moisture flooded him. "I don't know, I don't know. I-I asked him and it was just... I knew he lied to me."

If Leone knew where the triplets were, that was just the edge they needed. Olivia would foam at the mouth when he told her. Amadeo smiled, his mouth curling sensually. "Good girl."

He stopped teasing her.

Chapter 17

“Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek
and find all the barriers within yourself that you have
built against it.”

-Rumi-Mevlana

June 11, 2012

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Board Room 9:01 AM

I should kill you both.” She whispered the threat, but the hazy fog of danger hung behind the words. Her eyes hidden by her down-turned head, and the ruthless clench of closed eyelids. Simone’s face was a cracking wall, crumbling tiny piece by piece, threatening to collapse.

She and her brothers returned to the island after Caleb called them. News of their father’s death hit them hard. She worried terribly about how Daddy would fare after their grandfather died, and at first, she thought it was suicide. When she learned he was murdered, she was furious, and she wasn’t the only one.

THE AWAKENING

She had cried, and she had silently and verbally raged the entire trip home. After what Xavier had told them, they knew exactly who to question about the murders, but they couldn't do anything about it. Not yet, at least. Exposing the family traitors would tempt the Brotherhood in action before they were ready.

When the plane touched down at Loyalty Airlines airport, she wanted nothing more than to curl up in her husband's arms and take five minutes of needed silence. Instead, when she stepped off the plane, whomever Vasco sent to watch her husband handed her a thick envelope and confirmed her fears.

She left Vasco and Lucien standing on the tarmac and went straight to the boardroom. Her husband and a close friend. She sent MPs to pick them both up and left pictures of them together, some more graphic than she liked, sitting on the edge of the conference table.

Neither Victor, nor Cassie, said a word, not after a statement like that. It was ironic anyone could do anything behind a Terenzio's back, but Simone never thought to look there. Not so close to home, where she needed to look first, but she believed so completely her trust wouldn't be broken.

The signs were there. She saw them in hindsight. It was amazing what the mind ignored at the heart's

instruction. It didn't help. Not those thoughts. To feel as if she was mocked by those she loved.

"Simone." There was concern in her husband's voice. "There were circumstances..."

"No." Simone's composure returned quickly, as if it never left in the first place. Her eyes snapped open and locked with painful intensity on her husband's face. "Don't you dare make one fucking excuse, not when you didn't even have the decency to limit it to when I was away." Fury piqued, raging openly on her face and in the words that tasted like acid on her tongue. She came over to the table and shoved a tape recorder at them. "How many times did you fuck her while I was in the same house?"

Victor didn't respond. He almost cringed. The tape recorder skittered across the table, and he caught it before it fell off. He didn't want to know what was on it. He could guess. Fuck, he thought. What he could say?

"Simone, I'm so sorry," Cassie said, choking back tears. She had it, too, written all over her; honest feelings of remorse, guilt, love. To see it so clearly on both of their faces almost made it hurt more.

Simone turned her head to the side, briefly shutting her eyes again. Never in her life had she waged such a battle for control over her own self. It was worse under these circumstances, she warred fiercely against the

woman she was a lifetime ago—the one who wouldn't wasted two minutes on words—and the woman she was now. The woman she was now didn't think she could kill her husband.

Oh, but a bullet to the temple, she thought, a double dose of it, sounded so fucking sexy.

"There was a moment, there is always a moment you could've chosen to be..." Simone paused, struggling for the words. When they were found, she turned her face back, to look at them while she said, "...a little less human and a little more godly. For me. For the emotion you claim to have, for me." There was no malice in her voice, only the hardened edge of inner pain. "Leave. Both of you. Just... leave."

"Don't do this." Bravely, or foolishly, Victor got up from the table and came closer to her. "Don't write me off forever. Let's work through this. Please. Please."

Cassie was silent, a hand covering her face to muffle the sound of her crying. She wasn't quite as brave as Victor. What she felt couldn't possibly compare to the emotional storm hidden in her friend and mentor. Simone was someone Cassie looked up to, and then she spit in her face by fucking her husband. She cried harder.

Simone looked at Victor silently. Her face twisted, the veil lost for seconds as she gently ran her fingertips over his cheek. He shared her trait for the hidden. It was one

of the reasons she was so attracted to him in the first place.

"I love you," he said. "Please."

The fingers trembled against his face, a heavy sigh parting Simone's lips. The words that followed were not so gentle. "When, Victor, when did you love me? Before, during, or after you fucked her? All three? Then you and I see love very, very differently." She withdrew her touch, stepping back from him. "We've worked it out one time too many. Maybe we never did. It doesn't matter, now. I've heard *I love you* a thousand times, but you've never proven it."

Victor's eyes watered. He choked out the words: "Simone, no. Please."

"Leave. You won't be harmed, not by this family. Life for the both of you is punishment enough."

Cassie finally drew her hand away from her face, tucking both arms protectively over her chest. Her tear-stained eyes locked onto Simone in the silence of a pure apology. Then she turned, walking to the closed double doors.

One opened before Cassie reached for it. Vasco stood in the doorway, eyes locked onto the woman's departure with obvious distaste. He followed her with his gaze, until she disappeared into the elevator. They flicked once over his sister and came to rest with full force on Victor.

THE AWAKENING

“Simone, I can’t. I can’t leave you.” Victor thrust a trembling hand back through his hair, looking at her; hoping; praying. He would beg. He wasn’t above it.

“You don’t get that choice anymore,” Simone said. Turning away from him, Simone walked over to the expanse of windows which showcased Alcyone. She couldn’t look at him anymore. She no longer recognized the face she saw.

“Simone—”

“Now, Victor,” Vasco said, quietly enough to threaten the man’s disobedience.

Victor snapped his eyes over to Vasco. He met the man’s unwavering gaze before looking back at Simone. His brows furrowed. Finally, pressing his lips together, he nodded in defeat. Victor walked toward the door Vasco held open. He paused in the doorway, turning his head just slightly over his shoulder, and said, “Before, during, after, and every day for the rest of my life. It was stupid and cruel. And I don’t...” There was the briefest pause, before he shook his head. “I don’t know why. But I love you. Don’t write me off forever because I’m an idiot. Please.”

Vasco watched him until he was out of sight, then came into the conference room and closed the door behind him.

Safely enclosed inside the elevator, Victor removed his cell phone and sent a text message: *We've got a problem.*

Simone stood at the window, the line of her back so rigid it appeared that at any moment, she might shatter. Silently, Vasco went up to the wet bar against the far wall and poured them both a drink. It was early, but circumstances dictated it.

"How did you do it, Vasco?" Simone looked up at him when he came to her side.

"Do what?" He canted his head at her.

Simone wrapped her fingers around the offered glass, holding it against her chin as she regarded him. "In your previous life, as Stefano. How did you do it with her? How could you stand to watch anyone else touch her?"

Understanding dawned on Vasco, though he shouldn't have been surprised at her question. He mulled over it for a minute or two, inserting small swallows of the amber liquid into his thoughts before he answered her, "Arrogance. Lots and lots of arrogance."

Simone arched a brow. "Arrogance?"

Vasco chuckled, dusting his eyes to the window, watching the bustling streets of downtown Alcyone. "Finish your drink. I'll pour you another. Let's go upstairs. It's gorgeous out today."

Simone looked at him oddly, and then shrugged. The glass was raised and knocked back in a single swallow.

“Good girl.” Vasco winked at her, refilled both their glasses, and led her out of the conference room. It took his card in the slot provided in the elevator to grant them access to the rooftop, and subsequently, the helicopter pad.

Side by side, they walked over concrete and to the railing at the edge of the roof. Vasco turned to rest his lower back against the metal and tipped his face up into the warm island wind. “You know, I never get tired of this weather. Even in my previous lifetime, I always found it peaceful.”

Simone stared up at the sky, at the exotic island scenery around them. It was beautiful. Her husband had an affair. Lied, too. Betrayed her. In her own home. Her face pinched. “I find it hard to be at peace with anything, right now.”

Vasco turned his head to look over at his little sister. He realized he wasn’t as hard this lifetime as he had been in others. It moved him to see a rock in the family so close to breaking. Sighing, he turned around, bending to rest his forearms comfortably over the railing. He was thoughtful, searching for the right way to describe what he enjoyed with his wife. Instinctively, he felt his thumb curl inward to brush over his bare ring finger. He could still feel the weight of a gold band. “What is jealousy?”

Simone was thoughtful at his question. It should have been an instant answer with everything that happened, but when asked outright, she found there wasn't a simple answer. "The fear of loss."

"I was never afraid of losing her. I didn't fear her fucking someone else would ever jeopardize that." He pursed his lips together a moment, then added, "Do you remember when I was taken by the Chinese last lifetime? How messed up I was when I got back?"

That question required no hesitation. Simone clearly recalled the helpless rage she felt. "I remember."

"That's when I let *Ciro* take care of things I couldn't." *Ciro Anatolli* had been *Stefano Terenzio's* lifelong friend and bodyguard. *Vasco* smiled at the memory, a heated spark of life, of love, behind his eyes. "The ones she and I were with weren't many. Trusted partners, people we actually had an emotional connection to. *Alex* and *Mona DeMarco*, primarily. A few others here and there. It was nice to be able to freely give into those urges, but I never touched a woman without her consent, and vice versa." *Vasco* paused and took a small sip from his glass. He stared down into the amber contents and spoke quietly: "Relationships are so unnecessarily fragile. We partner up with another person, and then immediately stamp them as claimed, throw a chain around them and block any unapproved affection because of our own

insecurities. Maybe that's why so many relationships can't stand the test of time."

He stared up at the sky, remembering. "I loved her, so much at times, it scared me. And she was mine, completely, because I did not try to claim her. And if any other man was one of the very, very, rare few lucky enough to catch any sort of emotion from her, bully for them. It never changed what she was to me, or what I was to her."

It had been so clear to Simone how much her brother loved his wife. Unusual for a man who was the master of the masquerade, it was something S.V.T. hadn't been able to keep hidden. It wasn't overt, and if someone didn't *really* know him they wouldn't recognize it; the briefest shift of his impenetrable eyes when she was in the same room. The intense, loving flare that sparked then returned to hiding in the same breath. As a woman, Lil envied her brother's wife. What woman wouldn't want her husband to look at her in the same way? Though, in that same lifetime she hadn't envied anyone for long. When Kyle came into her life...

Simone swallowed hard at the rush of memories from a lifetime ago. "I remember what that feels like. To love someone like that." She realized, sadly, that she never loved Victor the way Lil loved Kyle.

Vasco looked over at his sister, catching the difference in the expression on her face. "You loved him very

differently than I loved her. But we both loved them just the same. The way she and I were, Simone, it's not for everyone. There's a level of responsibility, control, and more importantly, trust most people can't ever reach. But if it works for you, then it works for you. If it doesn't, you've already proven your way works, too."

Simone smiled in thought. She held onto it a moment longer, then let it pass with the heavy shrug of her shoulders and passing breath. "People are so dumb. It's time we changed that."

"Past time, little sister, past time." Vasco's classic smirk curled subtly over his mouth. It made him look more like the man he had been. "Ever think we'd use our powers for good?" "Never." Simone laughed outright, shaking her head in amusement. "Is it a fight we can win?"

He answered her question more thoroughly with the expression in his eyes than with his words. "We don't leave this lifetime until we have checkmate."

She understood and a devious smile broke across her lips. Simone came to her brother's side, entwining their arms loosely together and led them back inside the building. "Sounds like fun."

Chapter 18

“Single acts of tyranny may be ascribed to the accidental opinion of a day. But a series of oppressions, begun at a distinguished period, and pursued unalterably through every change of ministers (administrations), too plainly proves a deliberate systematic plan of reducing us to slavery.”

-Thomas Jefferson

June 11, 2012

Alcyone Island

St. Judas Cathedral 11:02 AM

Caleb pulled double duty. Normally, at an event like this, Leone coordinated the duties assigned to the Military Police, but because of how close Leone was to Marcello, Caleb stepped up to handle them. Barricades were set up ten feet from the cathedral, forcing press and onlookers to stay behind them. The no nonsense, often times intimidating, appearances of the MPs kept the press behaved. It was understood anyone caught sneaking into a Terenzio event would be jailed. Release could take months,

depending upon the level of infraction. Those uniforms also formed a perimeter around the cathedral, to ensure it remained a private event. Dion Corp Security guards stood outside near the cathedral steps, or positioned inside in their sharp black suits with the company logo on the right shoulder and wireless earpieces hidden in their ears.

Governor Isabella Terenzio (now the oldest living Terenzio) arrived with her own entourage; a small, five man section of the military police charged with her security. Three of them rode in the tinted window SUV that trailed her limousine. Suited instead of uniformed, with MP insignia patches on their shoulders identified them, they rose out of the car in unison, scanning the immediate area before one touched his ear and confirmed it was clear. The limousine's passenger door opened first, and a tall, gray haired man emerged. Captain of the Governor's security team and in his late fifties, it was rumored he had a crush on Isabella which may or may not have been reciprocated over the years, despite the fact she was twenty years his senior. Nodding at Caleb, he opened the limo door. Retired AAF General Christopher "Fangs Out" Terenzio-Zhane, Isabella's half-brother, stepped out first. Isabella rose after him, aged, sharp gray eyes flicking over the fiasco of news crews. Upon seeing the

Governor, they immediately started shouting a flurry of questions.

It gave Caleb a sense of fatherly pride to lay his eyes on the two of them. Isabella was born to Liliana from her third marriage, but she and her brother Dom (who died confronting the Anunnaki with JT) always called Kyle dad. Christopher was Kyle's blood son by Liliana and took to fighter planes just like his father. Christopher also possessed his mother's temper and affinity for pulling the trigger. The man's nickname was given to him by his men before his retirement, because when he was up in a plane, he was always ready to attack, or as the air force called it, "he rolled in, fangs out."

Ignoring the questions, Isabella stepped past her security guard and walked over to Caleb.

"Everything is under control, Governor. Kayla, Olivia, and Amadeo are inside," Caleb said.

Nodding, Isabella patted his cheek. She'd always had a fondness for Caleb. Christopher shared his sister's sentiments and smiled warmly at Caleb. Caleb returned it, resisting the urge to reach out and embrace his children from a life past. Instead, he watched as Christopher took his sister's arm and escorted her up the stone steps (though she didn't need the help), with security trailing close behind them.

Inside the church, two beautiful mahogany coffins sat at the front of the nave. Marcello's was closed; even in death the man was hidden. Demetrius' was open, and for the first time in a long time, a look of peacefulness was on his pale face.

"I did not authorize this." Kayla Terenzio stood in front the caskets. The words were spoken to Olivia in a calm whisper, but her manufactured gray eyes reflected her anger. Amadeo stood behind the two women, in full uniform, with his hands folded behind him. At Kayla's words, sharp eyes darted towards his cousin as if to say, *"I told you so."*

Much to her chagrin, Olivia inwardly flinched, but explained, "We needed to know where the triplets were go—"

Kayla cut her off with a raised hand, darting her eyes to the entrance as Isabella and Christopher appeared. She pulled Olivia into an embrace, giving off the appearance the two women comforted each other over the loss.

"If you ever make a move without my permission, I will feed your useless carcass to the Anunnaki," Kayla hissed, and then kissed Olivia's cheek as she drew away. Her eyes flicked up towards Amadeo quickly, making it clear he shared Olivia's fate, before her expression was replaced with barely controlled grief as she turned away

from them, walking up the aisle to greet Isabella and Christopher.

A prick of fear made the hairs on the back of Olivia's neck stand on end. Though the reprimand pissed her off, she didn't doubt Kayla's words. Amadeo touched her shoulder, leaning down to whisper, "Maybe you'll listen to me next time. Now get that expression off your face. Isabella is watching."

"Fuck you. It needed to be done," Olivia snapped under her breath, then drew herself up, slipping on the veil like the Terenzio she was.

Roberto Terenzio, Isabella's son and C.O.O. of SVT Think Tank, arrived with his cousin, Xavier. The two of them were in deep, quiet discussion as they climbed out of the limousine. It had been a hectic last few days for Xavier. He was startled by the news of Demetrius's murder, because he knew the order to terminate him hadn't come from the Brotherhood. Alexandro assured him of this. Xavier hadn't been very close to either men, as most of his time was spent in the States, but there was a level of respect for his family which required his presence. Besides his father would expect it, the triplets would be there, and Xavier needed to speak with them.

Roberto nodded at Caleb as they passed him. Xavier paused to smile knowingly at Caleb, winked, then

continued on. The ghost of a smile passed over Caleb's mouth towards Xavier.

Chief of Military Police, Colonel Leone Vaughn, arrived shortly thereafter, looking exhausted and deeply saddened. He approached Caleb before he went inside the Cathedral.

"Any trouble with the MPs?"

"On their best behavior. Your first Lieutenant is solid." Caleb offered him a sympathetic expression and clasped him on the shoulder. "Let me worry about security today."

"Thanks, Caleb. I just can't believe..." Leone trailed off, shaking his head. "We don't have any leads. Not a fucking one. Who would do this?"

Caleb had a pretty good idea, but he kept that to himself. Now wasn't the time. "You'll find them, Leone. And put a world of hurt on them when you do."

"I'm going to put their heads down in Stefano's basement myself." Leone's hands balled into fists at his sides.

"So, that's not a myth, huh?" Caleb cracked a small smile. It was rumored in a cellar underneath the Governor's Mansion, good ole S.V.T. kept the heads of various enemies that pushed him too far. It was also rumored Marcello added one or two during his tenure. Caleb knew very well the cellar existed. Stefano took Kyle down there the day he'd found out Kyle dated Lil. Kyle had thrown up at the sight, and Stefano called him a pussy.

THE AWAKENING

Leone opened his mouth to answer, but died off when he saw his father and wife walking up together. Caleb stepped aside to let the family have their moment, as still C.E.O of SVT Construction Derek Vaughn II released Victoria's hand and spent a long moment hugging his son, understanding his pain. They were both close to Marcello. Victoria stepped between the two men when they were done, and the three of them went into the Cathedral together.

It was a rare, rare instance for one to find Nicholas anywhere near his father. Unfortunately, circumstances dictated it. He rode with his father and his sister Agata. Caleb pulled open the car door for them as it stopped. Agata, the current C.E.O of Dion Corp, thanked Caleb. Then, as was her duty, she walked over to the press and made a short statement. Ignoring his son (as he had the entire ride over), Dominic climbed out of the car and stood behind his daughter, proudly yet sadly, and added in a few words when she finished. Nicholas acknowledged Caleb off-handedly, his gray eyes set on the display father and daughter were putting on. Hiding his disgust, Nicholas turned and walked inside of the cathedral alone.

The triplets were the last to arrive. When their car pulled up, Caleb put on his own veil. Steeling himself for

the rush of emotion he felt when he would see Simone, he walked up to the car door and pulled it open.

Simone was the first one out of the vehicle. The fury over her husband's betrayal died down, leaving only the quiet anguish she felt over the loss of her father and Marcello. Vasco hadn't made any smart remarks when her tears started this time, and they came in slow trickles from the corners of her eyes as she stepped out of the car.

"I'm very sorry for your loss. They were good men," Caleb said to her. He wanted to reach out, let her bury her face in the crook of his neck, and console her through her pain. He wanted to kiss the tears from her cheeks and remind her how it felt to be loved. And he was under strict orders that he couldn't, until the time was right. It was going to be his most difficult assignment.

"Thank you," Simone responded quietly. She met Caleb before, though briefly on all occasions. She offered him a weak smile as she brought the tissue to her cheeks again. Lucien climbed out after her, and Vasco trailed behind him.

"The rest of your family is inside, Mr. President," Caleb said to Vasco as he shut their car door.

"Thank you, Caleb." Vasco studied the man curiously. He didn't yet understand Marcello's orders regarding him, though he wasn't too concerned over it. He expected that answer would reveal itself in due time. He walked

THE AWAKENING

over to his sister, setting a comforting hand on her shoulder. Lucien took her opposite hand, and the three heirs to the empire climbed the steps to the cathedral to say their goodbyes to Marcello and Demetrius.

Publicly, Demetrius's death was confirmed to local newspapers around the island and to contacts worldwide, but because of Marcello, the funeral was closed to anyone who was not family.

Kayla sat in the first pew, holding Simone's hand. Lucien and Vasco sat next to them. Moments before, Vasco handed her the envelope from Marcello, quietly instructing her to open it after the funeral.

Looking at the family now, Vasco felt as if he were regarding his brethren with a completely new set of eyes. It was startling to realize how many subplots lay beneath the surface. The line that split them had the strength to set fire to over a century's worth of history and Vasco simply would not allow that. One side was going to call checkmate this final game, and it wasn't the one catering to the Anunnaki.

Vasco volunteered to give the eulogy for his father and grandfather. Shamelessly, Amadeo and Olivia proceeded to leave in the middle of it. Kayla, Isabella, and

Christopher gave them disapproving glances. Nicholas briefly considered joining them, if only so he wouldn't have to sit next to his father any longer.

Vasco paused in the middle of his heartfelt words, watching the retreating figures of his cousins. He sent a quick glance to his brother, and then he simply continued, ignoring the interruption.

Pissed off, didn't do justice to how Lucien felt since hearing the news of their father and grandfather's murder. Conversations with Xavier, combined with knowledge from their past lives, pointed a finger at the culprits. Even though it wasn't time to remove those pieces from the chessboard, it didn't mean he couldn't antagonize. Just a little.

"Be right back," Lucien whispered to Simone, stood and followed the two outside. "You could at least pretend to be sad, cousins." He strolled down a few stone steps to where they stood, lighting a cigarette as he moved.

Amadeo paused mid-sentence, flicking much darker gray eyes over Olivia's shoulder to land on Lucien. He smirked. "We didn't adore either of them, Lucien. It was no secret."

Olivia let her cousin speak for her, barely glancing at Lucien. They would get their hands on Leone soon. Combined with what their unexpected visitor Loki told them,

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it was only a matter of time before they took over and shaped the family into what it should be.

His teeth flashing grin never reached Lucien's eyes. A line of smoke was exhaled into the air. Ignoring Amadeo's remark, he spoke to Olivia's back. "Nice to see you again, too, Olivia. Sorry, I stepped up and took your grand plans of running the family away from you."

"Fuck off, Lucien. You couldn't run this family if you reincarnated as Stefano Terenzio himself," Olivia said, with her back still to him.

Dark humor flashed behind Lucien's eyes "You know, Olivia, one day soon, you'll realize how funny it is you said that."

"Is there something you wanted, Lucien?" Amadeo saw the rising tide of annoyance settling over Olivia. When she lost her temper, her mouth tended to fly, and right now wasn't the time. He walked around her, coming face to face with Lucien himself, effectively shielding her from him.

"From you, Amadeo?" Lucien gave him a once over, then started laughing humorlessly. "Just to let you know..." He came down one step, flicked the cigarette away and narrowed his eyes dangerously on his family member. "...you sonofabitch, you won't get away with it. And neither will that murdering whore over there."

“What the fuck did you just say to me?” Olivia finally turned around, her own eyes flashing furiously. In two steps, she came up behind Amadeo and attempted to push him aside to get at Lucien. Amadeo stood his ground, shoving one arm behind him to keep Olivia at bay.

“Watch your mouth, Lucien,” Amadeo snapped. “You don’t get to throw out accusations just because you got lucky. Daddy couldn’t pull his weight.” If it was difficult for Lucien to be in the family before, imagine how he felt now. Julian Terenzio’s thoughts swam in his head, feeding his natural anger at the cheap shot taken at his father, because Demetrius was a great nephew, as well. It pissed him off even more because Amadeo and Olivia were his great grandchildren. Shit, he owned memories of bouncing Olivia on his knee, as Julian, when she was a child. Now, they were on the wrong side, and he had no idea how they got there. “Say another word about my father, Amadeo, and I’ll knock your fucking teeth out. Until you measure up to half the man he was, I don’t even want you speaking his name.” “Your father was a typical sad story with the usual ending. Weak and now dead.” Olivia’s words dripped with loathing. She had taken great pleasure in the moment she’d gotten to pull the trigger on Demetrius.

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Amadeo was certain his cousin's comment would spring Lucien into action. He was right, but unprepared for how quickly. Amadeo's own cruel smirk barely touched his lips before the force of Lucien's fist knocked his head to one side. He felt a set of hands shoving him, and Amadeo lost his balance, stumbling out of the way. It gave Lucien room to grab the front of Olivia's blazer and hauled her into the sound slap that left a forceful imprint across her face. Normally, he would never hit a woman; Olivia was the exception.

The guards of the Terenzio family had never seen anything like that. Because of the ranks, they were not sure who they should aid or whether they should get involved at all. One was smart enough to turn on his heel and go jogging into the cathedral to alert the rest of the family. When Terenzio tempers went loose, it wasn't likely to end pretty.

"Say it again. Go ahead, say it again, you fucking bitch," Lucien growled as Olivia's sharp whimper echoed into the air between them. He wanted to smack her again, but Amadeo rushed him from the side, catching him around the waist. They both went toppling down the stairs, nearly taking Olivia with them.

Commotion ensued. Vasco and Simone were the first to run out of the church. As much as she wanted to stick her foot out and hope for a broken neck, Olivia restrained

herself for the time being. She stepped to the side and called out for Amadeo to stop.

Kayla came out of the church afterwards, staring down at the scene Lucien and Amadeo were making at the bottom of the stairs. Slow distaste set over her face, which slowly turned to Olivia.

Olivia met the woman's eyes for just a moment before looking away, saying quietly, "Lucien started it."

"Jesus Christ. Dion Security, clear the area of the local press. Confiscate cameras and shut up noisemakers. We have a situation," Caleb barked into his earpiece and hopped down the stairs two at a time after Vasco and Simone.

Xavier and Robert rushed out together, and as soon as Xavier saw the swinging arms, he jogged down the stairs, Robert following him.

Nicholas stepped into the sunlight with a smirk on his mouth. Both sides of the family were downright embarrassing at times.

"What the hell was Marcello thinking, putting Lucien in a position of authority?" Dominic came out of the church, frowning. Agata stood next to her father, watching, but reserved comment.

"I think Marcello knew exactly what he was doing," Derek Senior commented quietly, pushing his hands into

pants pockets. He had been a bit of a brawler himself in his younger years, and he didn't like Dominic.

Leone and Victoria joined the growing crowd, and Leone sighed heavily when he saw the display. "That's not what anybody needs today."

Victoria looked briefly concerned, but hid it well when she saw Amadeo was at the bottom of the pile. She'd take care of him when she saw him later, after Leone went back to work. "Very inappropriate. I'm so glad you don't act like that." She smiled convincingly up at her husband.

Vasco reached the two of them first, grabbed Amadeo's uniformed by the shoulders, and hauled him back from Lucien. "Break it up!"

Once Amadeo was pulled away, Simone looked down at Lucien, who stopped swinging when he felt the weight jerked back from him. Simone set her foot onto his chest, the expression on her face a mixture of scolding and light amusement. "This means down, boy."

Lucien smirked up at her through a split lip. "I already got my shot in. Twice."

Amadeo, though, didn't seem to be done. He felt hands grab him, was pulled unsteadily onto his feet and crashed back into his next least favorite person, Vasco. The moment he regained his footing, he tossed his elbow back and sneered in quiet satisfaction when he felt it

collide with the bone on Vasco's face. He did it again. Vasco lost his grip, and Amadeo spun around, hell bent on getting another shot in, only to be beaten to the punch, literally. The ending force of Vasco's fist knocked Amadeo's teeth together, so hard he was fairly certain one might have come loose, and sent him flat on his ass.

Caleb reached the scene just as Amadeo went to the ground again. Quite bravely, he put himself between Amadeo and Vasco. Vasco, though, was finished. His point made, he straightened his sleeve, ignoring the swelling that started where his cousin's elbow caught him.

"Nice shot," Xavier said under his breath.

Who knows if the brawl would have continued, but a sharp bark from Isabella earned both silence and ceased motions. "Enough!" Anger burned behind her older, gray eyes. With a quiet, regal grace, she pushed herself to the front of the small crowd and descended the staircase. Christopher followed at her heels, looking as furious as his sister.

"We didn't start it, Isa—" Olivia spoke up as the older woman passed, only to be cut off by the raise of Isabella's hand. Isabella flicked her eyes over the mark on Olivia's cheek, but didn't comment. Instead, she continued to the bottom of the stairs. "I thank God certain family

members are deceased, so they don't have to witness this disgrace," Isabella scolded.

"Just for the record, Aunt Isabella, this sort of behavior is expected from me," Lucien called out smartly, still on the ground, though with his hands behind his head. His sister's foot still on his chest.

"It's not funny, Lucien," Christopher growled. "This is a public event, and you are no longer in a position where you can act like a jackass without it affecting this family's reputation."

"I apologize, Aunt Isabella. Shouldn't have happened here," Amadeo said diplomatically, though he couldn't have been more insincere. He got to his feet, gingerly touching the blood on his split lip.

"It shouldn't have happened at all," Isabella hissed. She stared hard at Amadeo, before looking at Vasco. "This is now your responsibility. You do not encourage these displays."

"Yes, ma'am," Vasco agreed. "I apologize, too. Rough day." The duality inside him was something he needed to get used to. As Stefano, he wanted to add two heads to the shelf in the basement. He was that man, but he wasn't anymore. Amadeo and Olivia would get theirs, though, and soon.

Lucien opened his mouth to speak again, and Simone dug her heel a little harder into his chest, enough to make

him reconsider, but she was only paying him half attention. It was still a bit of a mind twist to look at two people she knew her entire life and see them in an almost completely different light. Simone's eyes kept straying towards Isabella, noticing how much like her mother the older woman was. Then they would shift towards Christopher, and that tilted her world a little more, because she never realized how much he looked like his father, Kyle. And the thought of Kyle made her heart ache.

Isabella paused over Amadeo, regarding him closely. "You will all return to the cathedral and pay your respects, whether you loved them or not. Am I clear?"

"Crystal." Amadeo reached into his coat and found his hanky, pressing it against his bloody mouth.

"Yes, ma'am. Yes, sir." Lucien pulled one hand from behind his head and saluted Christopher, who simply glared back at him. There was affection between them; Christopher had often been the one to lay into Lucien like a concerned father when his behavior stretched into inappropriate lines.

Isabella watched Amadeo a moment longer, then turned back to the three in front of her. "Roberto, get everyone back inside."

"Yes, Mother." He shook his head amusedly and rounded up the lingering family members.

“We need to talk later,” Xavier said quietly to Vasco before he walked back into the Cathedral.

Without another glance at the triplets, Amadeo went back up the staircase, equally ignoring the other family members’ eyes on him. Kayla, already gone back inside, was still disgusted with the both of them. Olivia caught up with Amadeo halfway up the stairs, her annoyance carefully hidden. Her calculating eyes re-centered on Leone’s back as they trailed him and Victoria into the church. She’d make herself feel better by paying Leone a visit soon.

Caleb stood quietly in the background while Isabella gave her orders and reprimanded the group. His smile was carefully hidden, as was the swell of paternal instinct he felt towards her. He moved to go inside when she instructed Roberto, but was paused by Isabella’s hand on his arm.

“Caleb’s focus has narrowed to the protection of the three of you.” Isabella looked at Simone. “Since I do not trust your brothers to do it, you will work with Caleb to see it done. It is neither up for discussion, nor calls of rank.” Her eyes briefly flicked between the two brothers before returning to Simone. “The three of you are too important to move around without the proper security. Do I make myself clear?”

Simone smiled. She couldn't help it, and hoped Isabella didn't take it as a sign of mockery. It was quiet pride which brought on such an expression. "As ordered, Govna."

Caleb stiffened. *Damn*, he thought. He didn't mind the assignment, obviously, but he hadn't expected he'd start working with the triplets so soon. He wanted a little more time to prepare. Just the sight of Simone pulled at his heart. All he wanted to do was tell her about their past, so he could touch her again. One more time. With supreme effort, he kept control of himself and nodded at the order, standing at a stiff ease in front of the triplets.

No further argument came, though Isabella did not expect one. Even so, she didn't head back into the church. Instead, her eyes continued to watch their near mirror in Simone. Unexpectedly, she smiled. It lingered around her well-aged face and held some secret knowledge in its easy emotion. Only after a moment did she turn and slowly climb the steps, back inside.

"Good luck with those two," Christopher said to Simone, giving Lucien and Vasco a look before he followed his sister back inside.

"That means us, too, I'm thinking. Lemmie up, Simone." Lucien poked lightly at his sister's ankle.

"Huh? Oh. Sorry." Simone gave a little shake of her head and took her foot off her brother. She was thrown

off balance by the look Isabella gave her. It was almost if Isabella knew, but how could that be? Though it wasn't out of the realm of the explainable; not in this family. Marcello had obviously known, somehow.

"Thanks." Lucien gave her a knowing smile as he got to his feet, understanding her dilemma.

Vasco was thoughtfully silent as he climbed back up the stone steps, occasionally glancing in Caleb's direction. Mr. Kincade couldn't reveal himself to Simone. Mr. Kincade kept side glancing at Simone when she wasn't watching, and the expression in his eyes was one Stefano had seen before. Understanding dawned, partly. Those thoughts were interrupted by the abrupt ringing of his cell phone. He glanced down at the caller ID, saw it was blocked, but answered it anyway.

"So, Caleb, just an FYI, we don't like bodyguards." Lucien half-grinned as they walked.

"Not uncommon knowledge, but I just take orders." Caleb returned his expression and shared it with Simone. She looked different, but there were so many similarities. He wondered if she would pick up on any of them in him.

"Simone, better work quickly with Caleb to plan a trip," Vasco said as he tucked the cell phone back into the inside of his suit jacket. "We're going to Virginia."

"Why?" Lucien asked.

Caleb didn't look surprised.

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Vasco actually grinned at his siblings. “Kill two birds with one stone.”

Chapter 19

“The great strength of our Order lies in its concealment, let it never appear, in any place in its own name, but always covered by another name, and another occupation. None is fitter than the three lower degrees of Freemasonry; the public is accustomed to it, expects little from it, and therefore takes little notice of it.”

- Dr. Adam Weishaupt

June 11, 2012

Washington, D.C.

The White House 4:11 PM

Rainbow City has fallen.”

“Why didn’t the Darkworkers see this coming?”

“We don’t know, sir. We suspect someone from the Federation may be interfering.”

His eyes were not human, though they appeared that way when he wanted them to. Manipulation of the cells in the human body was so ridiculously simple, it was laughable humankind didn’t know how to shape shift.

The news angered him, and his eyes flipped, exposing the reptilian irises. "What of the Terenzios?"

"They continue as expected. Our insiders have found an Atlantean, a survivor of Rainbow City. They wish to bring him to us in exchange for full membership into the Brotherhood."

A serpent-like tongue flicked out of his mouth, darting across his lips. "I'm sure they do. Bring them to me."

"Yes, sir. And the rest of the Terenzio family?"

"Continue as planned. We will still launch Alternative Three ahead of schedule." His hand extended, switching erratically from dark green scales to smooth white skin as he pressed the button to end the conversation.

It would be close, but the Brotherhood would not fail. They held control of the planet for too long just to give it away because the Galactic Federation claimed it was time. Let the vibrations rise. He didn't care how many of the slaves "awakened." Let them think the planet would Ascend. They tried before, and they would fail again.

A sharp knock came at his office door. It took a mere thought to return his eyes and the texture of his hand to their hidden state. "Come in."

The uniformed officer saluted sharply before informing him, "Mr. Vice President, they are ready for you now."

THE AWAKENING

June 12, 2012

Alcyone Island

St. Judas Memorial Gardens 12:12 AM

A warm rain had started. It came down in thick sheets, thunder lazily grumbling in the distance. The shadowed figure didn't carry an umbrella. Kayla preferred thunderstorms.

For fifty-five years, she lived a lie. Perfectly. She situated herself within the family better than *They* expected of her. As Marcello Terenzio's youngest daughter, she was a Dion Corp board member. She ran the subsidiary, Empire Cruise Lines. Alcyone was an island, after all, uniquely positioned. They didn't always smuggle things by air. That meant she was privy to a great deal. Since she was thirteen years old, Kayla fed the Brotherhood everything she knew about the Terenzios.

Sixteen hours ago, she learned her step-father played the game better than she had. Sixteen hours ago, she learned from the first day she appeared on his doorstep—he knew the truth.

The rain washed away the line of tears that fell in silence as she stared down at the freshly dug earth, next to where her mother was buried.

Marilyn Terenzio was the first person Kayla learned to love. It happened unintentionally. *They* tried to train her against it, but things endured by a five-year-old were not always completely washed away with mind altering drugs. She remembered the videos. The man with the funny smell that taught her to hide how much she disliked it when people touched her. She frequently suffered from nightmares. It was not until she came to the island she understood what it was really like to be embraced by the unconditionally loving, reassuring warmth of a mother. It made the nightmares stop, after a while.

Kayla knew why her mother was murdered; so that she didn't forget the plan and who she belonged to. Who would take care of her after all the Terenzios were dead? Caesar had appeared shortly thereafter. She thought he was as good as the rest of the Brotherhood, when she brought him home one weekend from college and Marcello accepted him with open arms. Now, she knew her step-father was a lot smarter than she gave him credit for.

Maybe she should have realized that years ago. She had been sent here to kill him, taught from day one. Initially, she hadn't formed a connection to him, not like she had with her mother. It wasn't hard to keep the distance. He wasn't around much. She was seventeen when her

mother died and the nightmares came back. She fully expected to wake from them to nothing but darkness and the cruel, lingering visions of the past. Instead, he had been there. Her screams were soothed by his strong quiet voice, and she was amazed at how easy it was to burrow into his chest, hiding from the truth. She let herself believe the lie in those moments, because his arms were warm and strong, and she had never felt protected before. He was around more after that.

When she finished college, he invited her more frequently to his office on the infamous 52nd floor. The Brotherhood loved it. Secretly, so had she. To this day, Marcello was the only man who could touch her without making her skin crawl. Even her gentle half-brother Demetrius made her inwardly flinch when he put a hand on her.

Kayla didn't understand Marcello Terenzio. He knew she was his enemy, the bastard child of his raped wife, but he looked at her like he loved her, anyway. She knew it for certain. He looked at Demetrius and pictures of Amanda the same way.

"Why? Why would you ask me...?" Kayla whispered the unanswered question into the rain. The letter Marcello wrote her was crumpled up in her closed fist. A father's last request of his daughter.

Except she was not his daughter. Never mind she loved him like the father he wasn't. She never admitted it to him. She didn't know if she ever would have.

She was never ordered to kill him and hadn't questioned why. But yesterday, Caesar called to tell her he'd be coming back to the island soon. She knew why. Orders were coming. They were worried about the success of the Ascension. Frankly, she was surprised they hadn't killed the Terenzios sooner, if they were concerned. Regardless, someone was going to die, and she would be the one pulling the trigger. The cruel beauty of it was even if she didn't want to, they could make her. It only took a single phrase. Caesar was usually the one to "activate" her.

Kayla bent down to set a single red rose on top of the freshly dug wet dirt. Her head bowed, her dark blonde hair soaked and coming loose from the pins which held it back in place. She closed her eyes, fighting a losing battle against emotions she didn't want to feel. She would disappoint her step-father. Choices weren't given to things that were owned.

"I'm sorry, Dad," Kayla whispered. Her cell phone rang. She knew it was Caesar. She flipped it open. "Yes?"

"Get ready to rid the world of your family, baby. I'm on my way home."

Kayla was not a Terenzio. She was a child of the Project, loyal only to the Brotherhood. "I understand." Her

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face hardened, and her fingers opened, Marcello's crumpled letter fluttering into the mud as she walked away.

Cast of Characters:

Vasco Terenzio: Co-President of the Dion Corporation, an empire run by the Terenzio family. First-born triplet. Siblings are Simone and Lucien. Vasco recently learned in a previous life (aka reincarnation, or past life) he was Stefano Vasco Terenzio, the mastermind behind his family's plot to destroy the Anunnaki, the Brotherhood, and free Earth.

Simone Terenzio: Co-President of the Dion Corporation. Second-born triplet. Siblings are Vasco and Lucien. Simone recently learned in a previous life she was Liliانا Terenzio, sister to Stefano Terenzio, also known as the Black Widow because of her habit for murdering her husbands. Liliانا stopped killing husbands when she married Alcyone Island AF General Kyle Zhane. Like her brothers, she wants to shoot the Anunnaki and the Brotherhood in their respective faces.

Lucien Terenzio: Co-President of the Dion Corporation. Third-born triplet. Siblings are Vasco and Simone. Recently learned in a previous life he was Julian Terenzio, brother to Stefano Terenzio. Julian was responsible for keeping his brother's secret, and worked as a double agent for the Brotherhood after Stefano's death. Lucien is ready to throw down on the side of team fuck up the Anunnaki and the Brotherhood.

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Caleb Kincade: Director of Security for the Dion Corporation. Personal bodyguard for the triplets. Caleb has always known in a previous life he was Alcyone Island Air Force General Kyle Zhane, and Liliana Terenzio's husband. He is secretly in love with Simone. Caleb will do anything to protect her, and ensure she completes her mission to free humanity.

Olivia Terenzio: Director, SVT Securities Eastern Division. Olivia murdered her father, Matteo Terenzio, in order to rise to a position of power within the company and family. She is cousin to Amadeo Terenzio, her partner-in-crime. Olivia doesn't believe in freeing humanity and is secretly working with the Brotherhood and Anunnaki to make sure the Ascension never happens.

Amadeo Terenzio: General of the Alcyone Island Military. Amadeo murdered his father in order to rise to a position of power within the military and family. He is cousin to Olivia, his partner-in-crime. Amadeo doesn't believe in freeing humanity either, and is also secretly working with the Brotherhood and Anunnaki to make sure the Ascension never happens.

Kayla Terenzio-Medicci: CEO Empire Cruise Lines, a Dion Corporation subsidiary. Step-daughter of Marcello Terenzio, deceased head of the Terenzio family. Kayla is a mind-controlled agent of the Brotherhood, sent to infiltrate the Terenzio family at a young age. Despite her conflicted feelings at times, she has no choice but to do as she is ordered by her masters.

Dominic Terenzio-Fidelio: Retired CEO of the Dion Corporation. Dominic has a few secrets of his own, such as secretly working with the Brotherhood for decades, and will stop at nothing to ensure that the Ascension never happens.

Nicholas Terenzio-Fidelio: Director of the Loyalty Airlines Eastern Sector. Nicholas is a former member of the Brotherhood, now double agent. He turned against the Brotherhood when they let his family die in the attacks on 9/11. Nicholas doesn't care if the Ascension happens or not, so long as the Brotherhood is destroyed. He also hates his father, Dominic.

Caesar Medicci: Brotherhood Agent. Kayla's handler. Caesar knows that in a previous life, (aka reincarnation or past lives) he was Roman Moretti, Stefano Terenzio's greatest enemy. As a result, he hates Vasco. Caesar has infiltrated the Terenzio family as Kayla's husband. He will stop at nothing to ensure the Terenzios, especially Vasco, are murdered.

Dr. Derek Vaughn III: Director, SVT Think Tank, a Dion Corporation subsidiary. Derek works with his team to find a mysterious Cave of Creation before the winter solstice. He has a crush on Shirley McDermott, a colleague. Derek and his team try to make scientific sense out of a mystical event known as the Ascension.

Dr. Shirley McDermott: Senior Scientist, SVT Think Tank. Shirley works with Derek and Abe to find a mysterious Cave of Creation before the winter solstice. She is trying to make scientific sense out of a mystical event

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known as the Ascension. Shirley secretly has a crush on Derek.

Dr. Abe Donahue: Senior Scientist, SVT Think Tank. Ex-Navy. Abe works with Derek, and Shirley, to find a mysterious Cave of Creation before the winter solstice. Abe is trying to make scientific sense of a mystical event known as the Ascension, but is very skeptical.

Tony DeMarco II: Works for the Brotherhood, but is a double agent. In past lives Tony was an ally of the Terenzios. In his current incarnation Tony has infiltrated the Brotherhood to help bring them down. He will do everything in his power to make sure the Terenzios succeed, and the Brotherhood is destroyed

Alexandro DeMarco II: Director of Homeland Security. Tony's big brother. In past lives was an ally of the Terenzios and close, intimate friends of Stefano Terenzio and his wife, Cleona. In his current incarnation Alexandro has infiltrated the Brotherhood to help bring them down. Like his brother Tony, he will do everything in his power to make sure the Terenzios succeed, and the Brotherhood is destroyed.

The Brotherhood: 13 human bloodlines that control the world. Also known as the Roshaniya. The Brotherhood worship aliens called the Anunnaki. Together, they keep humanity enslaved in a mundane, thought controlled system, with the illusion of freedom.

Enki: Anunnaki Scientist and Magi. Enki does not agree with his family's treatment of humanity and wants Earth

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to be set free. He is secretly working against his brother, Enlil, and the Brotherhood. Through the DeMarcos, Enki provides help to the Terenzios.

Enlil: Military Commander of Planet Earth and the Anunnaki. He is unaware of his brother's split loyalties. Enki will never release humanity from Anunnaki control, and will prevent the Ascension at all costs.

CRYSTAL STORM

The Ascension

Synarchy Book 2

Crystal Storm

Tell Our Visions

New Orleans

THE AWAKENING

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Did you enjoy this book? We'd love to hear from you! Connect with Crystal at her website crystalsimagination.com

Authors Note

The second installment of the Synarchy Series follows in its predecessor's footsteps as being a blend of fact and fiction. But, just as exciting (at least to me), there are portions of the book that are a fabulous co-creation between myself and two other writers.

I have marked these sections with an asterisk to give proper credit where it is due; something I should have done with the first book. I wish to take a moment to sincerely thank Jessica Gerson, a perplexing anomaly of a young woman who is not only a great writer, but a human encyclopedia. Carissa Terenzio is her creation. I must also send my extreme thanks and gratitude to Sara Hendrickson, the mind behind Marilyn Pearl and Liliana Terenzio, whom readers of Book One will know the character of Simone Terenzio to be based off of.

I cannot express my thanks enough to these two women.

To you. Yes, you, the one reading these words:

May this book be the catalyst that propels you forward on your journey of discovery;

About the power of you.

CRYSTAL STORM

Love, Courage, and Co-Creation

Crystal Storm

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*"We're villains, as much as we are capable of
being heroes. When the moments come that we
can we soften the blow of our sins, we've got to
take them."*

-Stefano Vasco Terenzio

Prologue

December 20, 2012- 11:44 PM

Vacherie, Louisiana

Oak Alley Plantation

It came down in thick heavy sheets, bulleting from the sky, drenching the ground that could only absorb so much before it leaked up from the grass, and quickly became swamp so common in the area. The glare of headlights cut through the rain, illuminating the porch of the empty antebellum mansion.

Caesar climbed out of the car, whistling. He snapped open the trunk and stared with vicious glee down at Vasco, whose hands Caesar taped behind his back. Caesar reached inside and hauled the other man out, half dragging him through the puddles of water, and shoved him in front of the stairs, facing the house. "I thought you'd want to see it one more time before you died."

Vasco's eyes traveled slowly over the elegant, old fashioned structure. It had been *her* home, before she—

His jaw hardened. A lifetime ago, he made love to her against those columns, often after he'd shot a few people out among the centuries-old oaks. For a fleeting moment, his eyes softened at the phantom images.

"You know, she and I had some good times here after you got popped." Caesar grinned.

Vasco's eyes narrowed, jealousy and fury coiling hotly in his gut. His fingers fisted around the piece of glass hidden in his palm, and sharp edges cut into the tape and his skin, the blood washing away with the force of the rain.

Caesar turned him around so they were facing each other. "I don't get you, Vasco." He stepped back, pulling the gun out from the waistband of his pants. "Why? Out of all of them, I never thought you would choose this."

The hatred in the depths of Vasco's eyes was unhidden as he regarded Caesar. It was their destiny to be enemies, their agreement for this lifetime. He was fully committed to honoring that agreement. "Choice, Caesar," Vasco said over the noise of the storm. "I never made anyone do anything. They always had a choice. You—*Them*—you take the fun out of the game when you take choice away. But the better, less noble reason is I just don't like you. Or your masters. I never have."

Caesar shook his head. "I'll never understand you Terenzios. I won't miss you, either." The thunder growled, a flash of lighting exposing the malevolent gleam in

CRYSTAL STORM

Caesar's eyes as he pressed the muzzle of the gun against
Vasco's temple.

Chapter 1

“Some of the biggest men in the United States...are afraid of something. They know that there is a power somewhere so organized, so subtle, so watchful, so interlocked, so complete, so pervasive, that they had better not speak above their breath when they speak in condemnation of it.”

- Woodrow Wilson

Earth Day – June 12, 2012 - Time does not exist here

Babalon

Galactic Federation Headquarters

Unless this Council has forgotten, I am not obligated to follow any of your suggestions.” Enlil, Military Commander of the war-like race called the Anunnaki, dragged his reptilian gaze over every form within the chamber.

His nine-foot-tall body was draped in a shimmering red material that covered his tough, dark green scaly skin. A pair of short, black wings was tucked in against

his back, and his head was reptile shaped with a serpent like tongue and razor sharp teeth.

Beyond the Milky Way Galaxy sat Babalon, a great oval ship whose flawless metallic surface gleamed against the backdrop of space. Six races agreed to come together to discuss matters of importance. Many other races existed in the cosmos, and often visited Babalon but choose not to take part in any formal proceedings. The six races called themselves the Galactic Federation. Lately, the Federation's topics revolved primarily around planet Earth.

The six representatives sat in a circular chamber, the domed glass ceiling exposing the beauty of space. In the center of the room was a wide black pedestal made from the rock of Jupiter's moon, Callisto. On top of the pedestal sat a small pyramid carved out of alexandrite, with a glowing cerulean rock forming its capstone. Six high-backed quartz crystal chairs circled the pedestal.

"Enlil, you fight against forces you cannot stop," Thoth warned. On his home planet Sirius, Thoth was known as a Dominous Gnosis, a master of many forms of knowledge. As correctly depicted by the Egyptians that he'd taught hieroglyphics to, he was a creature with the body of a human and the head of ibis. Centuries ago, he and other Sirians traveled to Earth to share and expand their knowledge.

“You fight for no reason. Let them go brother,” Archangel Michael said. He, too, closely resembled a human except he stretched a good eight feet in height, and his physical form was a perfect harmony of glowing skin and taut, sinewy muscle. His gleaming purple eyes carried a deep wisdom, compassion, and fiery spirit. That spirit became apparent in battle. His white wings set ablaze when he was called to defend what he and the rest of his race known as Angels believed to be a just cause.

“I cannot believe what I am hearing. The last time it was attempted to bring the full power of creation into form, we lost an entire planet, and my home suffered the repercussions. Now, you seek to try it again? With man?” As his impatience and agitation grew, Enlil’s forked tongued flicked out of his mouth with greater frequency. “I will not allow it.”

Beside Enlil sat a member of the one race that sided with him. The being had a small, thin body, but a very large, oblong shaped head, with no protruding features. Its eyes were oval shaped, lidless, and pure black. It wore no garments, and sat with its long, thin gray fingers wrapped around the armrest. On Earth they were called Greys. The true name of their race was Zeta. They came from several stars within the Orion constellation. The Zeta did not speak, but nodded on occasion in agreement with Enlil.

"Nibiru is not the home of the Anunnakis," Thoth said. "You chose to leave, Sirius. If you would calm your war-like ways and find some balance within, the Gnostics would vote for your return." The Sirians were on a constant quest for knowledge. The Gnostics were their High council, the smartest members of their society and made all governing decisions.

"We no longer have need of your planet of thinkers who take no action, Thoth." Enlil snapped.

"You cannot prevent it, Enlil." A gentle, soft-spoken voice echoed from the being of blue light which hovered above its seat. It came from the Pleiades and had no form, except when it chose to make one; usually only when it came to Earth. The Pleiadians, as they were called, were made of pure light, often of varying colors. "They have raised their vibration to levels that have far surpassed what we expected of them. The Source will not be denied."

"The Source may choose another planet to conduct its science experiments. We will not relinquish our control on Earth." Enlil slapped his claw like hand on the arm of his chair.

"How do you think you will stop it, Enlil?" The Dragonika's voice boomed in the chamber. His name was Anataboga. He was a gigantic winged beast with a long scaly tail draped over the chair he was entirely too big to

fit in. He stretched out beside his chair, back legs that were longer than his front legs curled underneath him. One short, three-clawed hand occasionally drummed on the stone floor, and his massive head rested on the other. Every time he spoke, a small cloud of smoke left his jaws.

“A matter I will not discuss with you, Draconika.” Enlil looked at the huge beast, whose body took up one half of the chamber. “I put faith in no God, but the intelligence and strength of my race. That will prevail.” He rose from his seat and looked pointedly at Michael. “And may I remind this council that any interference with the plans on Earth will be considered an act of war against my race.”

“As you know, Enlil, per our peace treaty, we may assist the humans when they call for us,” Michael said evenly.

“Yes, when they are scared of the dark they have created. But you may not interfere with our plans,” Enlil hissed.

Michael sighed. “I truly wish you would reconsider this course of action, Enlil.”

Ignoring Michael, Enlil waved his hand in a gesture of finality. “Council, this topic is closed. May your travels be safe.” He laced his claws together and gave a short bow. A moment later, his form faded from the room. The Zeta said his good-byes telepathically and disappeared, too.

When Enlil had gone, another Anunnaki emerged from the shadows behind Anataboga's chair. A cane made from the trees of Earth was held in his leathery palm, and it supported his slow movement. A glowing white robe adorned his frame, coming all the way to the floor and covering his tail. A black sash draped over his shoulders and touched the ground, as well. The sash indicated his rank as the Supreme Commander of the Anunnaki. "He gets his stubborn nature from his mother." The Council chuckled and Anu, continued. "I apologize for my son's rudeness. He carries much fear."

"Do not apologize, Anu," the Pleiadian said. "We understand. It will be a good lesson for him."

"There is some concern that he may slow things down, though," Michael said.

"If Enlil succeeds, then he was meant to. I remain an observer to these games, Council. It is Enki, my other son who has chosen to be his brother's opposition."

"I agree," Anataboga said. "This duality will end soon, one way or the other. If the experiment is meant to happen as we believe, then at the time of Galactic Alignment, it will."

There was a murmur of agreement around the room. Michael sat in thoughtful silence. Finally he nodded. "Very well. My people and I will continue to protect the

THE AWAKENING

humans when they call from the darkness that they unknowingly create.”

“We will help as we can, as well,” the Pleiadian said softly.

“I have done all I will do for them,” Thoth said.

After discussing other mundane matters concerning the galaxy, and the great Interdimensional Traveling Vessel Races, the Galactic Federation adjourned.

June 12, 2012 - 10:00 AM

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Headquarters

“This arrangement was dependent upon you staying close to Simone.” Dominic Terenzio-Fidelio perched on the front of his desk. A perfectly tailored silk suit covered his round, Italian frame, and his short, fat fingers were loosely clasped in front of him. Thick eyebrows framed piercing gray eyes that were locked on Victor Russo.

Victor sat in the chair in front of Dominic’s desk, his hands tunneled back through his wavy, brown hair. “I know. Look...” Victor dropped his hands and looked up at Dominic. “I can fix this.”

"She caught you fucking one of her whore friends. You're lucky she didn't have the balls to kill you." Olivia Terenzio sat on the leather couch pressed up against the wall. Above it hung a Van Gough painting she thought was both ugly and depressing.

"Simone's not that type of woman." Victor said impatiently, glancing briefly in Olivia's direction, then back at Dominic. "I can get her back. I'll get her to forgive me, okay? I just need a little time."

"Time is a luxury we don't have, Victor," Dominic frowned. "The whole point of you marrying her five years ago was to put you in a prime position to feed us information we needed."

"Or be a real husband and push the bitch in the direction we wanted," Olivia pressed a long, thin cigarette between her full, red painted lips.

"I get it okay? I get it." Victor stood up, buttoning the front of his suit jacket. "Just give me a week. I know Simone. She'll forgive me and we'll be back on track."

"You better hope those good looks of yours pays off big time, pretty boy," Olivia warned and admired his tall, athletic build. Victor was a handsome man, with a charming smile and a silver tongue.

"One week, Victor," Dominic said.

Victor clapped his hands together. "Consider it done, guys and gals." Flashing them a reassuring smile, he walked out of the office.

"I'm not entirely convinced he can pull that off." Dominic walked behind his desk, sat down, and began to clean one of his small diamond rings.

"I'm not convinced Kayla is so patient as to give him a week after fucking up like that." Olivia uncrossed her legs, and stood up. "This whole matter would be a fucking moot point if the Brotherhood would just give the order to have the triplets killed."

"Patience, Olivia."

Patience was one thing she was losing the closer they got to the winter solstice and the Brotherhood did nothing about the fucked up side of her family. "Did you tell *Them* about Loki?" Days ago, a strange man who looked human, but otherworldly, appeared in the house of Amadeo Terenzio, Olivia's cousin and partner in crime. The stranger introduced himself as Loki and told them he would help stop the Ascension.

"I did. I expect They'll want you to bring him in soon. They sounded very pleased."

"Am I going to meet someone in authority or some level of middle management?" Olivia walked to his desk and used Dominic's gold ashtray.

Dominic smiled. "If Loki is really an Atlantean, then I'm fairly confident you just might meet Enlil himself."

Olivia's eyes flickered with excitement. "Don't bullshit me."

"No bullshit. As I keep telling you, cousin, this game is as good as won. The triplets can't stop us. Our time is almost here."

June 12, 2012 - 9:45 AM

Monte Rio, California

Bohemian Grove

Bohemian Grove was twenty-seven hundred acres of campground. Nestled in a valley surrounded by high stone hills and towering redwoods that were two to five thousand years old, it was easy to hide what went on inside. Once a year, two thousand five hundred men came together to enjoy two weeks with like-minded individuals. Once a year, the true rulers of the world came here to utilize the energy of sacred space for dark purposes, and create reality as they saw fit.

The celebration at Bohemian Grove was so secret the rest of the world could only speculate about what went on, and the majority of the population never even heard

of it. Rich, middle-aged white men drank too much, enjoyed a weekend without a care, and solicited the waiters (mostly men) around the grove like whores when the lights went down. Six out of the thirteen royal heads of the Roshaniya, what conspiracy theorists called The Brotherhood, or Illuminati, attended the Western Event (another was held in Rome at the same time with the other seven) and made policy decisions regarding the future of the world. Usually, when the festival was kicked off with a “human sacrifice” signifying the cremation of care—a ritual explained as nothing more than a theatrical production symbolizing the removal of care for the two week vacation—the body in the bag was a real human. The Roshaniya, as taught by their Gods, the Anunnaki, used human beings like slaves. Humans were fitted into a system of control, bred to work in order to survive, and their true awesome potential was kept cleverly hidden. The news humans watched controlled them. The papers they read controlled them. The State-run education system controlled them. They were taught that their lives were nothing more than a mundane cycle of work, reproduction, and death. Wars, technology and the duality of human drama ensured they would never question if something more magical existed other than their petty, everyday lives. Even those that questioned never took it a step farther. Those that even came close to the

truth were labeled New Age hippies, or paranoid conspiracy theorists, and nobody took them seriously.

It was easy to be cynical when one knew as much as Antonio “Tony” DeMarco II did. But everything was about to change.

Standing in the security booth at the main gate, he pulled the walkie talkie out of his belt, pressing the talk button. “You clean up the Necrophilia room yet, Jimmy?”

There was static before the reply came. “Aw, why the fuck can’t I delegate that assignment to one of the new guys?”

Tony rolled his eyes. “Because it don’t look too good for rumors to start about how the Secretary of Defense and a few other Forbes cover CEO’s like fucking dead women. Clean it up. If you miss garbage incineration, I’ll put you on Hillbilly camp duty.” At the Grove, the two thousand members were divided into different camps, each with their own name. Some were symbolic. Some were just for fun.

Nobody wanted to be assigned to the Hillbilly camp, though. “Fuck that,” Jimmy said. “I’m on it.”

“You know, it’s not exactly smart of you to discuss the Secretary’s sexual preferences out loud either, amico.”

Tony slipped the walkie talkie back onto his belt, casting a nonchalant glance over his shoulder. “You’re here early, Director DeMarco.”

"I knew you missed me, so I took an earlier flight." A cigar was held comfortably between Director of Homeland Security Alexandro DeMarco II's fingers as he lounged in the doorway of the small building. "Such a waste of space, no?"

The DeMarco brothers were nearly identical as far as facial features went. They shared striking, wheat-hued eyes that crinkled at the corners when they laughed, and strong jaws. The similarities stopped there. Alexandro possessed a very old-fashioned, very politician-like demeanor, and his thick head of black hair was graying prematurely. Tony was taller, more muscular, and a little rougher around the edges.

"This place? Without question."

"Mhm." Alex brought the cigar to his mouth, pulling in the heavily scented smoke, and rolled the flavor of it around his tongue. "Let's take a drive."

"Sure." Tony followed him out, walking over to the golf cart that carted the suits around the acres of the camp ground.

"You have it on you?" Alex asked.

"Always." Tony slipped his sunglasses on, and climbed into the driver's seat. "Get in."

Alex got in the passenger side of the vehicle. Tony reached into the front pocket of his uniformed shirt, removing what appeared to be a stick of gum. When he bit

it, a signal was thrown out that blocked the sound of their conversation to those who might be listening. Unless eavesdroppers were two feet away and in which case could be seen, they would hear nothing but nature.

“So what’s up, big brother?”

Since the early 1920’s, the DeMarco Crime Family controlled New Orleans, Baton Rouge and the surrounding areas. They had aligned themselves with the Terenzios, and Alexandro DeMarco Senior had been a close friend of both Stefano Terenzio and his wife. Alexandro I had slickly made his way into politics, despite the rumors that his brother, Antonio DeMarco I, was the boss of the crime family. It was the first Alexandro’s stellar political career that inserted the DeMarcos into the inside position they had today. Alexandro I’s son, Matthew, had kept the partnership with the Terenzios alive, and secret, ensuring that both of his sons, who Matthew smartly named as the men from whom they reincarnated, were ready to finish what they had started.

“Marcello has passed,” Alex said.

“Sucks. Tell me more.”

Alex sighed, shaking his head. “You could at least have a little respect for the dead.”

“Look, I didn’t know him in this life, or my last seven. Aside from the sympathy I’ve been programmed to have for the natural occurrence which is death—which

nobody really minds by the way, they just think they do—my ‘sucks’ is a little bit more than is needed, all right?”

“But you did know his father.”

“Everybody knew his father.”

“He’s back.”

Tony pulled his eyes from the dirt road that cut between the towering redwoods to shoot a sideways glance at his brother. “No shit?”

“He’s not alone.”

“Whole crew?”

“All but Carissa. But I think she’s already moved into different form, probably somewhere in the Pleiades.” Alex smiled, sticking the cigar back between his teeth.

“The universe really isn’t fucking around this time.”

“Well, there is some importance to the third dimension.” Alex paused to puff lightly on his cigar. “They reincarnated as the triplets. I want you to meet with them and give them the next round of information.”

Tony glanced over at his brother. “Xavier can’t do it?”

“I need him on a different assignment right now. Plus, we need to keep his involvement in all this as hidden as ours.”

“All right. What do I need to tell them about?”

Alex reached into his pocket and removed a USB. He handed it to his brother. “It’s all on there. They’re on their way to Virginia, now.”

Tony took the drive and dropped it into the front pocket on his shirt. "I've got to finish up here first, then I'll take care of it."

"Grazie."

"No problem. Does Stefano's wife know he's back in form?"

Alex paused. Even though his brother was right about death, there was an old soul that had left form on Earth. Her physical presence was missed. "She did."

Tony gave that revelation a moment of silence. "Now her, I'm going to miss."

"Me, too, amico. Me, too."

"I'm telling Mona."

"Do it..." Alex leaned back lazily in the shuttle, sticking one foot up onto the dashboard. "...and I'll tell her you were her slave a thousand years ago."

Tony made a face, letting loose an exaggerated shudder. "You're a bastard for even bringing that up."

Alexandro laughed, grinning around the cigar between his lips.

"Speaking of the bitch—I mean your wife..." The bitch remark earned him a solid punch to the shoulder from his brother. "She coming up for the festivities?"

"As if she'd let me shoot anyone without her."

"Good point. Where are you off to?"

"To see the Brotherhood of Light."

THE AWAKENING

“What a stupid name.”

Alex chuckled. “I agree. I doubt they call themselves that.”

“Why do you get to go see them? Why can’t I do that, and you go prep the triplets.”

“Proof positive, mi amico, that you will never be as cool as I am.”

Tony rolled his eyes. “You and your wife deserve each other. You both live in the same world of self-delusion.”

Chapter 2

“The difficulty lies, not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones.”

-John Maynard Keynes

June 12, 2012 - 9:00 AM

Alexandria, VA

S.V.T. Think Tank

They're on their way? Sure, of course. We'll be ready.” Dr. Derek Vaughn III hung up the phone as Dr. Shirley McDermott walked into his office. Derek smiled instinctively.

“What are we getting ready for?” Shirley asked, lifting her hand to cover her yawn.

“The new Presidents of Dion Corp,” Derek said, standing up and stretching. “Sleep okay?”

Shirley nodded. “As soon as I hit the pillow, I was out like a rock.” She pulled one of three pens from the front of her white lab coat and pinned her fiery red hair atop her head. She eyed him speculatively. His glasses sat atop a thin nose and covered golden brown eyes. His short,

brown hair was graying at the sides and still a little damp from his recent shower. "Did you sleep?"

Derek smiled. "Probably as good as you did."

"I brought coffee since I'm not ready to swallow the shitty stuff Derek makes." Dr. Abe Donahue came strolling into the office with a tray that housed three styrofoam cups.

"You love my coffee and you know it," Derek teased, reaching out to take the offered cup.

"I've tasted better shit on a Navy Sub, and that's saying something."

Derek grinned into his coffee mug. Abe had done a brief stint in the Navy before he'd succumbed to his brainiac potential. Derek thought Abe looked like a soldier; his build was lean and muscular, and he kept his black hair cropped close to his scalp. He disliked shaving, though, and a thick beard covered his cheeks.

"Before we go jump into the Orgone machine, has anyone ever heard of the term Theophany?" Shirley asked, cradling the warm cup of coffee between her palms.

Both Derek and Abe shook their heads. "What is it?" Derek asked.

"It refers to the appearance of a God to a human, usually for the purpose of some sort of divine disclosure. I had aliens and the Anunnaki on the brain before I went

to bed last night, and I did some research on alien abductions.”

“You know, it’s a little early to send my world into another flat spin,” Abe muttered.

Six days ago, Abe and Shirley, five miles underneath the Antarctic Ocean, found a man floating to the surface, carrying a golden rod with a diamond crystal attached to the top that was emanating some type of force field. Mene, as the man called himself, had given them a dire message about finding the Cave of Creation before the winter solstice and using their employer, the Terenzios, to protect them from the Anunnaki a race that apparently enslaved mankind. Derek, the Director of SVT Think Tank, sent a second team to Piedras Negras to search for this mysterious cave. They believed they found it underneath ancient Mayan ruins.

Shirley laughed. “It’s not too heavy, I promise, just interesting. The term is also used in reference to some alien abductions, because abductees claim to have profound mystical experiences, accompanied by a feeling of oneness with God or the Universe during their visits with the aliens.”

“Huh.” Derek looked thoughtful. “More proof to support the Ascension?”

The Ascension was a worldwide spiritual event that dealt with the power of consciousness and a connection

to some divine source. What little evidence existed to support it indicated that it was already occurring, but would reach some as of yet unidentified zenith on the winter solstice; unless they didn't find the Cave of Creation in time. And they still didn't know what the Cave of Creation actually was.

"Maybe. I just thought it comforting to know that not all aliens who have apparently contacted us are evil," Shirley said.

Abe eyeballed his co-workers. "Would you like me to make you two your own tin foil hats?"

Derek chuckled, and Shirley looked over at Abe in amusement. "After everything we've been through—the dreams that started this, Menes, and all the evidence based in science that talks about the power of your mind—I remained shocked you still sound so skeptical."

"I know, I know." Abe sighed. "But look, here's what we know." He started ticking off points on his finger around his coffee cup. "We've got a dead guy whose DNA is impossible, but only because I think he's a different species. The reason he was able to float was that crystal, and I haven't figured out the way it works, yet. Doesn't make it mystical. All your evidence about the power of consciousness is a science still in its baby stages, okay? And I'm not touching aliens on Earth, for obvious reasons. Plus, I think I might have a nervous breakdown after I find out

all this is true, so you just leave the skeptic alone, missy.” Abe gave her a wry smile.

“How about we run some mystical tests of our own,” Derek walked past them and down the twisting staircase to the main lab rooms. Shirley and Abe followed.

“If this Orgone Accumulator blows you up, or turns you into a fly, don’t say I didn’t warn you,” Abe said.

“Orgone is perfectly safe, and you know it, silly.” Shirley gave Abe’s shoulder a playful shove. “Whether or not it will work is the real question.”

Before Marcello Terenzio died, he sent his scientists an Orgone Accumulator, along with a letter that encouraged them to use it. Orgone was a term coined by psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, who claimed that Orgone, also called chi or life force energy, was everywhere and could be harnessed to help patients heal energy blocks in the biological system that led to illness. The Orgone Accumulator that sat in the lab was a six-sided box made up of organic and metallic materials.

“I guess I’ll go first,” Derek eyed the machine. “You two monitor my neurological activity.”

“Might as well monitor everything while you’re in there,” Abe suggested as he walked over to a cabinet to get the equipment they would need.

“Think it will work?” Shirley walked to the row of computers and turned three of them on.

"I've never been big on conspiracy theories, but I don't see why the FDA went to such extreme lengths to stop Reich's research, so it just might." Derek took a final, quick sip from his coffee cup, then set it down and unbuttoned his shirt.

Shirley glanced up as Derek opened his shirt and caught herself starring. She ducked her head down, hopefully controlling the blush she thought was creeping into her cheeks. "What your password, Abe?"

"USS Scorpion 589. Spell the first and third S with a dollar sign," Abe walked over to Derek and placed small white sensors over Derek's torso. The device Abe put on Derek's forehead resembled a headband, all black and a lot thinner. Abe pressed an unseen button in the back and a dull blue light illuminated Derek's head.

"This is your prototype, isn't it?" Derek pointed at the device around his head.

"Yup. And a lot more effective and convenient than an fMRI." Abe slapped him on the shoulder. "You're all set. Go have a kundalini what-the-fuck-ever experience."

"Thanks." Derek opened the door to the accumulator. "How long should I stay in here?"

"Reich's instructions strictly say, no more than thirty minutes at a time," Shirley said.

"Got it. I'm supposed to breathe slow and deep, and try to still my mind, right?" Derek stepped inside.

Shirley nodded. "From what Grams has told me." Grams was Dr. Angela Knoxx, Shirley's grandmother and another scientist on their team. Despite her background in science Knoxx was a complete New Ager. "Attempt to visualize each of your chakras opening and spinning."

"I can't believe we're wasting Think Tank hours on this." Abe shook his head as he sat down at the computer next to Shirley.

"Right. Visualize. See you in half an hour." Derek pulled the door closed.

"Are you going to think he's cuter if he comes out all Buddha-like?" Abe looked at Shirley with a barely suppressed grin.

There was no stopping Shirley's blush this time. "I hope you get abducted by aliens."

Abe burst into laughter. "Great, now I'm going to get beamed up to some spaceship that's part of some Galactic Federation."

Shirley barely stifled a giggle. "Stranger things have happened."

Abe snorted. "Yeah, maybe to *you*."

June 12, 2012 - 9:44 AM
Alexandria, VA

S.V.T. Think Tank

“How many other things do we have that we don’t know about it? Or are we fully up to speed now?” Lucien Terenzio climbed out of the car, looking around. The SVT Think Tank complex was gated off, a steel and glass building partially hidden by the array of tulip trees scattered across the well-tended lawn. Off the parking lot, a family of ducks played in the small man-made pond, and park benches for employee breaks littered the area.

“Combine your memories with current knowledge, and we should all be fully up to speed.” Vasco Terenzio, the oldest by seconds, tucked his hands comfortably into his pants pockets and walked up to the building’s doors.

“I have to say, your family is very adept at keeping secrets,” Caleb Kincade closed the car door and followed along behind them.

“Is any one surprised Stefano’s son managed to carry on the intrigue?” Simone Terenzio-Russo sounded amused as she followed her brothers into the building.

Derek was standing in the lobby, waiting for them. He finished in the Accumulator when the call came the triplets were a few minutes away. He hadn’t had a chance to go over the results of his meditation session with Abe and Shirley, but that could wait until later. When the triplets walked into the lobby, Derek smiled warmly in greeting.

Lucien made the last introduction. "Derek, this is our shadow, and head of our personal security Caleb Kincade."

Caleb stepped forward and shook Derek's hand. "Mr. Vaughn, I'm told that your level is the most secure in the building. After I've seen the Terenzios there, I'll need access to your security center, full clearance, and cooperation from your personnel."

Simone studied Caleb as he gave orders to Derek. Since climbing out of the Holon which provided, she and her brothers with their past life memories, little things reminded her constantly of Kyle Zhane, a husband from a time not so long ago. Caleb was becoming one of them. His tone, his mannerisms, were almost General-like, and they stirred up fond memories of a man that she had deeply, *deeply* loved. That was the past though, Simone reminded herself. And Caleb wasn't Kyle; not that it would matter if he were. Shaking herself back into the present, Simone followed Derek and her brothers.

"Not a problem, Mr. Kincade." Derek led them over to the elevators. Inside, he swiped his access card on the panel and leaned forward for the retinal scan. Once his identity was confirmed, he pressed the button for his floor.

"So, what kind of cool projects are we working on?" Lucien asked.

THE AWAKENING

“Too many to list.” Derek chuckled. “Level two is robotics and weapons. Really cool stuff. Level three is split between our security center and the bio weapons division. Level four, where we’re going, is mine.”

“And what do you primarily work on, on your level?” Simone asked.

“We sit around and think of cool stuff for the other two levels to work on.” Derek smiled.

“I want a light saber,” Lucien said.

Derek chuckled. “Me, too. You say the word, Mr. President, and we’ll start working on it.”

“Is this how we’ll be using our presidential power?” Simone gave her brother an amused look.

“He gets no say in what goes on at the Think Tank,” Vasco said, straight-faced.

“Haters. Both of you.” Lucien eyeballed his siblings.

The elevator doors dinged open, and Derek led the way. Two main lab rooms sat in the middle of the fourth level, with a smaller conference room sandwiched between them. The senior scientists’ offices were on the second floor, accessible by a spiral staircase. Abe and Shirley sat in the lab room where Menes was brought days earlier. While introductions were made again, Caleb prowled the area, checking the exits. Seemingly satisfied the triplets would be fine without him for a few

moments, he excused himself and took the stairs down to the security center.

“And this is—was—Menes.” Derek lead them to the cryogenic tank that was slightly bigger than a coffin, sitting up against one wall. Derek flipped a switch and turned on the light, illuminating the deceased man floating in liquid nitrogen.

There was a mixture of subtle, surprised reactions on the triplet’s faces. Menes looked otherworldly, even in death.

“Have you performed an autopsy?” Vasco looked at the scientists.

Abe nodded. “He had the healthiest internal organs I’ve ever seen, besides that he’s very similar to us. The anomaly is he has three strands of DNA instead of two, and I cannot determine how that works. It’s pretty crazy.”

“Is that even supposed to be able to happen?” Lucien rubbed the back of his neck, glancing at Abe.

“No. Our cells couldn’t handle it. But Menes’ body is clearly more evolved than ours,” Abe said.

“Have you figured out how that works?” Simone pointed to the golden rod with the crystal attached to the top.

Derek shook his head. “No. But, we do know that crystals can focus, amplify, transform, transmit and store

energy. Marc Vogel, a pioneer in this science, among other things, called it FATTs.”

Simone blinked, staring down at the rod. “Crystals do that?”

“Sure do. You don’t realize it, but you use crystals in your computers, your LCD screens, clocks, all kinds of devices,” Derek explained. “The science of actually storing information or energy—like a battery, for example—directly inside a crystal is still in its baby stages. In 1994, though, Stanford University scientists proved it could be done when they stored the image of the Mona Lisa inside a quartz crystal, and then retrieved it. That equaled about 163 KB of data. Not a lot. We tried to measure the energy in this thing—” Derek motioned at the rod. “—using a very complex device called an Omega 5, and we’ve determined that this crystal holds a crazy amount of energy. In terms you can understand, probably millions of terabytes of data.”

Lucien whistled. “That’s a lot.”

“It’s defiantly a power source, and that’s how it was able to generate some type of force field around Menes, but I have no idea what the mechanics of that are. It’s beyond our science.” Derek looked a little awed. “We could detach the crystal and do more tests, if you want.”

“Don’t,” Vasco said. “Not yet, anyway. What have you found in regards to evidence about the Ascension?”

“Conscious evolution might be a better term for it,” Shirley said.

Lucien scratched the back of his head. “Okay, I’ll bite. What’s that?”

“Ascension implies that humans are going to leave their physical bodies and transform into some ethereal state. I don’t think that’s going to be the case. It’s our consciousness that is ascending or, more accurately, evolving.”

Vasco arched a brow. “Meaning?”

“Einstein stated that the same consciousness that created a problem cannot be the same consciousness to fix it. We can all agree humanity is sitting in front of a very profound crossroad, and we’re on the brink of destroying our planet. Faced with this challenge, and remembering Einstein’s words, the only logical conclusion would be to change our consciousness. Evolve.” Shirley grabbed a stylus and touched it to the large LCD screen, bringing up bar graphed data. “Admittedly, the science is still in its infant stages, but there are some amazing experiments that show the power of our minds, and our ability to create or manifest the things that happen in our lives.”

“I got you. The whole, we affect our reality, and the internal creates the external stuff,” Lucien said.

Shirley smiled. “Exactly.”

Simone walked behind Shirley's chair, looking at the LCD screen. "Are there any scientific examples?"

Shirley nodded, "A few. The Global Consciousness Project is an international group that attempts to measure the power of consciousness interacting with random event generators. Their data is fascinating. For example, they saw activity four hours before 9/11 which leads to speculation that on some level, we knew it was going to happen. They've found the same happens right before an earthquake, or other natural disasters." Dragging the pen over the screen, Shirley moved one graph aside and brought forward another. "Lynn McTaggart is another researcher who has used large groups of people to conduct what she calls 'intention' experiments. They've managed to change the pH levels of water, just by thinking about it."

"McTaggart is an ex-journalist, not a scientist and the Global Consciousness data isn't as conclusive as they make it sound." Abe shook his head. "Like Shirley said, all the science is in its infancy and in my opinion, unreliable."

Lucien grinned faintly down at Abe. "Aw, you kinda remind me of Vasco before we could get him to believe in past lives."

Abe blinked. "Say, what?"

"I've heard talk about a Galactic Alignment, what is that specifically?" Simone interrupted.

"You remember your past lives?" Shirley's eyes widened at Vasco, who shrugged at her. "That's amazing." Shirley mulled over the concept of reincarnation, before she looked over her shoulder at Simone. "It occurs once every 25,800 years. The Sun, and Earth will line up in the center of the Milky Way at the exact moment of our winter solstice. Astronomers who have studied the Galactic Center report that periodically, for reasons unknown, it spits out extreme barrages of cosmic energy."

"Which is good, bad, we don't know?" Lucien looked between the scientists.

"We don't know," Abe said.

"It has been theorized researchers such as Sergey Smelyakov, that as the Galactic center emits this energy, it is catalyzing our evolution by means of higher dimensional torsion waves. They travel to Earth through the Sun. In a few months, we'll be in line to get them directly," Shirley said.

"I think my brain just exploded." Lucien chuckled.

"We've felt the same way the last few weeks, Lucien," Derek said.

Abe rolled his eyes. "Okay, again, more unproven theories. The only thing scientists are certain of is that Earth's magnetic field is at the lowest it's ever been. That

sort of decline only happens when the magnetic poles are reversing. At this point, there's no denying it. They're going to flip," Abe said.

"And what happens to humans when the poles flip?" Lucien asked.

Abe shrugged. "Probably nothing. Animals that rely on the magnetic field for direction might get a little turned around. Electronics may be affected."

"The issue is the combination of the magnetic field being weak and the influx of solar storms that are supposed to peak by the end of the year," Shirley added.

"What's a solar storm?" Simone asked.

"Think of it as a big blast of radiation and energy being hurled at the earth. The Earth's magnetic field protects us when the Sun has its hiccups. At the end of the year the storms are going to hit maximum, and the magnetic field is weak. That has the potential to affect the Global Satellite Communications network. Transformers could get fried, and that means worldwide power outages that could take years to fix. Commercial airliners would have to be grounded, things of that nature," Derek said.

Lucien whistled low. "No wonder all the doomsayers are having a field day."

"Could the peak of solar storms be caused by all this, what did you call it?" Simone glanced at Shirley. "Torsion something?"

"Torsion waves?" Shirley nodded. "That's a possible theory. Another interesting point about the magnetic fields is that there are studies, which even Mr. Skeptic can't argue with, that point to a direct correlation between our consciousness and earth's magnetic field."

"And before she takes it to the New Age place," Abe shot Shirley a heatless glare, "studies have shown that where earth's magnetic field is low, change happens faster. Take California for example. Where the magnetic field is high, change happens much slower. For example the bible belt."

"You could theorize then, that when the poles reverse, we could be wiping our plates clean. The patterns in the field will be released during the reversal, which could leave our consciousness open to, well..." Derek shrugged. "Whatever."

"Exactly," Shirley shot Derek a quick smile. "Add to that what could happen when we line up with the Galactic Center."

"We could get completely reprogrammed." Lucien interrupted, his brows furrowing. "But with what?"

"That's the million dollar question," Abe said, lacing his fingers together behind his head.

Simone rubbed her temples. All this scientific terminology made her want a drink. "Well, we'll find out soon enough won't we?"

THE AWAKENING

“What about your team in Piedras Negras?” Vasco asked Derek.

“They’ve found something underneath the site. We were going to join them and see about going in,” Derek said.

Vasco clucked his tongue. “Pull your team back.”

Derek blinked in surprise. Shirley and Abe shared his expression. “Sir?”

“Pull your team back for the moment, Derek. Send them to the nearest town and have them wait for further instructions,” Vasco said.

Derek frowned. “May I ask why?”

“Because if you’re right, and you have found the Cave of Creation, the Anunnaki are not going to let you get near it. We’re not ready for that move, yet. I’ve got something else for you to work on, in the meantime.”

“Wait, how do you know about the Anunnaki?” Shirley traded glances between the three Terenzios.

“We are the all-knowing.” Lucien winked.

“We wouldn’t be very good protectors if we didn’t.” Simone smiled

Abe groaned and rubbed his hands over his face. “It’s true isn’t? It’s all true. I’m going to have to stop eating red meat and go to stupid yoga classes.”

His complaint brought light chuckles from everyone but Vasco, who continued looking at Derek. "Have you ever heard of Nicholas Tesla?"

Derek nodded. "Of course."

"Later this afternoon, Robert will be here. He's bringing a semi-functional prototype of one of Tesla's designs. I need you to build six of them, and you have a little less than six months to get them fully functional."

Nicholas Tesla was a genius way ahead of his time. The Terenzios getting their hands on one of Tesla's blueprints and giving Derek's team the task to build one of his prototypes fueled the excitement in Derek's eyes. "Yes, sir."

"Utilize your other team as you need on this. When we're ready for you to go in, you'll have support and protection." Vasco held out his hand.

Derek shook it. "You got it."

June 12, 2012 - 11:21 AM

Alexandria, VA

Commonwealth Avenue

To get from downtown Alexandria to Commonwealth Avenue was a twenty minute drive. Caleb navigated the

tinted window SUV down the quaint, tree-lined streets to the two hundred block. Their destination was a large house sitting on the corner. An old chain link fence surrounded the property, and a massive oak tree dominated the front yard. Roses in full bloom wound their way around the front gate. Caleb pulled the car into the driveway and stopped in front of the closed garage door. "Don't get out."

"I have this great mental image of us walking somewhere, or doing something before Caleb tells us it's okay, and getting bum rushed by him." Lucien grinned from the back seat.

Caleb looked at them in the rearview mirror. The humor in his eyes was hidden by his sunglasses. "If you see me running at you, do me a favor and help out by hitting the ground."

"I don't know if I'm the duck and cover kind of girl. I think I'd want to shoot back," Simone mused.

"That's the Liliana in you talking." Lucien chuckled.

"If I'm running at you, just duck. We'll get around to the shooting afterwards." The garage door slowly opened. Caleb pulled the SUV inside. Once the door closed, he turned off the engine. "Now, you can get out."

Simone climbed out of the car first, just as her cell phone vibrated. She glanced down at the caller ID, and her eyes hardened.

Vasco caught her expression. "Victor?"

"Yes." She glared at the phone as if Victor could see it.

"C'mon, let me put a hit out on him. Divorce takes too long, and we've got plenty of bored assassins on the payroll," Lucien said in all seriousness.

"Are you expecting any important calls today?" Caleb asked quietly.

Simone paused, then shook her head. "No."

Caleb walked up to her, took her phone, and pressed the button to answer the call. "Mr. Russo, Simone, will be unavailable for the rest of the day. She'll call you at her earliest convenience."

"Who the hell is this?" Victor demanded.

"Miss Terenzio asks that you don't call again. If you choose to continue this harassment she'll be forced to exercise her Presidential powers. You don't want that Mr. Russo. She'll be in touch." Caleb ended the call without giving Victor a chance to respond, turned the phone off and hands it back to her.

Simone's lips twitched. "My hero."

It took a lot of self-control for Caleb to hide from Simone how that simple statement affected him. A lifetime ago, she had called him a big hero all the time. "The thousand messages he's going to leave you, I can't do anything about. Your brother's idea is solid, though."

Simone's smiled faintly. "Thank you."

Caleb walked over to the door that led into the house, knocking three times before he pushed it open. His eyes stayed on Simone, though, even as he pushed open the door. "Anytime."

Vasco watched the interaction between his sister and Caleb. Behind the natural veil of steel that hid his emotions, fond amusement lived. They would have been good for each other this lifetime, too. He would allow them a small taste of that soon, but not yet.

Tony DeMarco waited inside. Hugs were given and introductions were made.

"You DeMarcos are pretty slick, staying so close to the inside all these years," Lucien said as he took a seat at the dining room table.

"Bet your ass we are. You Terenzios aren't the only ones who can hustle people," Tony turned his laptop around to face the triplets.

"Your place?" Simone asked idly, admiring the huge china cabinet that dominated one wall of the small dining room. Across from it was a row of bay windows. The entire house had a very elegant, old feel to it, as if nothing much had been changed over its decades of existence.

"No. It was actually owned by the grandmother of a famous writer. When I need a really obscure spot for something, she lets me use it," Tony said.

“What have you got for us, Tony?” Vasco asked, pulling out one of the high-backed chairs and lowering himself into it.

“A lot, and not a lot of time. But first, I think a li'l history lesson would be pretty prudent. I doubt you were told this much by the Anunnaki when you were working with them in your last lifetime, Vasco.” Tony looked at the eldest.

Vasco shook his head. “As far as their history on this planet, no, they didn’t tell me much. But, I didn’t particularly care at the time either.”

“Figures. All right, look, a few millennia ago...”

Chapter 3

“Nothing can be more contemptible than to suppose
Public Records to be true.”

-William Blake

Before The 2nd Great Flood – Time does not exist yet
E.Den Medical Facility
Mt. Sahand

The floors glowed under the weight of his steps. His large, white wings were tucked in against his back, but easily visible over the deep purple robe that covered his muscled, flawless skin. His long black hair flowed over his shoulders. He passed through the lab's doors instead of opening them, his movement causing what looked like solid steel to ripple like water.

The entire complex was a flurry of activity, but in this lab, the organized chaos ceased. The lights were bright, but not obtrusive on their sensitive eyes. Stainless steel surfaces gleamed. Pyramid-shaped crystals sat on each table, along with rows of test tubes. At the longest table, in the center of the room, an Anunnaki stood in front of

an large touch screen, a long green finger sliding with expert familiarity over data displayed.

“Noah is on the way,” Lucifer said to Enki.

Noah was Enki’s most trusted, loyal, and intelligent creation out of thousands. A short time ago, the explosion of the planet Atlantis damaged the atmosphere of the Anunnaki’s home, Nibiru, and knocked it into a much longer orbital path around the sun. In order to sustain life on their planet, the Anunnaki had to find gold in order to create a reflective shield. The great ship Babel, which looked like two massive towers connected by a walkway through their center, was dispatched to find a planet nearby that could provide plenty of the natural resource that was scarce on Nibiru.

They found an abundance of those resources on a planet the Anunnaki called Terra. When they landed, they discovered the planet mostly uninhabited, except for a very primitive version of what they named Man. The Supreme Anunnaki Council decided they would task their geneticists with turning Man into a capable worker who could mine the gold for them.

It worked. They created them by the thousands, and after the initial bugs were worked out, gave Man the ability to reproduce. While the more war-like and dictatorial members of the Anunnaki took control of the planet’s activities, the geneticists were fascinated by the many life

forms on the planet. They dabbled and created many, many others. The varied DNA of Man, some giants as tall as the Anunnaki, others dark skinned, were all in the test tubes that surrounded Enki.

Man was given limitations in their knowledge. It was important to the ruling class of the Anunnaki that the many slaves never realize that they, too, had the capacity to be like what they had come to call their Gods.

Enki turned and nodded at Lucifer, a friend who looked so different than himself. Lucifer was an Angel. Enki, like the others of his race, was tall, with small black wings. His skin was dark green, and leather-like. His hands were more like claws, though their razor sharp points only extended in battle. His reptilian eyes were expressive, penetrating, and his serpent-like tongue often tickled his lips as he spoke. "You are sure there is a greater plan at work here?"

"Yes. I have felt it in my connection with the Source. When the flood waters clear away what has been broken, Terra will be known as Earth, and the experiment to bring spirit down into form with all the powers of creation will begin again."

"The Atlanteans attempted such a thing, and they destroyed their planet. Their race would be extinct if not for the small group that escaped and is scattered across the sands of Mars."

"It is suspected that some are on Terra as well, but no matter. Limitations are being set forth for the new souls that will inhabit the vessels we have created. For example, upon arrival into physicality, they will forget from whence they came."

Enki tapped his clawed fingers against his chin. "Your race experienced the same disconnection and look how you began."

Lucifer smiled. "A good point, but they are not us. It's necessary until the energy of the planet is high enough that creation comes through love and not fear," Lucifer said. "We will play the roles of villains, for a time."

"My family is villains."

"No." Lucifer stepped forward. "Simply misguided. They will come to understand, too, but for now, their control over what they call the Brotherhood will help ensure that humans do not ascend until they are ready."

"I hope you are right. No life should be treated as we treat them." Enki opened a large chest and waved his hand, guiding the test tubes to float into it and slide into their marked places.

"I have absolute faith in the great universal intelligence that speaks through us all, when we can listen. And if that is the plan, then it is a good plan." He patted Enki on the shoulder. "I will not see you again for quite some time, I'm afraid."

THE AWAKENING

"I will miss our conversations, Lucifer."

"So will I. We will have them again, when this grand experiment is done."

"I look forward to it. May I call upon you in my times of questions?"

"As always, brother. Namaste." Lucifer bowed to Enki before he made the door slide open this time. A young man stood in front of him, pale and dirty from his work within the mines. The human clasped his hands together, and bowed low to Lucifer when he saw him.

"Grand Master Magi," Noah whispered reverently.

Lucifer's eyes were kind as he ruffled Noah's dirty hair and continued on his way.

Enki turned as Noah appeared and motioned him closer. "My best student. I am going to task you with a burden that is far greater than any labor, or strike of the whip. But I trust no other to do it."

Once more, the young human bowed. "How may I serve you, great God?"

Enki sighed at the term. All were Gods in a sense, because all came from the Source. All had the ability to do such amazing things. The power of creation was given at birth; its use must simply be learned. "A great flood is coming, and it will kill many of your kind. Your family will be spared. I have built a great ship that will sustain you, and within that ship you must guard these." He

motioned at the chest and the test tubes contained within. "When the waters recede, you will receive a sign. After, you will follow my instruction to the letter, and spread these different life forms across the whole of your planet. Do you understand?"

Noah slowly nodded. "I will do you ask."

June 12, 2012 - 11:44 AM

Alexandria, VA

Commonwealth Avenue

"Time out. Are you telling me I've been created by some alien race?" Lucien stared at Tony.

A smirk cornered Tony's lip. "Kinda. Enki and his geneticists tinkered with Neanderthals and made Homo Sapiens Sapiens, aka Cro-Magnon. Neanderthals had the perfect body build to do the mining, but were a little too primitive to work as efficiently as the Anunnaki wanted. Without the rest of the Anunnaki knowing, Enki also created our current version, Homo Sapiens. And would you rather believe you came from a monkey?"

Vasco glanced at his brother. "He has a point. But if Enki's brother believed that the flood was to wipe out

humans entirely, how did Enki get away with continuing the species?"

"Anu, their father, was a little smarter and more in touch with the Source than anyone gave him credit for. Certain things were kept from the Anunnaki Supreme Council. When the Anunnaki returned to Earth, a few thousand Earth years had passed and civilizations were flourishing. Instead of trying to wipe them all out again, they agreed to start interfering."

"And the thirteen bloodlines were created from...?" Simone asked.

Tony glanced over at her. "There were about twenty human civilizations alive on the Earth when the Anunnaki came back. The Anunnaki visited each one, and pretty much demanded obedience or threatened extinction. Some of the first wars fought on this planet were between the races of man that chose to side with the Anunnaki and those that didn't. Enki liked helping the side that told the Anunnaki to go fuck themselves, and nuclear weapons of a sort were used. That's what the abnormal radiation levels in the Black Sea are from."

"I have a hard time wrapping my mind around Lucifer being this benevolent alien." Simone's lips twisted wryly.

Tony chuckled. "Weird, I know. But the worship of Lucifer is a lot different than the worship of Satan. At the

end of the day, it's all a fuckin' PR scam. All Freemasons, once you get into the higher degrees, become Illuminati, a.k.a enlightened. If you ask them, they'll tell you it's Christian but that's a load of B.S. They worship Luciferian ideals, and the heart of that lesson is all the metaphysical shit about the power of consciousness. "

"No wonder they've stayed in power so long. They're the only ones around controlling reality," Lucien mused, scratching his cheek. "What a con."

"Yeah, it is," Tony agreed. "And we're about to bust it wide open."

"Last question: what's a Leumerian Crystal?" Lucien asked.

"Decent question. Leumeria was the first civilization on Earth, and I'm told the first Ascension experiment."

"Atlantis wasn't the first one?" Simone quirked a brow.

Tony shook his head. "No, the second. Leumeria was the first. It didn't end quite as badly as Atlantis did, but it got wiped away by volcanic eruptions and tsunamis. The islands of Hawaii are what is left of Leumeria."

"Who made the Leumerians?" Lucien asked.

"The Pleiadians," Tony said. "They're a race primarily made of pure light, but when they take form, they kinda look like us. Except their crown chakras are so open, they always have a halo of light around their heads."

The triplets exchanged amused glances. “We’ve just got everything fucking wrong,” Lucien chuckled.

“Information is twisted on purpose, so don’t take it personally.” Tony patted him on the shoulder.

“How do you know all this Tony?” Simone asked.

“Alex. He and Enki are close.”

“How do you want us to handle this?” Vasco asked.

“There’s a lot to do, and not a lot of time.” Tony pressed a button on the computer, bringing up a map of the United States. “In six months, about half the world’s population is going to be imprisoned in FEMA controlled camps.”

The triplets blinked. Even Caleb looked surprised.

“We need your men ready to break people out of the camps when the time comes. Also, both the Club of Rome and Bohemian Grove usually have their annual parties over the summer. This year, because of the energies, they’re going to wait.”

“Pushed back to December 21, right?” Lucien asked, studying the map.

“Yeah. A great day to celebrate what they think will be their victory. Alex and I have our people ready to take care of the one in Rome. That will remove seven ruling families of the Brotherhood from form on Earth. We need you to do Bohemian Grove, and make sure that ELMINT doesn’t activate.”

Vasco raised his eyes from the screen to look at Tony. "What is ELMINT?"

"Electro Magnetic Intelligence. It looks like a big ray gun. It's going to block the surge of energy we're going to receive from the center of the Milky Way when the Galactic Alignment occurs."

"And I bet that surge of energy is what's supposed to help us humans get a clue, right?" Lucien asked.

Tony nodded. "That combined with opening the Cave of creation. You've got a lot more detail in the USB drive I'm going to leave with you."

Simone looked over at Tony. "How are you and Alex able to operate under the radar like this?"

"We've got help from Enki and his father. A few other species are helping out, too."

"More aliens up in their spaceships, huh?" Lucien shook his head.

"If you want to be ignorant and call it that."

Lucien quirked a brow. "What the fuck would I call it, then?"

"An interdimensional traveling vessel. And they're not aliens—"

Simone rolled her eyes. "Can we stop with the pronoun wars, please?"

Caleb hid a chuckle behind his hand and a forced cough.

“What? We’re already the idiots of the galaxy. I’m just trying to educate him.” Tony shrugged.

Lucien glared at Tony and rubbed his middle finger across his cheek.

Vasco studied the map on the screen. The locations of all the camps built and ready for prisoners in the U.S. were marked with red dots. A slow smile touched his lips. “Not one person I’ve put into play has been a disappointment.”

Simone smirked at her brother, before she glanced down at the map. After a moment, she started laughing lightly. “It’s no coincidence that we have SVT Offices within a twenty to thirty mile radius of these camps, is it?”

“Do you ever stop plotting or do you do that in your sleep, too?” Lucien asked

Vasco winked at his brother. “Marcello was responsible for SVT Security expansion, but Stefano might have put an idea or two in his head. We’ll handle our end, Tony.” He looked at his siblings. “Lucien, you’re on ELMINT. Simone, camps and underground bases. I’ll take care of Bohemian Grove.”

“Why does it sound like he’s got the easy job?” Lucien pulled a pack of smokes out of his suit jacket pocket.

“Because he does.” Simone reached over and stole the cigarette he shook out of the pack.

"Nobody can fail. If any point breaks down the Ascension has a real good chance of not occurring, even if your scientist get to the Cave of Creation in time." Tony cautioned.

"What exactly is the Cave of Creation?" Simone asked, leaning into the light Lucien gave her.

"Nobody knows. Well, somebody knows, but they're not telling us." Tony pulled the USB drive out of his computer and handed it to Vasco. "Here. Oh, last thing you should know, Caesar Medicci, Kayla's husband-"

"She reports to him, and he reports to you." Vasco finished for him.

Tony nodded, looking at Vasco. "You'll find this last phase of the game is just full of reincarnated souls. He's one of them. You two knew each other, Vasco."

Vasco canted his head slightly, regarding Tony in questioning silence. Then, it hit him, and with it came a full barrage of memories and emotions that thickened the steel of his eyes. Instinctively his hands balled into fists at his sides. "Roman," he growled the word.

"Yeah, Roman. Have fun with that," Tony said.

"When you've got unfinished business, you've got unfinished business." Lucien rose to his feet.

"I'm going to Denver, to give Caesar new instructions." Tony closed his laptop. "Originally, he was coming

back to the Island to have Kayla kill you three. Enki has stopped that order.”

“Does Enki’s brother know he’s stopped that order?” Vasco asked.

“Most likely. That would be a little difficult to hide.” Tony extended his hand. “We won’t meet again. Anything that comes from Alex and I now will get routed to you through Xavier.”

Simone took his hand first and leaned in to kiss his cheek. “Thank you, Tony.”

“It’s what I do sweetheart.” Tony returned her kiss, then hugged Lucien and Vasco.

Minutes later, the triplets were back inside the SUV, and Caleb was taking them to the private airfield outside of Crystal City.

“I like how we’re not only saving the world, but attempting to not get murdered by our family before we pull it off,” Lucien mused, staring out the window. “It really pisses me off that Amadeo and Olivia are on the wrong side.”

“Do you know how they got there?” Simone looked over at him.

Lucien slowly shook his head. “I wish I did.”

The Past

*"You grit your teeth, and you bear it.
Because you are a Terenzio first."*

-Liliana Terenzio

Chapter 4

“There’s little difference in my world between business and personal; just levels of disclosure.”

-Stefano Vasco Terenzio

August 23, 1927 - 10:10 AM

Boston, MA

Coffee House

I hear police are going to be doubled at the execution.”

Stefano Vasco Terenzio, Crime Boss of the Terenzio Family, lifted cold gray eyes to Ciro Anatoli, his closest friend and former bodyguard. Ciro primarily guarded Stefano’s wife, because Stefano had lost him to her in a bet. For this particular assignment, Ciro was on loan. “It doesn’t change what needs to be done. They’re better off working for me than dead. And I want to catch the eye of the Galleanists.” Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were Italian immigrants falsely convicted on charges of robbery and murder. They were also members of the Galleanists, a militant Italian-American anarchist group. They were set to be executed tomorrow.

Ciro nodded, crushing out his cigarette in the small round ashtray on the wrought iron table. "Just letting you know. Hey, where's Nina?" Nina was the new bodyguard that Stefano frequently went without.

Stefano leaned back in his chair, bringing the small coffee cup with him. "She'll be arriving later this afternoon with Lil and Zhane."

"Who's Zhane?"

"New guy. Primarily Air Force, but I needed the extra hands and want to see what he can handle." Stefano raised the rim of the coffee mug to his mouth, swallowing down the caffeine boost.

"How's Lil doing?" Ciro slung his arm over the back of his chair turning slightly to watch all the legs that walked by the outdoor café.

"She'll be fine. She usually is, even when she doesn't think so."

Ciro chuckled. "You shoulda been a philosopher or some shit, Stef."

The flicker of amusement softened Stefano's face. He opened his mouth to respond, but something struck him mute. Through the thin crowd he caught sight of a young man with a head full of black hair, his mother's strong aristocratic features, and as he came closer Stefano saw, piercing gray eyes.

"Stef?" Ciro looked at his friend curiously.

“Stay here,” Stefano nearly dropped his coffee mug on the table. Standing quickly, and forgetting his cane, he hopped over the small railing that separated the café from the sidewalk and pursued the young target, limping heavily. A block later, the opportunity Stefano was looking for presented itself. He bumped into the young man and kept his head lowered. His deft, thieving fingers pulled the young man’s wallet from the inside of his coat. Stefano’s target never noticed; he simply continued on his way.

Stefano did not pursue him any farther. He walked back the way he’d come, and flipped open the wallet, looking down at the photo identification inside. It was the name that made his steps suddenly halt.

Marcello Adams.

The address below confirmed what he already knew and thrust Stefano into a piece of his past that he rarely thought about anymore. It was the now, and more importantly the future, that most concerned him. The past was full of memories of his abusive father, of doing what he could to protect Lil from the bastard, of teaching himself the ways of the world; and how to manipulate it.

But there had been moments, though few, which reminded him of his humanity.

"If we ever have a son, let's name him Marcello." She propped her head in her hand to look up at him, tracing idle patterns over his chest.

He couldn't help but be amused at her gentle naïveté. She wouldn't last a day in his world. "Let's try to get through the week, first."

"We will," she said. "They won't find me here. And I hope they never do."

He knew better. They would find her, eventually, and even if her grandparents didn't track her down, he would never let her stay. There were different levels—depths—to innocence. He had already taken one from her. He wouldn't take any more. He framed her face in his hands, guiding her up to his waiting mouth. "For once, Miss Adams, I don't want to think about the future."

"You suddenly had the desire to steal someone's wallet?" *Ciro asked in a highly amused tone when Stefano came back.*

His friend's voice snapped Stefano back to the present. He removed the photo ID, and dropped the wallet and a few silver dollars on the table. "Let's go."

August 30, 1927 - 12:21 AM

THE AWAKENING

St. Martin Parish, Louisiana

Blackwood Swamps

His cane struck the old floors rhythmically as Stefano walked into the dimly lit cottage, nestled among the swamp. She was sitting by the window, talking to herself, which was nothing unusual for Gypsy. Seth, his cousin and her husband, was not home, yet. Stefano tossed the photo identification on the table in front of her.

“Tell me, Gypsy.”

She looked at the picture, then at Stefano and giggled. “You know.”

He did know, but confirmation forced the heavy breath from his lungs. His son. “Can he be my heir?”

She canted her head at him, almost curiously. “Can he?”

It required a great deal of patience to pull information from Gypsy’s brilliant, but utterly crazy, mind; the price she paid for knowing what she did he supposed. Not that he cared, so long as he got the information. “If I continue on this path, will he accept my invitation?”

She focused on him in a moment of great clarity and said, very seriously: “Only if you are not on that path, Stefano.” Just as quickly as the moment came it was gone, lost by the noise of another boat approaching. Gypsy smiled. “Seth Frost is home!” She jumped out of her chair

and scrambled to the door, launching herself at it just as it opened. Thankfully, his reflexes were quick. It also helped that he had learned to expect it. Seth (last name not Frost but the reason she called him that was another story entirely) wrapped his arms tightly around her.

Stefano remained standing, lost in his thoughts. *Only if he wasn't on that path.* This meant he could finish with the foundation. Line up the pieces where he wanted them. Then, let his family, his son, take the next step.

Without him.

Stefano lifted his hands, the fingers of one twisting the wedding band on the other. His only regret would be leaving her.

November 17, 1935 - 11:11 AM

New Orleans, LA

SVT Securities Office

"I need a favor, Alexandro." Stefano stood in front of the glass windows overlooking the Central Business District of New Orleans.

"I'm listening." Louisiana Governor Alexandro De-Marco sat at the conference table. Scented smoke from Alex's cigar slithered into the air.

THE AWAKENING

The DeMarcos were longtime friends of the Terenzios. For Stefano and his wife, intimately so. Alexandro looked like a southern politician with short, salt and pepper hair combed neatly back, and warm blue eyes. He was wearing his favorite dark blue, three piece, pinstriped suit. The watch his wife, Mona, had given him for his fiftieth birthday sat on a gold chain in his vest pocket underneath the suit jacket. Despite the fact that certain areas of law enforcement and business were manipulated to make it easier for his brother Antonio, the current Don of the DeMarco crime family, to do business, Alexandro was a well-liked governor. He'd beaten Huey P. Long for the spot without tampering with the votes.

"I love my family, like you love yours. It's time I stepped back from things. I'm being hunted, and I don't want the cross hairs to fall on the wrong people."

Alexandro studied Stefano's back. "This conversation is over, Stefano, until you're ready to cease with the bullshit."

Amusement flickered across Stefano's face as he turned away from the window, looking at Alexandro. "You know, I've always said if there was a better man, and meant it, it would be you."

Alexandro was not fazed by the compliment. "Both in and out of your bedroom. Let's have it."

A smirk settled over Stefano's lips as he walked around the table and settled into one of the leather chairs. "You know about the sensitive nature of the weapon I acquired?"

"Si."

"I need you to hold onto it until after the transition. You'll know when it's time to return it to my family."

Alexandro studied him in silence, before he finally asked: "Why, Stefano?" He was not referring to the weapons.

"Because it's time."

"You are more of a bastard than I gave you credit for. You know the state you will leave her in with this move."

Stefano's eyes narrowed. "She will go there whether I am around or not. We both know that."

Alexandro cocked his head. "You'll give up everything, purely for ego?"

Stefano shot out of his chair, stabbing his index finger towards the table. "I will die to see my will done. And it will be done." He took a step closer to the man he considered a friend. "And do not presume I take anything lightly, or that I don't love her more than this game. This is bigger than me, bigger than us. If it doesn't play out to our advantage, neither of our families will be left standing."

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Alexandro stared at him in thoughtful silence. He nodded, almost imperceptibly. "We will safeguard the weapon for you. Until it's time."

Stefano nodded once. "Thank you, Alexandro."

For two days, Stefano remained locked away in the SVT Building. As the sun began to set over the Big Easy, it was finished. He could do no more. He drew a tired hand over his unshaven jaw and closed the leather bound journal. The letter tucked inside the envelope. His journal, along with two other letters, would be delivered at a later date. He was going home to his wife to face that beautiful wrath he was sure to get for being unavailable for the last forty-eight hours.

Stefano collected his suit jacket and fedora off the back of the door. He set the hat on his head and flicked off lights as he left. He slid on the suit jacket as he got into the elevator, stabbed the button for the ground floor, and pulled out his Marlboros. He shook one out and set it between his lips, the sterling Dunhill lighter he'd stolen from his wife cradled in his palm as he waited for the ding.

When he stepped into the lobby that was surrounded by glass doors Stefano paused. For several moments, he

simply stood there, watching the thin crowd pass by. Eventually, he brought the flame to life and lit the cigarette. A long, satisfying pull was drawn in as he tucked the lighter back into his pocket. He straightened the sleeves of his suit jacket. Then, he walked outside.

A nondescript, average man came through the crowd of harmless people walking down the street and stumbled right into Terenzio. The assassin's hand came out of his pocket, a .22 held expertly in his palm. The muzzle came up with unerring speed, pressed at Terenzio's chest. The next sound was that of a gunshot.

Stefano could have prevented it. He could have let Seth take the assassin out weeks ago when he had been spotted.

Only if you are not on that path, Stefano.

He didn't fight it. The sharp, echoing boom that startled the unknowing sheep on the street brought forth a sudden heat, and then searing, debilitating pain. Stefano's hands shot up, fingers clutching the front of the assassin's shirt as he met the eyes of his murderer and whispered: "I know."

Two strong arms caught the staggering Terenzio, the gun gone as quickly as it had appeared. The assassin even managed to paint an expression of concern on his face, though when his eyes caught and locked with Stefano's, they were laughing. How hard the mighty fall. The

THE AWAKENING

assassin stepped backwards as Stefano toppled to the pavement. As the crowd began to gather around the dying man, he melted into it, thinking how pleased Mrs. Adams would be.

Stefano couldn't get his breath. His vision became fuzzy, darkness rapidly crawling from the edges. The shouts of the crowd around him faded until there was nothing but silence. His arms shook, the strength to hold his weight failing.

It was one fight Stefano would not win.

His chest hit the pavement, staining it crimson. The fading sunlight caught on the gold of his wedding band; the last thing he saw. For him, it had been enough.

June 21, 1974 - 4:44 PM

Alcyone Island

Bazaar

*Marcello Terenzio, head of the Terenzio family, leaned against the concrete pillar with his arms folded over his suited chest. He moved through the Dion Corp Empire like a ghost. To the underworld that his family controlled, he didn't exist. The deception had allowed him to manipulate situations from afar for decades. That

never made him less busy, or sought-after by key people. No one bothered him right now, though, and he was glad; because after telling his wife that morning that he would be too busy to wander around the Bazaar with her that afternoon, there he was; waiting.

Seconds later, the doors opened, and Marilyn stepped through them, with her purse hanging from the crook of her arm and her eyes fixed on the sheaf of papers in her hand. The warm light of the afternoon caught in the waves of her blonde hair, filling the age-lightened strands with youthful color. It was a different light, however, that came into her face and brightened her eyes when she glanced up and saw her husband. Marilyn's smile deepened the lines around her mouth and brought to life a faint webbing of wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. "I thought your afternoon was booked?"

Thirty some odd years later, Marcello still felt a little like a boy with an insane crush when his wife smiled at him. Uncoiling from his stance, he stepped into her. "It is. But I knew your husband wouldn't be around." He brushed her cheek with his thumb and kissed her. "I haven't ditched a meeting in a while. I was due."

The light danced in the blue-green of Mari's eyes, like the reflection of light on water. "He won't be. Not for another..." She checked the watch on her wrist. "Three hours, at least." Her smile widened into a faint grin.

"Is that right?" Marcello matched her grin. Lowering his hands to her waist, he pulled her closer so he could kiss her again.

Grin deepening in the heartbeat before his mouth met hers, she closed her eyes and caught his face between her hands, wrinkling the documents she had been studying just seconds before.

Marcello lingered in the warm, familiar taste of her mouth, earning lowered smiles from a few of the never-ending stream of employees that flowed in and out of the building. Easing back, he kissed the tip of her nose. "What are you putting on the American Express card today?"

Marilyn's nose wrinkled affectionately. "I haven't decided, yet. I thought I would wander up and down the aisles and see what jumps out at me." She glanced away long enough to stow the papers in her purse.

"Now that sounds exciting." There was teasing in Marcello's feigned excitement. He took her hand in his own. "You know, there are better things we can do with a quiet afternoon."

"There are," Mari agreed, threading her fingers through his. Her grin resurfaced. "But if you're ditchin' all of your meetings, then you and I have the rest of the day to do those better things. The bazaar closes at seven."

"Fine. I'll just drag you down a deserted alley like we were in our twenties again." Marcello just might have been serious.

"Let's try not to get caught this time."

Marcello laughed, shaking his head in sheer amusement at the memory of the last time a healthy dose of lust had over taken them in public. "The expression on that man's face was priceless."

Mari laughed with him and rubbed a hand over her cheek. "I think it took a day or two for the red to come out of my cheeks."

"That near permanent blush suited you." Clear affection lit Marcello's eyes.

"Suited you, maybe." Mari dug him good-naturedly in the ribs. "As if it wasn't bad enough that I couldn't get rid of it, but whenever someone asked me about it, it burned up into my ears and went a darker shade of red."

That did nothing to prevent another round of laughter. "I still say that wasn't the worst. The near catch in the elevator; now that could have been a disaster."

Mari laughed again—she could, in hindsight—and wrapped her hand around Marcello's arm, giving it an affectionate squeeze. "Oh, I wouldn't have been able to look those people in the eye for a month."

Humor made the corners of Marcello's eyes crinkle. "It would have been my fault. You did warn me. But then

again, I never seem to be able to help myself.” He pressed a kiss into her hair.

“You’re about as good at not bein’ able to help yourself as I am at denying you.” She smiled up at him, her eyes glittering, and glanced out over the bazaar with its bustling, open stalls and charming blend of island authenticity and Alcyone tourism. It was one of Marilyn’s favorite places. Tightening her fingers around Marcello’s as she made her decision, she led them into the closely-packed aisles of the food vendors. A slow smile curved Marcello’s mouth as he watched his wife. “I had lunch with Kayla today.”

Marilyn chatted amicably with the locals, asking after family members and loved ones and the well-being of dogs and goats and the occasional chicken. The man from whom she had been buying fresh eggs for the last twelve years had just finished updating her on the condition of his favorite spotted hen when Marcello spoke. Mari paused, glancing up at her husband, and tucked her carton of newly purchased eggs beneath her arm. “How did that go?”

“It was... fun.” It had only been recently that Marcello had stopped being so much of a ghost in Kayla’s life and attempted to get to know her; or at, least the face she showed them. Marcello found it difficult to stop the faint

smile that touched his mouth. “She has your stubborn look.”

Neither could Mari stop the small, pleased smile that settled along her mouth. Kayla's existence—and now presence—had been trying, to say the very least, but Kayla was Marilyn's daughter. She was Marilyn's flesh and blood. Marilyn knew her in ways that no one else did, and she was connected to Kayla in ways that no one else would ever be. It pleased Marilyn that she had passed some of herself into the child that had been a stranger to her for so long. “It's funny how you bring that look out in both of us, don't you think?” she teased.

“I just have that effect on the women in my life.” Marcello winked, his smile deepening.

SVT Construction was in the process of building a parking garage across the street. The lot was half finished. It was from the second level, absent of construction workers that had called an early day, the assassin set his eye in the scope.

“You love every minute of it, too.” Mari stepped into Marcello, lifting onto the tips of her toes to kiss his cheek, and slipped her arm through his. The dry, cloying scent of fresh herbs and heavy, fragrant spices drew her further down the aisle, and she stopped a stall laden with sacks of seeds, leaves, and finely ground powders. Mari

peered at the selection. "What did the two of you talk about?"

"Where she wanted to go to college, and whether or not she wanted to join the company afterwards." His mouth twitched. "The conversations that our son tried to avoid."

The assassin curled his finger around the trigger. The scope made a bull's-eye over his target's chest. He held his breath.

Mari sifted her fingers through a mound of fennel seeds and smiled over her shoulder. "What did she say? Is she going to follow your footsteps to Harvard?"

"She's considering it." The whole conversation had amused Marcello. Since coming into his father's world, one of empires and crime, the time of his life spent in typical academia often felt like it happened to someone else. "I told her I'd come when the two of you fly out to Boston to take a firsthand look."

"I'll make the arrangements, then. And after the official tour of the campus, you can give us the real tour."

The assassin, Matthew DeMarco, could wait no longer. He squeezed the trigger, just once. He didn't bother to stick around to see if he'd hit his mark; he knew he had. Marilyn Pearl-Terenzio would die. Abandoning the gun, Matthew turned around and jogged away.

Passing on the spices for now, she smiled at the young woman behind the stall, thanking her for her time through that simple gesture, and turned toward Marcello--but halfway through that turn, she jerked back. Behind her, a fine red mist that she couldn't see burst into the air. Marilyn's mouth opened, but no sound came out. Her brows furrowed, confusion and shock seeping into her features. She glanced down and saw blood welling in a round, perfectly formed hole in the front of her shirt. "Marcello...?" Her legs gave out, and she sagged against him.

There had been moments in his life when he felt like the world was giving way beneath his feet. But nothing, *nothing* was as horrifically surreal as the moment he realized his wife had been shot. Shock spread across his face, his eyes dropping towards her chest that was rapidly staining red. No. "Mari?" He stepped into her, catching her weight in his arms. No. No. No. "Mari? Baby?" That smooth, calm voice was suddenly frantic. He sank to his knees and pulled her back from him so he could see her wound. The world didn't give; it shattered. He snapped his eyes up to the woman behind the stall. "Call an ambulance! Now! Tell them Isis is down. Do it!" For security purposes, Isis had been his wife's code name. After a shocked pause the woman ran off to find the MP Officer that was stationed somewhere in the crowd.

THE AWAKENING

Mari dug her fingers into his shirt, holding herself up as she drew a deep breath. It made a wet, bubbling sound and hitched in her chest. She coughed, and when she took her hand from her mouth saw that it was spotted with dark red blood. “Marcello...”

“Mari, stay with me.” He pulled her closer and touched her cheek, his eyes desperate and pleading. His voice cracked. He could feel the tears, wet and cool, rolling down his cheeks. “Don’t leave me. *You can’t leave me.* I can’t do this without you.”

Marilyn’s breath came in shorter, desperate gasps. She brought her blood stained hand to his face, “It’s okay,” she whispered. “I love you, Marcello. Kayla... love... K-” Her hand slipped off his cheek.

When those beautiful, expressive aquamarine eyes went blank, Marcello was deathly still. When reality swiped its cold, feral claws through his heart, he wanted nothing more than to join her, because surely, he couldn’t live with this pain. “Mari?” he whispered, and heard nothing. Gripping her to him tighter, Marcello’s silent tears became a heart-wrenching scream.

June 22, 1974 - 12:12 AM

Alcyone Island

CRYSTAL STORM

Farmhouse of Marcello and Marilyn

The silence was thick. It's presence a weight, staining the air. Marcello sat in his wife's drawing room, facing the garden. She loved sketching. Her drawings were everywhere. He could almost still feel her; see her curled up in her chair in front of the window with pad and pencil in hand.

Fourteen years ago, he had learned a few truths about the world. Those truths weren't all about the evil that thirteen men and their alien masters did. Some were spiritual in nature and fascinating in their concepts. Some had amazing potential to be proven one day. One of them concerned death. Death was not the absence of life; it was a transformation of form. It sounded great. Until they took Mari away from him.

Marcello closed his eyes against the fierce, painful assault the thought brought. The reality of it crushed his heart; an intense, choking pressure from which there was no escape. The Brotherhood had done this. He knew it was *Them*. Marilyn Terenzio was not a woman with enemies. The strike had been personal.

He was not young anymore. He was sixty-one years old. They had been married for thirty-one years, and it wasn't enough. He didn't want to hear *at least you had that long*. If anyone said that to him, they were going to eat a

bullet. He shouldn't have to live without her. It felt... wrong. He didn't *want* to live without her. How could he walk the line that he had to walk without her there to keep him from the darkness? How could he be a father to their children, look into the eyes and faces of the lives that carried a very tangible, visual piece of her, and not fall apart?

Marcello's hand clenched into a fist that he pressed against his chest. He had spent the last fourteen years collecting information; learning what They controlled, how They controlled it, where their weak points were. It hadn't been that difficult, once he knew where to look. For fourteen years, he sat on that information, allowing his uncle to play the game as his father instructed, biding his time because Matthew DeMarco had told him that his was a higher purpose.

A higher purpose that, right now, Marcello didn't give a fuck about. They were sorely mistaken if they thought that he would just accept this transgression without consequence. Marcello shot to his feet, went into the darkened living room and snatched up the phone. He stabbed the buttons.

"Joey, Marcello. Meet me in my office first thing tomorrow morning-"

A scream pierced the silence of the house. Marcello's eyes jerked to the ceiling.

Kayla.

"Tomorrow morning, Joey," Marcello said before he dropped the phone back into the cradle and went jogging up the stairs. He pushed open the door to Kayla's room. Mari's daughter was sitting up in her bed, her hands clenched in her long, blonde hair. Kayla frequently suffered from nightmares. The things the Brotherhood did to her left their mark, the demons of the past given free rein in the shadows of her dreams. Mari was the one to calm her when this happened, but Mari wasn't here anymore. Heart twisting, Marcello snapped on the dim light on Kayla's nightstand, and sat down on the edge of her bed.

Kayla wasn't his daughter. She was an enemy sent to kill him. But the only thought that filled Marcello's head as he looked at her tortured face was that she was *Mari's* daughter. "Shh, Kayla, I'm here." She was trembling. Marcello found her hands and pulled them away from her hair. Kayla jerked when he touched her, snapping frantic eyes up to his. She stared at him in the silence, uncertainty written across her features. Slowly, Marcello drew her against him, wrapping his arms protectively around her.

At first, she resisted. After a moment, she sank into him, burrowing into his chest, and let her tears come, open and ragged. They soaked into his shirt. "They got Mom. They got Mom," she whispered, barely audible.

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Marcello heard her. He wondered if Kayla had any idea what she was whispering, or if she was still too caught up in the scary place between a bad dream and a reality that might have been no better. Swallowing back the lump in his throat, he kissed the top of his step-daughter's head, and simply held her. "I'm here, Kayla. I'm here." He wouldn't tell her it was all right, because it wasn't. But, one way or another, he'd make it even.

Chapter 5

“We Terenzios are always pushing. Sometimes, we go too far.”

-Liliana Terenzio

June 22, 1974 - 7:44 AM

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Headquarters

Marcello, stop and think.” High above Alcyone on the 52nd floor of the Dion Corporation building, Joey “The Mouth” Terenzio stood in front of Marcello’s desk. “It’s not time to start the war. That isn’t your job.”

Marcello stood with his back to his younger cousin, staring out at the island paradise below. “They killed, Mari, Joey.” His voice was sharp. Anger hid the nearly overwhelming pain.

“Yeah, yeah, I know they did.” Joey’s voice gentled. “But if you start this tit for tat, you know what’s gonna happen. It aint time yet.”

“They took something very precious from.” Marcello slowly turned around. “I will not let that slide.”

“Marc, you do this now you fuck it up for the future, and you know it.” Joey frowned, albeit gently at him. “You’re pivotal. What we are doing right now is pivotal for your grandchildren. You gotta think about them, too.”

Rational thinking led him to the truth of Joey’s words. His purpose was simple; prepare his family for the Ascension. Stay off the radar, move the pieces into place so when the time came, checkmate would be inevitable. Except, he didn’t feel rational, because a short thirty-six hours ago, his wife died in his arms.

“Vengeance won’t bring her back. And it won’t take the pain away,” Joey said.

“No, it won’t.” His eyes darkened. “But it will make me feel better.”

Joey frowned. Marcello wasn’t going to let this go, and to be honest, he truly couldn’t blame him. Nobody got away with fucking with family, period. “I think I’ve got something. It won’t take you to Mari’s killer, but if you want to take a swing at them, this is it.”

“I’m listening.”

“I think I found Dr. Joseph Mengele.”

Dr. Mengele was the man who programmed Kayla against them. “Where?”

“Ridgecrest, California. And it just so happens I’ve got to be in LA anyway to stick my foot in Jimmy Regace’s

ass.” Jimmy Regace was the crime boss in LA. “How about you tag along and get some aggression out?”

Marcello nodded once. “We’ll go after the funeral.”

“You got it, boss.”

June 26, 1974 - 10:10 PM

Ridgecrest, CA

Home of Joseph Mengele

Marcello sat at Dr. Mengele’s desk. Around him, three SVT Security Agents swept the house, making sure it was empty. He didn’t want to be interrupted when the good doctor and his wife came home.

Marcello flipped open the planner, scanning the appointments listed. Finding nothing he wanted in there, he pushed the chair back and looked down at the drawers. A small label, in the upper left-hand corner on the bottom drawer read: *Mannequin*. Mannequin was the program Kayla had been part of. Apparently, Mengele was not concerned about his wife becoming curious and rifling through his desk. Marcello pulled at the drawer and found it locked. He stood up, motioning one of his agents over to him. “Open it. The other two drawers too.”

“Yes, sir.”

THE AWAKENING

It took the agent two minutes to pick the lock. Marcello sat back down in the doctor's chair and started pulling out folders. Mengele was extremely organized. His notes on the Project were incredibly detailed—and horrific. Project Mannequin was started by the NSA on underground bases in Britain. The objective of the Project was to create a better kind of espionage agent and assassin; one that would last longer mentally and not be plagued by issues of conscience. They experimented in creating these agents by using forms of mind control and genetic manipulation programming. Joseph Mengele was an expert in trauma-based mind control.

The ideal patient was five years old or younger. To properly program the mind, first, it needed to shatter. This was done by systematically traumatizing the child, using such means as burying them alive with snakes, or taking them to the edge of death, just to revive them. Once the mind shattered into fragments, each child could be programmed for a different use. Sometimes, an electromagnetic grid was incorporated into the brain to assist with programming. It was called the Mengele Grid.

The more Marcello read, the more nauseated and furious he became, until his hand nearly shook. That a government that claimed to be a democracy would do that to children—to people—was as disgusting as it was infuriating. Forcing himself to calm, Marcello set the

doctor's general notes aside and moved to the section marked *Patients*, organized by month and year. He selected the date Kayla would have been involved, and found her folder to be one of the thickest in the drawer.

Like most of the other folders on the doctor's "patients," there were tape recordings, photographs, and pages upon pages of notes. It was an envelope marked *From Deucalion* that made Marcello catch his breath. Deucalion was Kayla's biological father, the man who had raped and drugged Marilyn so that she had forgotten it ever happened. That bomb had been dropped on their world nearly twenty years ago. Marcello had tracked Deucalion down and Marilyn had killed him. Deucalion's head was sitting in the cellar underneath the Governor's Mansion on the Island, next to a few of Marcello's father's enemies that had pushed SVT too far.

February 17st, 1957

Doctor Mengele,

I hope you are still finding America to your liking. We're very pleased to have you as the lead scientist of a program that is so important to the

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future of the World. We're not so much different from Hitler, are we?

I have learned that your blood testing shows despite my rendezvous with Marilyn Pearl-Terenzio, I was unsuccessful in impregnating her. This would lead us to conclude that unless Marilyn was a whore, and I don't believe she was, Marcello must be Kayla's father. Considering our plans for our subject, I find her true heritage almost poetic. Regardless, I want you to proceed as planned. I never really thought of her as my daughter anyway, just a means to an end.

Keep me updated on your progress.

Regards,
Deucalion

"Ghost Team, come in." Joey's voice came in through their two-way radios. "Subject has left the restaurant. They're on their way to you."

The answering response from the Senior SVT Agent was a distant buzz compared to the sudden roar in

Marcello's head. Kayla was *his* daughter. For moments, Marcello couldn't get his breath.

Kayla's appearance on his and Mari's doorstep had put such a strain on their marriage. He had been distant and moody for the first few months, and when with his family, he worn the veil that he never showed his wife. Mari had always been able to look at him and really see him; not so, those first few months with Kayla. He'd worn it because he was a man, not a saint, and Kayla was a constant reminder of an enemy, despite the fact that she was his wife's daughter. She hadn't been *his* daughter.

Slowly, he'd begun to get around that. His wife had demanded it in her own firm but gentle way, and she had a habit of bringing out the best in him. So, he stopped ignoring and got to know Kayla. There was still a child underneath all that programming, and Marcello had come to care about Kayla more than he would admit.

After all that, to find out Kayla really was his, *theirs*, Marcello felt the world give out beneath him for the second time in his life. He tunneled the fingers of one hand back through his hair and continued flipping through her file. Kayla didn't just have her mother's fiery spirit, but a Terenzios, too. According to Mengele's notes, she had been resistant to her programming. Hence, it had taken fourteen instead of twelve years for her to appear. A single tear slipped down Marcello's cheek as his rage

overwhelmed him. They had taken his daughter and programmed her against him. They had committed unspeakable acts against her for fourteen years, things no child should ever have to endure. Marcello saw red. He felt like he was going to snap, slip into the darker side of his nature and never come out. Terenzios played the game so effectively because they walked that proverbial line between good and evil. They could dance over to either side at any point of their choosing. Sometimes, the darkness called louder than the light, and it was important for a Terenzio to have someone in their lives to pull them back. Aunt Lil had Kyle for example. He used to have Mari.

“Sir, he’s home,” one of the Senior SVT Agents said.

Marcello snapped his gaze up. Right now, he didn’t care if he ever saw the light again. Leaving the file open on the desk, he walked out of the office. His Agents were positioned in the kitchen, on either side of the garage door, where the doctor and his wife would come into the house.

“Stop being silly, dear. Mrs. Kesiers just had a bad week, that’s all.” They were speaking in German. Mengele’s wife walked in first. The Agent on the other side of the door grabbed her by the arm and slapped his hand over her mouth, muffling her scream.

"I don't care. She's snotty, and condescending and—" Mengele stepped through the doorway, then immediately halted. His eyes widened when they came to rest on Marcello, and he whispered in a strongly accented voice: "You... How did you....?"

Marcello's answer was to ram his knuckles into the older man's jaw. He grabbed Mengele by the front of his shirt and dragged him over to the stove. "Your cologne is interesting." Marcello's tone was dangerously quiet. "Now, I understand why Kayla called you the man with the funny smell."

Mengele's eyes widened in shock at that revelation, but quickly narrowed with indignation. Blood stained the corner of his mouth. "What do you want?" he demanded.

Marcello turned the electric burner to high. He put his hand against the back of the doctor's head and bent him over, holding Mengele's face mere inches away from the heat. Mrs. Mengele began to cry. "Is Kayla my daughter? Is it true?"

At first, Mengele said nothing, but once the heat began blistering his skin, he shouted: "Yes! Yes! She's yours!"

The rage that coursed through Marcello made his body tremble. He leaned close and whispered in

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Mengele's ear: "You know what I want? I want you to scream."

July 4, 1974 - 4:11 PM

Washington, D.C.

Home of the Vice President of the U.S.

Fury rode every step Julian Terenzio took. His nephew, Dominiceo—Dom Jr., one of Liliana's twin children—followed alongside of him. Two Secret Service Agents escorted them into the office of the Vice President of the United States.

"What have you done?" Julian demanded without preamble. The door clicked shut behind them. Dom Jr. stood behind his uncle. His eyes were as sharp and angry as Julian's tone.

Three men sat in the room. Two had full heads of white hair. The other had a dramatically receding hairline. They all shared aristocratic features. They were bluebloods. Men who could trace their ancestry back centuries to the Pharaohs of Egypt and the kings of Greece. Well, two of them could. The third wore his humanity as a disguise. Look close enough and an Anunnaki could be identified by the cold, piercing depth of their black eyes;

the kind found on the Vice President of the United States, who stood from his arm chair and focused those eyes on Julian.

“Those are harsh words coming from a slave,” the Vice President said.

Julian didn’t back down. Instead, he stepped forward. The tip of his brother’s walking cane struck the wooden floor. “It wasn’t a statement. It was a question, and a fair one. What have you done to my nephew? I can’t fulfill my end of our arrangement if you’re sidestepping me.”

The Vice President looked away from Julian and at the two men sitting beside him. The one with the receding hairline was the president of the RAND Corporation, the Illuminati’s eastern hemisphere think tank. The other was a member of the British royal family and gave orders to the Black Nobility, the European Union’s small, personal army and assassins. “Would you excuse us, please?” The men nodded, set their glasses down, and without so much a glance at Julian or Dom, left.

Only the Secret Service agents, who were Grey aliens in disguise, remained. They stood motionless by the door. The Vice President looked back at Julian. “We haven’t done anything to Marcello. Yet.”

Julian frowned. “It’s a simple fucking question. Answer it.”

The Vice President smiled. What it lacked in warmth it made up for with its mocking edge. He reached up and straightened Julian's tie. "I don't think you've been so loyal all these years. And I don't think your brother was, either."

"Excuse me?" Julian batted the alien's hand from him. "Who killed Kennedy for you? Me. Who was running the LSD and providing the hookers the CIA needed to conduct operation Midnight Climax? Us." Midnight Climax was a CIA program to test the effects of LSD. Prostitutes lured their johns to a specific hotel and slipped their clients an LSD Mickey. "If I went down the list of the things we've done for you, we'd age another fucking year, so don't feed me bullshit."

The Vice President left his hand in mid-air as it was batted away. "Yes, you've done very well at doing what we ask, but your loyalty is tainted by your ulterior motives, so don't play these games with me anymore."

"You got some proof of this?" Dom Jr. asked. "Or did you suddenly decide to fuck with your best bulldog?"

The Vice President pulled a folded envelope from inside his suit jacket. He flipped open the lip and removed a letter soft with wrinkles. He read out loud: "Julian. There's something I've never shared with you, something that you are not to share with Lil or Carissa. The burden of this secret, for now, will be yours."

Julian's fingers tightened imperceptibly on the handle of the cane. "Where did you get that?"

The Vice President lifted his eyes from the letter and nodded at the Greys. One of them walked out of the room. The Grey returned moments later with the Dominic, Carissa's youngest son. Dominic's familiar gray gaze was hard, but a flicker of remorse lived within its depths.

Julian blinked, and then his eyes narrowed. "What have you done?"

"He's picked a side Julian. Something you're going to have to do," the Vice President said with a callous smile.

"You rat bastard," Dom Jr. hissed.

"Fuck you," Dominic spat defensively. "How could you keep a secret like this from the rest of us? Why didn't you allow us all choose which way the family should go? We should honor the deals made. You don't bite the hand that feeds you."

"I can forgive Stefano's ambition. And you've been a good lap dog in his place." The Vice President interjected calmly. "We've done our part to ensure that the possible future that our Seers have predicted doesn't come to pass. Your job, Julian, is to go home and rein in Marcello. Make sure he drops any sort of quest against the Anunnaki or the Roshaniya."

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Julian stared at Carissa's son for a long, impenetrable moment. Finally, he leveled his eyes on the Anunnaki. "No."

The Vice President's brow subtly arched. "Excuse me?"

"You heard me. I won't do your dirty work anymore," Julian said, simply.

The Vice President looked over at Dom Jr. "And you?"

Dom pulled his furious gaze from his cousin and looked at the Anunnaki. "I stand with my uncle."

"Leave us, Dominic," the Vice President said.

Dominic's eyes flicked back and forth between his uncle and his cousin. "Don't do this. It doesn't have to go down like th—"

"You heard him, Dominic." Julian looked at his nephew for the last time. "Get the fuck outta here. And I pray to God your mother never knows that only one of her sons had a life worthy of her maiden name."

Dominic's jaw trembled, and his fists visibly shook. He stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

He was standing in the hallway, trying to let his Uncles words roll off his back, when the screaming started.

July 6, 1974 - 9:11 AM

Alcyone Island

CRYSTAL STORM

Dion Corporation Headquarters

Not many people knew that a very important office could be found on the 52nd floor of the Dion Corporation building. Fewer still knew whose offices it was. That made the box delivered strange in and of itself, but it took Marcello mere seconds to realize who would have sent it to him.

Security had done their checks on it and determined it was safe to open. Marcello pulled the letter opener off his desk and cut the tape loose. When he pulled the lid open, his eyes widened at the grotesque sight that greeted him. "Oh, my God."

"Isabella, I am deeply, deeply sorry." Marcello squatted in front of his younger cousin's chair. He covered her tightly clenched hands.

Dom Jr., her brother, was dead. Inside the box delivered to Marcello's office just hours ago was his head and Uncle Julian's.

Matteo stood at the window, his eyes slowly leaking silent tears. "Who did this Marcello?" he demanded quietly.

Isabella pressed trembling fingers against her mouth, a single tear escaping from the corner of her eye, before

the veil of control was found. At Matteo's question, she brought those eyes to Marcello, silently asking the same.

Marcello glanced over at Matteo, then back at Isabella, coming to a decision. He stood up. "We're a family of secrets and we've been keeping them from each other. What I'm going to share with you now cannot be shared with your brothers."

"Tell us, Marcello." Matteo turned away from the glass.

Isabella's brow arched sharply. "What kind of secrets?"

Marcello regarded the two of them in brief silence before he spoke. "This started with my father and was given to yours. Even we Terenzios have a master, but it's one we've already turned against."

Chapter 6

“Think you can handle it? The day you look in the mirror and realize the evil that *you’ll* do?”

- Stefano Vasco Terenzio

October 18, 1994 - 6:22 PM

Alcyone Island

Cleona’s Italian Restaurant

The kids have their first play tomorrow night. Anne and I would love it if you could make it.” Nicholas Terenzio-Fidelio looked at his lover.

Mario smiled. “I’d love to.”

“Great.” Nicholas leaned across the seat and kissed him. “Have a good night.”

Mario squeezed Nicholas’ thigh. “Enjoy your dinner meeting.”

“Unlikely.” Nicholas kissed him again, and climbed out of the car with his blazer in one hand. When he entered Cleona’s, Alcyone’s finest Italian restaurant, he put the jacket on. “Hello, Jimmy.”

“Mr. Fidelio. Miss Terenzio is waiting for you.” Plucking up a menu, the maître d’ led Nicholas to the Terenzio family’s private booth. Kayla was sitting there, sipping a glass of white wine. She smiled politely at Nicholas and tilted her head up to accept the proprietary kiss he placed on her cheek.

“Thank you for coming. How are Anne and the kids?” Kayla asked.

“They’re fine.” Nicholas snapped open his menu. Once the maître d’ had gone, he looked at Kayla. “What do you want?”

Kayla’s mouth curved into a smile. “Your Uncle Joey is always so polite. So is your mother. What happened to you and your father, I’ll never guess.”

“My Uncle doesn’t know when to shut up, and my father is an idiot,” Nicholas said evenly. “You’re right about Grandma Issa, though.”

“How are you and your father getting along these days?” Kayla watched him closely.

“We’re not.”

“Shame. And all over Mario.”

Nicholas’s eyes narrowed. “What do you want, Kayla?”

“If you had a choice between controlling the world or letting the world control itself, which would you choose?” Kayla asked casually, bringing her wine glass to her mouth.

A frown set on Nicholas's face. "What the hell kind of question is that?"

"A yes or no one." A hint of impatience exposed itself in her tone. "Answer it."

"I am a Terenzio, Kayla. That means we control the world, not the other way around."

She made a thoughtful noise. "You'd be surprised."

Nicholas arched a brow. "Meaning?"

"What if I told you, your children's future was at stake due to poor management choices? Specifically made by your uncle and my father?"

Nicholas studied her face. At length, he said, "I'd tell you to keep talking."

"Nicholas..." Kayla reached across the table and touched his hand. Nicholas thought he felt a slight tremble in her fingers at the contact and he wondered the cause but pushed that thought aside as she continued speaking. "For the majority of your life, your father has thought you a waste. I'd like to give you a chance to not only prove him wrong, but help me move this family in the direction it should be going."

Nicholas stared at his water glass. Worthless, his father had always called him, and much crueller things before Dominic stopped acknowledging his son's existence altogether. Nicholas was strong enough not to give a fuck what his father thought, but a chance to really

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prove his worth and situate himself in a position of greater authority in the family was very, very appealing. "Maybe we should order something. I think we may be here for a while."

October 18, 1994 - 6:22 PM

Alcyone Island

Home of Carissa Terenzio

*Dominic was irritated today, as he often was when he thought of what a colossal failure his son had become. He did not often think of Nicholas. Not after he'd caught him with... Shaking his head in disgust, Dominic forced the memory away and pushed open the door to his mother's home. It was Tuesday night, and he took her to dinner every Tuesday night. "Mother?" He called out from the foyer.

"Up here, Dom!"

Pulling the mail off the table in the foyer where it had yet to be retrieved, Dominic flipped through the envelopes as he climbed the staircase. "You spent the day in your office again, didn't you?" Dominic adored his mother. She was eighty-four years old but had more energy than he did. And it had festered over the years that

Joey had been the favorite son. She didn't have to say it, and never would, his mother wasn't that type of woman; but he could see it. It was one of Dominic's many secrets that he had not been as sad as he'd pretended to be when Joey finally died. Tucking that thought aside when he reached the top of the stairs, he met his mother's gaze, leaned in, and kissed her cheek affectionately.

Carissa's face lit up, as it always did, at the sight of her son. She returned the kiss, waving one hand dismissively. "I meant to spend some time gardening this afternoon, but time flies when you're terribly old." Amusement glimmered in gray eyes that were still as sharp as ever they had been. Examining her son's face, she lifted heavily wrinkled hands to cup his face between them. "You look tired, sweetie. You work too hard."

"Apparently, not hard enough if I can't keep up with you."

"Pfft." Carissa waved the thought aside with a dismissive noise. "You can't honestly expect me to believe that you wouldn't still be working if it wasn't Take-Mother-To-Dinner night," she chided gently. "You should spend more time with Maria," she said, referring to Dominic's wife. "We never know how much time we'll have with the people we love. Just look at your brother—" even now, her voice got a hair unsteady when she spoke of him. "Well, we didn't have nearly enough time with him."

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A flicker of a shadow tainted the back of Dominic's eyes. "Considering the path Joey took, we're lucky we got as much time with him as we did."

Carissa's brows shot up in disgruntled surprise, not only at those words, but at the look in her son's eyes. She released his face and took a step back, frowning at him. "What is that supposed to mean, Dominic?"

"Nothing." Dominic brushed past her, walking towards her office. "I'm sorry. It doesn't matter." His jaw tensed. His brother didn't deserve his mothers' pain, or her love. "Where do you want to go tonight?"

Carissa frowned a little more deeply. "No, son. You said it. Obviously, you meant something by it. So, tell me why on earth you would be taking pot shots at your dead brother?"

Dominic dropped the mail on her desk, giving her his back and silence. His son was a disappointment. Agata wasn't strong enough to know the truth. His brother, a dead enemy. And his mother, this beautiful tower of strength, was misguided in her faith. He turned around, walking back towards her. "Joey was on the wrong side. Joey spent his life a slave to the whims of a stupid man. Do you know how much of a Terenzio I am? The moves I've made, the shadows I've walked through? And for decades, Mother."

Dominic watched the blood drained slowly from Carissa's face. Her voice was little more than a whisper. "What are you saying, Dominic? What have you done?"

"What have I done?" Dominic could feel himself snapping. He'd held himself in check for so long; tolerating all the love his mother gave Joey, while he desperately wanted the same depth of affection; tolerated the knowledge that Joey and Marcello were running the family into the ground. Dominic clasped his mother's hands and pulled her towards him. "The right thing. Marcello was keeping secrets from you. About every-thing. He's fighting against a very powerful force that we should be siding with instead."

Carissa stiffened. For once, she truly looked old. "Dominic, no. I know. I know what Joey was doing. What Marcello asked of him. What they—we—were fighting against. Are fighting against. And now, you tell me that you... That my own son..." She shook her head, tearing her hands from his and taking a step back.

Shock registered openly on Dominic's face. She knew, and she was on the other side. Marcello's side. Joey's side. The lines around Dominic's mouth tightened, staring at his mother in a brief, incredulous silence. "I can't believe I'm hearing this. No, you know what, I refuse to believe I'm hearing this." He drew himself up and buttoned the front of his suit. "Get ready for dinner, Mother. We're

going to talk, and by the end of the evening, you're going to get on the right side."

Carissa took one more step back from Dominic and shook her head with heavy finality. "I wish I could refuse to believe what I'm hearing, son. There will be no dinner. It's not me whose loyalties are grievously misaligned." She closed her eyes, as if she was unable to even look at him. Her voice was very quiet, and deeply sorrowed. "Oh, Dom. You've broken my heart."

She might as well have shot him. "I've broken your heart?!" Dominic came at her, grabbing her roughly by the shoulders. "Everything, *everything* I've done has been for you!" Tears burst from his eyes and he shook his mother hard. "I knew Uncle Julian wouldn't understand, and Dom Jr. was too stupid to make a choice for himself, but you! You! You take it back. You take it back right now, Mother. You're on the wrong side! Why can't you see that?!"

"Don't you dare—don't you dare tell me that what you've done was for me. You've smeared mud on the memory of your elder brother. Joey loved you, *he loved you*. He wanted to make the world a better place—for you. For all of us." She stared at her son in silence for half a second, then shook her head and twisted her shoulders in the attempt to wrest them from his grasp. "Go. Just... go. Please."

Dominic's fury flamed so hotly that he saw red. Joey. Joey. Joey. Always fucking Joey. Joey this. Joey that. She would not switch sides. She was looking at him the same way Uncle Julian had, right before he died. Dominic's back teeth clenched. He didn't release his mother but forced her against him, so he could hug her, fiercely.

For an instant, Carissa pressed her forehead into his shoulder. Dominic's tears came harder. A low sob caught in his throat and ran silently down the length of his form. Then, he became the Terenzio he was and sucked it all back in. He stopped hugging his mother, but kept his hands on her shoulders. He kissed her cheek, tenderly. "I forgive you," he whispered. "You'll forgive me, too." It didn't require much force on his end; to shove his mother down the staircase.

Gravity took her, and the damning sounds of her tumble echoed out with no scream to punctuate them. When silence once again reigned, Carissa lay at the bottom of the stairs in a broken heap, dove-grey eyes gazing sightlessly upward toward her youngest.

Dominic's shoulder hit the wall, and he sunk down until he was sitting at the top of the stairs, tears running in an open line down his face. Eventually, he wiped his cheeks on his sleeve and stood to call 911.

THE AWAKENING

May 21, 2000 - 1:12 PM

Alcyone Island

Marina Café

“What I really want is complete control of SVT Securities.” Olivia sat at a table in the beachside café, the roll of the ocean quietly serenading the lunch goers.

Amadeo Terenzio sat across from her, his fingers laced behind his thick head of prematurely whitening hair. “You just want access to the black budget records.”

“Bet your ass I do. Marcello’s been up to something for years, and I think it’s bullshit we’re kept in the dark. If he’s making moves, we should all know about it.”

The voice came unexpectedly. “What if I told you what Marcello was up to?” Dominic strolled over to their table, pulling out a chair and inviting himself to sit in it.

Amadeo shrugged. “We’d say thanks?”

Dominic chuckled, then grew serious. “Marcello, Matteo, and my brother have spent the last decade fucking up your legacy.”

Olivia slid her sunglasses down her nose, eyeing Dominic over the rim. “And how would you know that?”

“I discovered a letter, written to your Uncle, from Stefano.” He reached into the inside of his suit jacket, removing the old, folded piece of paper and pushed it

across the table. "I started snooping around on my own. Olivia, Marcello, and your father are moving in the direct opposite of what the original heads of this family wanted."

Olivia yanked up the letter, unfolding it to read it. "Oh, my God," she whispered. She handed the letter to Amadeo. "It's true?"

"All of it. There are classified SVT Security files that you can access that will prove it," Dominic said.

"How do you have access? And is my father involved?" Amadeo asked after he had finished reading the letter.

Dominic passed them another, much smaller slip of paper. "Go look for yourself. And not to my knowledge, Amadeo."

"This is bullshit. How the fuck can they justify keeping something like this so secret?" Olivia scooted back her chair, rising to her feet.

"Where are you going?" Amadeo watched his cousin.

"To find out what the hell is going on in this family," Olivia said.

Amadeo scratched his jaw, and then pushed back his chair. "You're going to hack into the SVT Security database. I'm coming with you."

"I'll be in touch," Dominic said quietly, watching them hastily depart. When they were gone, a slow smile spread

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across his thin mouth. He pulled his cell phone out of his pocket, dialing a familiar number.

“Yes?”

“I’ve set them in motion. It won’t be long now.”

“They bought the letter?”

“Slightly altered to suit your goals, and yes, every word.” Dominic plucked up Olivia’s coffee cup, finishing it.

“Good. When they’re ready, send them to me.”

“Of course, Kayla.” He pulled the phone away from his ear, and ended the call.

May 22, 2000 - 8:11 AM

Alcyone Island

SVT Security Headquarters

Completely ignoring the secretary, Olivia stormed into her father’s office, and slammed the door behind her, unconcerned that he was on the phone. “Why didn’t you tell me about the Brotherhood?”

Matteo quirked a stern, curious brow at his daughter’s abrupt entrance. His eyes narrowed at the words that flew out of her mouth. “Jules, let me call you back, my

Olive is here. Thanks.” He hung up the phone, leveling his gaze on his daughter. “What are you talking about?”

“I found the letter.” She stalked across the office to stand directly in front of his desk. “I used your password to access the SVT Securities files. What the hell are we doing, Dad?”

Anger clouded his dark gray eyes. “How did you get my password?”

“You’re not answering my question. This is bullshit. If the Brotherhood are the puppet masters controlling the world, we should be working *with* them, not against them.”

“Olivia, calm down. I don’t know what you think you read in that letter, or those classified files that are way above your security clearance, but there are forces at play here you know nothing about.”

Her chin setting stubbornly, she sat down in the chair in front of his desk. “Enlighten me.”

Matteo frowned and took off his glasses. “I’m not bringing you into this. This is need-to-know information and you are not at this time, meant to know. If Marcello chooses to widen the circle, you’ll be informed. Until then, you will forget you ever saw those files.”

“It’s the wrong play, Dad. He’s going to end up burning our empire to the ground.”

"That is not your decision to make. And the elders of this family don't agree with you." Matteo's voice hardened. "You will do it, Olivia."

"No, I won't," Olivia snapped. "I'm not some mindless robot. This is my family, too. We should have a say—"

"Enough!" Matteo shot up out of his chair, pointing his finger down at her. "You are my daughter. Your loyalties lie with me and whatever end game this family chooses to take. You *will not* disrespect me and shoot your stubborn fucking mouth off. Am I clear?"

Olivia clenched her fingers together to keep from pulling out her hair. She remained silent, because she didn't trust her voice.

"I'm not kidding, Olivia. Don't test me on this. You will forget you ever saw those files and go about your business. Cross me, and you can forget a future in SVT Securities. The highest rank you'll get will be Director of Housekeeping for the hotel chain."

Olivia surged to her feet, glaring at her father. "I'm not a child. You will not treat me this way."

"No, what you are is a spoiled brat with selfish ambition." Their gazes collided. "The moves this family makes now will impact the future of the world. It's bigger than us, and Marcello is making the right choices. Accept it, or lie to yourself, I don't care. But keep your fucking mouth shut. Capisce?"

Olivia held her fists at her sides, but the furious set to her father's face prevented her from arguing further. The stupid, stubborn old man wouldn't budge. "Fine."

Matteo's eyes narrowed. "You know what, Olivia, I'm your father and you're going to afford me some of the respect I deserve that I rarely ask for. Say yes sir, and get out of my office."

It took a moment, but Olivia tempered down her anger enough that she could respond. "Yes, father." Without another word, she turned around and walked out.

May 22, 2000 - 10:44 PM

Alcyone Island

Former Shipping Warehouse

"I'm not going to take this. This is bullshit." Olivia paced, agitated.

"I agree with you, Olivia, but I'm not sure what we can do about it." Amadeo stood with his back pressed against the wall of the old warehouse, his arms folded over his uniformed chest.

One of the heavy doors slid open, and Dominic stepped inside, pulling the door closed behind him. "Did you talk to Matteo?"

"Yes, and it was pointless. He's a fucking slave to Marcello's whims." Olivia released a frustrated noise that echoed through the stale air. "He told me to forget about it and keep my mouth shut, or I'll get demoted."

"That's unfortunate." Dominic pressed his fingers against his chin. "You know, you would both be in positions very valuable to the Brotherhood if you were to take your fathers' places."

Amadeo snorted. "As much as we would love that, Dominic, our fathers aren't going to hand over the reins anytime soon."

"They're both fucking useless." Olivia waved a hand. "Dominic is right. We've got to find a way to muscle them out."

"Or make them disappear." Dominic offered, almost nonchalantly.

Olivia stopped pacing, to stare at Dominic. "Are you saying we should kill our fathers?"

Dominic shrugged. "I didn't say anything. But a move like that would certainly put you on the Brotherhood's radar. And I have a few contacts inside that I'd feel comfortable approaching, should it happen."

Amadeo frowned. "How the hell could we possibly get away with that?"

Olivia was silent, because she was thinking. "Car bomb. They go to brunch together every Sunday. We could do it then. They'd never check for it, not on their own island."

Dominic said nothing, simply stood there a silent observer.

Amadeo raised a brow at Olivia. "You're serious."

Olivia hesitated, her brows pinching. The arrogant echo of her father's voice, threatening her future, demanding her obedience, rang in her ears, suffocating any emotion she might have felt. She nodded sharply. "You're fucking right, I am. We've got to do something, Amadeo, before it's too late."

Amadeo was quiet for a short time, studying her. Then, he looked at Dominic. "You can guarantee we'll be on the inside, if we pull this off?"

Dominic slowly smiled. "With 99% certainty."

June 1, 2000 - 10:01 AM

Alcyone Island

Empire Cruise Line Headquarters

“Shut the door, Olivia.” Kayla sat behind her desk, watching the young woman walk forward. “Sit down.” Kayla tipped her head towards the seat in front of her desk.

Olivia was uncertain why Kayla, Marcello’s daughter, and the likely heir to the empire once Marcello passed on, had called for this meeting. Her ambition left her with several likelihoods she would love to see come to pass, but Olivia had no reason to think they would. Kayla was like her father; usually alone in their big tall towers, leading the family to its demise.

Kayla regarded Olivia in studious silence for what felt like hours, but was probably only a minute or two. When she could stand it no longer, Olivia broke the silence. “What can I do for you, Kayla?”

“You live up to the family arrogance, thinking you can do something for me.” Kayla’s tone was laced with faint amusement.

Olivia arched a perfectly plucked brow. “All right. What do you want?”

Kayla’s eyes were a pale gray that was almost blue. They were similar to the color of Christopher’s eyes, except there was nothing kind in Kayla’s. Christopher had very expressive eyes. Kayla’s eyes, like her father’s, were a thick steel slate. “I want to know how it felt to murder your father.”

Olivia's heart sped up in her chest. Her breath might have held for a second, but her face did not break expression, save for the raise of her brow a little higher, with false incredulity. "Excuse me?"

Kayla smiled, pressing her chin into her palm, and set her elbow on the desktop. "Dominic tells me you want in, but membership into the Brotherhood is a little more... complicated than that. From now on, you and Amadeo will report to me."

Olivia went very still and kept her expression carefully veiled. Somehow, Marcello and Kayla found out about their plans; or they suspected, but weren't sure, and this was to lure her into a trap. She took the safe road. "I'm not sure I know what you're talking about, Kayla."

"Olivia, do you really believe that the reason I suddenly popped into Marcello's life was because there was a hospital mix up the day of my birth?"

No, Olivia thought, she didn't. But she was still wary of coming clean to Kayla. She would be stupid to underestimate Marcello's reach, even if she thought his leadership skills were lacking. "Kayla, I don't know anything about the Brotherhood—"

"Do you really think the Brotherhood would have left Terenzio unchecked all this time? If you want in, Olivia, it's through me."

Olivia studied her in brief silence. "How do I know I can trust you?"

"You don't. But if my loyalties truly did lie with Marcello and I knew that you had killed your father, we wouldn't be having this conversation in my office, would we?"

Olivia paused again, considering her options. "Assume, for a moment, I do want into the Brotherhood. What's the next step?"

"I'll be in touch," Kayla said impassively. "Moving forward, neither you nor your cousin will make a move without my permission. Chain of command is followed to the letter in the Brotherhood, and it is not a democracy. Am I making myself clear?"

"Crystal." Excitement began to form in the pit of her stomach.

"Good." Kayla smiled; a gesture that very rarely touched her eyes. "Thank you for coming by."

Tipping her head in the elder woman's direction, Olivia rose to her feet, briskly walking out of the office. She kept her head lowered and her steps quickened down the carpeted hallways to the elevator. Once the doors safely enclosed her, she turned her back on the security camera, pulled out her cell phone and sent Amadeo a text message.

We're in.

CRYSTAL STORM

September 29, 2001 - 2:22 PM

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Headquarters

Marcello glanced at the phone as its shrill ring interrupted his thoughts. He wasn't plotting; he was remembering his wife. He pulled off his glasses, rubbed a hand over his bearded face, and then snatched up the receiver. "Yes?"

"Sir, Nicholas is here to see you."

Marcello's brows arched. "Send him up." He put the phone back in its cradle and tossed his glasses carelessly onto the spotless surface of his desk. Moments later, Nicholas came in.

Marcello rose from behind his desk, coming around to embrace his cousin, who looked awful. Nicholas' hair was mussed, as if he'd run his fingers through it too many times, and his eyes were bloodshot. He looked like a man who had just lost his family, Marcello noted with sympathy, though, he would never have expected Nicholas to come to him after such a tragedy. He cupped a hand around the back of Nicholas neck, studying his face. "How are you holding up?"

THE AWAKENING

Nicholas gripped Marcello's shoulders, meeting the elder Terenzio's eyes. "I'm a member of the Brotherhood. I have been for eleven years."

Marcello blinked. That was completely new news to him. Nevertheless, he didn't release his cousin. "Why are you telling me this, Nicholas?"

"Because I want them to suffer for what they took from me." Nicholas's eyes shone wetly. "Everything I loved was on that plane and they didn't warn me."

Marcello sighed heavily as Nicholas began openly crying. Marcello pulled his cousin into his embrace again. "We'll make it even, Nicholas. I promise."

November 11, 2006 - 11:11 PM

New Orleans, LA

Loyalty Airlines Airport

Matthew DeMarco slid into the back seat of the waiting Sedan. "Sorry it took so long. Everything all right?"

"The '70s were difficult. The last thirty years have been interesting. I expect things will be a lot more exciting for my grandchildren." Marcello stopped gazing out the window and looked over at Matthew. "The items my father delivered to yours; it's time to take them back."

Matthew nodded. "There was only one working model. The rest were files."

"Whose?"

"Tesla, Marconi, and Fulcanelli."

"The first two I've heard of. Who was Fulcanelli?"

"Some call him the Master Alchemist. If you wanted to learn it, really learn it, he probably wrote the most authoritative book that's allowed to circulate the masses."

"Interesting." Marcello clucked his tongue then looked back out the window. "No rush. I just wanted to put it in motion."

"Of course." Matthew studied his friend. "How are you holding up these days? We haven't spoken much."

"I've spent the last ten years trying to understand this ascension process, really understand it. And I can see the allure of the connection." A quiet sadness filled Marcello's eyes. "I miss my Mari very much. To know that she's out there, in some form, and I'm not good enough to communicate with her is frustrating."

"It's not a matter of good, Marc," Matthew interjected gently.

"I know. Blocked, then. I think it makes me miss her more. And not just her. Amanda. Joey. Everyone else."

"Understanding the truth about death doesn't make it any less painful. I think it's only meant to shorten the

time we grieve, give us some reassurance that our loves aren't lost, simply not here."

"Mm." Marcello lapsed into a brief, thoughtful, silence. "Regardless, I've been on Earth too long without her." He looked over at Matthew and extended his hand. "My job here is almost done. Thank you for always being a good friend, Matthew."

As Matthew took Marcello's hand, an odd expression crossed his face. "Marcello, there's something I need to tell you."

Marcello slowly shook his head. "Don't Matthew. I know."

Matthew quirked a brow. "You know?"

"I know you killed Mari." Marcello slowly frowned. "They made you prove it, didn't they? Your loyalty. And what better way to assure them that you have no ties to the Terenzio family than to kill the Don's wife, so to speak."

Matthew swallowed hard. "I'm so sorry, Marcello. I tried to find a way around it—"

Marcello held up his hand. "And the bottom line was there wasn't one. It's a heavy burden to carry, isn't it? Living with the evil that we'll do for the sake of the future."

Matthew slowly nodded. "Yes, it is." He clasped Marc on the shoulder, squeezing gently. "You're a good man, Marcello. Take care."

CRYSTAL STORM

Marcello nodded, watching Matthew climb out of the car.

Two weeks later, Matthew DeMarco was shot and killed while walking home after a late night at work. The police called it a robbery. Marcello called it even.

THE AWAKENING

The Now

*"We can't let things go on like this. The
world needs to change."*

-Marilyn Terenzio

Chapter 7

“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.”

-Albert Einstein

June 12, 2012 - 11:21 AM

S.V.T. Think Tank

Alexandria, VA

I need you to pull back to Corrediago Ortiz, Grams.”

“What’s the story, lovie?” Dr. Angela Knoxx, a.k.a Grams, pushed back the wide brim of her hat and peered at Derek through the small screen.

“Boss’s orders. He thinks that if we’ve found what we think we’ve found, the bad guys are going to come after you. Back track until reinforcements get there,” Derek said.

“How long until reinforcements arrive?”

“I’m not sure. He’s given us a hell of an assignment in the meantime.”

“Do tell.”

THE AWAKENING

"I'll send you all the details as soon as we get them. Robert should be here either today or tomorrow. And listen, I don't want you guys to be idle, either. Do a little snooping and see what the locals know about the place. If you can get some hard evidence on where the Brotherhood of Light might be, all the better." Grams had heard stories from the locals concerning a group of holy beings that formed a coven, were hiding in the remains of the Mayan Cities, and called themselves the Brotherhood of Light.

Grams nodded. "I'm sure we can find something. All myths start from fact."

"True. If you need anything else, just call."

"Will do, lovie. How are things between you and my granddaughter?"

Derek spared a quick glance over at Shirley, where she stood with Abe. He smiled as he looked back down at the phone. "Just fine, Grams."

"Don't wait forever. Those are my words of wisdom for the day." She winked. "We'll let you know when we're back in Ortiz."

Derek cleared his throat, hoping his ears weren't turning red. "I won't. Wait forever, that is. It's just not the right time. Talk to you soon Grams." He quickly hung up, took a second to compose himself, and walked back into

the lab. "Grams is going to break down camp. What are the results from my meditation session?"

"We were just talking about that. I'll admit it's intriguing." Abe rolled the chair over to his computer screen and brought up the results. "The average adult takes twelve to twenty breaths per second. For the last fifteen minutes of your session, you were down to 5. Tibetan Monks can get theirs down to 3, so that's impressive." He caught the amused look Shirley was giving him and shrugged. "I was curious so I Googled it. Anyway, we also saw increased blood flow to the brain, a decrease in stress hormones, and greater muscle relaxation. You were in a Theta brainwave state, commonly seen in people who are day dreaming. People are also prone to get a lot of creative ideas while in this state, which makes sense because we saw a significant increase in functional awareness. The left prefrontal cortex was extremely active, and we all know that's the part of the brain that mediates our moods and emotions."

Derek walked over to the coffee maker and poured himself a cup while he listened. "What else?"

Shirley hip bumped Abe from the front of the computer, and picked up the stylus, touching it to the screen to move aside one window and bring forward another. "You started out visualizing, right?"

Derek nodded. "The chakras, like you suggested."

“While you were doing that, your pineal gland was quite active. The pineal gland, that pine cone shaped gland in the center of the brain, produces melatonin and that affects our sleep/awake patterns. It’s also filled with water. Think back to the discussion we had about how the mind can affect water and that information becomes really interesting. It also has the same rods and cones on its interior that are found in your eyes,” Shirley said.

“I did not know that,” Derek admitted.

“It’s not common knowledge. The pineal gland, specifically yours while you were meditating, was producing Dimethyltryptamine, DMT.”

Derek’s brow lifted. “Like the DMT found in yopo and ayahuasca?”

“Those exact Shamanic potions. DMT is directly associated with time dilation, journeys to paranormal realms, even encounters with mystical beings,” Shirley said.

Derek gave a little shake of his head. “Wow.”

“From what I’ve briefly read, your experience, on a biological level, is pretty standard.” Shirley dropped the stylus, turning to look at Derek. “Studies are showing that people who continue this practice for years are actually making the brain stronger, in the same way exercise strengthens your muscles. This also directly relates to body functions, like your nervous system.”

"I did not know meditation could be so effective in improving yourself." Derek took a thoughtful sip from his coffee mug. "That's really fascinating."

"How was it for you?" Abe asked.

"I really enjoyed it. There were some moments of utter stillness, and peace. I felt loved. I felt a lot of love, actually, and I don't know where it came from. I also had this feeling..." He paused, searching for the right word. "It's hard to explain. Like there was something just beyond my consciousness, and I was approaching it. But I couldn't tell you what that was. Just a sense of something other-worldly."

"How do you feel now?" Shirley asked.

"I feel great," Derek said, smiling. "Despite the magnitude of what's going on around us, I feel very relaxed and very clear."

"Well, hang onto that brain power, buddy. We're going to need it, if we're going to build something of Nicola Tesla's six times in less than six months." Abe stacked his feet up on the table.

"Why don't you go try it?" Derek suggested.

"I think that's a great idea." Shirley looked over at Abe.

Abe pursed his lips together in thought, eyeballing the Orgone Accumulator. "Nah. Not yet. Why don't you go for it, Shirley?"

THE AWAKENING

“Chicken.” Shirley teased, but took off her lab coat. “I’ll go.”

Earth Day - June 13, 2012 – time does not exist here
Hevan
Machanon City

Hevan was stunning. Alex found its otherworldly beauty incomparable. Everything held a consciousness, and here he could really feel it. The trees looked life-like in their tall, reverent silence, beckoning a companion to share stories with. Buildings of smooth white stone and sparkling crystal dotted hills and decorated valleys. The sky was so unlike that of Earth’s. It was an infinite window, an unobtrusive view of the beauty of the cosmos. Hevan’s two purple moons hung low and majestically in the sky, surrounded by slyly winking stars whose light challenged the black backdrop they sat against.

“Gabriel and I love this view.” Archangel Michael walked onto the balcony and stood next to Alex, smiling serenely.

Alex’s brows furrowed in amusement, right before his laughter came. “Forgive me, Michael, I’m just not used to hearing that.”

Michael smiled. "I know. It would be quite sacrilegious in your world to go around spreading rumors that Michael the angel has spent the last three hundred years with a male angel."

"You can just imagine the uproar from certain religious factions," Alex said through his laughter.

"Your race is going to get quite the kick out of the real stories." Michael's eyes glowed with his humor as he showed Alex into the sitting room.

"I have to say, I'm a little surprised to be here, Michael. I was told the Brotherhood of Light, or rather the Ascended Masters, sent for me." The Ascended Masters were twelve souls that had broken through the veil and been able to manifest their projected realities instantly. Jesus and his wife Mary, whose very existence had come into question thanks to the clever manipulation of the Anunnaki, and the Brotherhood, was the most famous example of those men and women.

"They did, but since it is such a busy time on Earth, they implored me to share this information with you," Michael said.

Alex nodded once. "Do you mind if I have a cigar while we speak?"

"Not at all. I'll have one with you."

Alex removed two Cao golds. A small flame came to life from the tip of Michael's finger that he used to light

both before he continued. “As unfortunate as violence is, on a soul level, the thirteen members of the Brotherhood have agreed to be forcefully removed from their current lifetime.” Before coming into physical form on planet Earth, some souls chose to pick how their bodies would die.

“So, we can proceed as planned.”

“Yes. Your weather predictions are nearly accurate. There will be some minor earthquakes, and flooding, but nothing of disastrous proportions; small hiccups as the Earth aligns with the Dark Rift, the center of your galaxy. It is extremely important the Terenzios accomplish their mission, especially where ELMINT is concerned.”

Alex nodded. “I assumed as much.”

“The destruction of the Global Satellite System and electrical grids worldwide will open the door to the new technologies of the future.”

“There is some concern as to how we will be able to communicate during that juncture.”

“The Sirians, while wishing primarily to just observe, have agreed to donate the devices you’ll need.” When Michael released the smoke from his cigar, a pair of wings formed in the thin wisps.

Amusement drifted briefly over Alex’s face at the feat. “What’s in the Cave of Creation, Michael?”

Michael smiled. "The most important part of all of this. The Akashic Records are there. If it is not opened, the activation energy that will come from the Dark Rift will be nearly pointless."

Alex's eyes widened. "So, they do exist." The Akashic Records were the history of every soul on the planet. Not just memories, but thoughts, feelings, intentions, reaching all the way back to the dawn of creation. The humans of Earth had lived in a state of forgetfulness about life before their birth. The limitation of their knowledge had been necessary, but that time was quickly passing.

"Of course, they do. There is not a race in the cosmos that does not have their own Akashic Records. There is a very, very large one, safe guarded by the Pleadians that contains the memories of The Source itself."

"That must be an amazing sight." Alex puffed on his cigar, his exhalation of smoke not nearly as entertaining as Michael's. "This will work, yes? The Ascension?"

Michel smiled reassuringly. "To speak in mathematical terms, the vibration of a fully awake human is so powerful that it only requires 144,000 people, worldwide, to be able to carry the light of love, twenty fours a day, seven days a week, to push you past the veil. You reached that number in 2010, a few months after the oil spill in your Gulf of Mexico. It will happen, Alexandro. Do not fear."

"I know I shouldn't worry, but no man, or other race, will give up control so easily. Especially when he claims dominion over so much."

"Let Enki and I concern ourselves with that."

Alex slowly nodded. "Would you answer a few questions I have?"

"Of course."

"Has the Peruvian door always been a, well, portal to your world?" In Southern Peru, in the Hayu Marca mountain region, a place local Indians called "City of the Gods," was a door carved out of natural rock. Alexandro used the door and the required key, a small square stone tablet engraved with unique writing that Alexandro suspected was the language of the Angels, to travel to Hevan.

Michael smiled. "Yes. Centuries ago, we spoke frequently with the people who lived in that region. When Enlil found out, he had the key hidden away. We were quite pleased when your allies stole it back."

Alex chuckled. "Liliana was very good at that. One last question, what is the true meaning of a fallen angel?"

Amusement drifted across Michael's face. "I'm a fallen angel, Alexandro. Or, I was."

Alex quirked a brow. "I'm very interested to hear the story behind that."

"Long before the Anunnaki visited your race, the Angels and the Anunnaki shared a love of war-mongering.

We were a military people, almost like your Spartans. We were bred to be beautiful, strong, civilized warriors of the sky and ground. Our King was Samael, the best of us. He was an Angel of Death, one of the fiercest warriors I have ever seen, and my teacher for a time.” A faraway look came to sit in Michael’s eyes. “I shall never forget him. “

“You are not a war-mongering people now. What happened?”

Michael looked back at Alexandro and his mouth quirked. “Lilith and Lucifer. Our own Jesus and Mary, you might say. We had no faith, no spirituality of any sort, until they came along. It was Lilith who opened our Akashic records and made us see. She did this during the time we and the Anunnaki were on your planet. We were assisting the Anunnaki in their mining efforts and enslaving you. Lucifer, who was not only spiritual, but a brilliant scientist, worked closely with Enki in E.Den. He taught the Anunnaki Magi many things about Alchemy. Once the angels started awakening, though, we realized we needed to change. Samael did not awaken initially, and of course, he was furious. He and the Anunnaki rose up against us. Around the time of your great flood was one of the great wars in the galaxy. For a short period, myself and thousands of other angels were cast out of Hevan; the fallen angels. Eventually, Samael, too, realized that we were only disconnected from the Source of

all things, laid down his arms against us, and stepped down from the throne. We elected Lilith as our new queen, and she and Anu signed a treaty of peace.”

Alexandro felt like a child listening to a fantastic fairy tale. He leaned forward in his chair, his cigar forgotten. “Why is there such animosity towards Lucifer? I know the bible is a misconstrued blend of truth and pure fiction, but he is quite hated.”

Michael nodded. “So is Lilith. In your culture, you think of her as a demoness. It is because of a love story. Belial was Enlil’s best friend, a great Anunnaki warrior. On his visits to Hevan, he developed feelings for Lilith. He became seduced by her beauty, you could say. He was so enamored of her, he even asked for a way to change into an angel so he could be with her. She refused to even approach Lucifer with the subject, because her love was for Lucifer. Belial wasn’t pleased by this. Anunnaki do not like hearing that there are things they cannot have. He challenged Lucifer during the war, and Lucifer killed him. Enlil was furious, of course.”

Alex whistled lowly. “There is so much we just don’t know.”

“Soon, Alex.” Michael patted him on the knee. “Come with me. I would like to introduce you to Gabriel before you leave, and I have a gift for you to take home to Tony.”

CRYSTAL STORM

June 13, 2012 - 5:55 PM

Denver, Colorado

Denver International Airport

The Denver International Airport was another prime example of how the Brotherhood hid in plain sight. Tony stood on one of the runways usually inactive, except when the Brotherhood needed them, waiting for Caesar. Conspiracy theorists had a field day with this place, and as usual, they got a lot of the information correct. The runways were constructed in the shape of a swastika. While the Nazis had given the symbol some really bad PR, before Hitler decided to use it, the swastika was the archetype for the rotations of time and consciousness. It had also been used by the Hittites and Celts and was found on the buildings of ancient sites like Troy. Aside from the runways, and the fact that the airport sat on top of a major underground military installation called Blue Moon, the inside of the Airport was another anomaly that often made people scratch their heads. A Masonic capstone sat in the south eastern side of the terminal which had been coined *The Great Hall*. The capstone was said to be a time capsule filled with completely insignificant things; that, of course, being a lie. An arm bent at a 45

degree angle rose out of the capstone, and at the end of the arm was a keypad. There was some significance to a 45 degree angle because of its practical ability to illustrate the law of the conversation of energy. Energy could be neither created nor destroyed. It simply was, sitting there, waiting for something to tell it what to do. Aside from the hidden symbology, when the proper code was keyed in, the capstone opened a portal directly to the Anunnaki vessel, the Babel.

Flicking the cigarette to the pavement, Tony tracked the approaching sedan's movement as it came to a stop and Caesar climbed out.

Caesar was worked up. Ever since he received the order to return to Alcyone and finish off the triplets, he'd done nothing but think about what he was going to say to Vasco before he killed him, and how he was going to kill him. When he saw Tony, some of his excitement began to fade. He didn't like DeMarco much, and hated having to report to him. "Joining me, sir?"

"Change of orders."

Caesar's steps came to an abrupt halt. "Excuse me?"

Tony's eyes narrowed slightly, and he took a step closer to Caesar. "Change of fucking orders."

Caesar reined himself in. DeMarco outranked him, and that meant everything in their world. "I'm listening. Sir."

“Integrate and observe. Keep reporting back. Allow Kayla to keep handling Olivia and Amadeo as she sees fit. Keep the body count at zero, right now.” Tony lightly slapped Caesar’s cheek. “You’ll get your chance to kill ’em soon enough.”

Caesar wanted to growl in frustration, but called upon his patience. There was little else he could do. Orders were orders. “Yes, sir. What about the scientists?”

“Don’t worry, we’ll take care of ’em.” Tony stepped aside. “Have a nice flight.” He watched the rigid line of Caesar’s back as Caesar walked up the staircase and disappeared inside the cabin of the plane.

Tony turned around. It was a lucky fucking thing for them that not all the Anunnaki were opposed to freeing humanity. He shook out another cigarette as he climbed into his SUV. Just as the engine turned over, a low growl from the backseat made the hairs on the back of his neck rise. Lifting his eyes to the rearview mirror, Tony saw the hulking, ugly Igigi. Resembling the mythical gargoyles, Igigis were the Anunnaki’s personal messengers.

“You can’t find a better way to announce yourself?” Tony scolded. He hated talking to Igigis. They spoke telepathically, and the noise that invaded his mind was hoarse, and downright eerie.

THE AWAKENING

The Igigi looked at Tony with its glowing red eyes. *You are being bestowed with the highest honor. Report to the Holy See the day of the Summer Solstice.*

“Thanks. I’ll be there.”

The Igigi didn’t linger for conversation. It pushed open the door to Tony’s car and took off into the early evening. Usually, Igigis moved so quickly that people rarely saw them.

Tony leaned his head back against the headrest and lit up his cigarette. He was a 33rd degree Illuminati, a few levels below his brother. Most people believed that the degrees stopped at 33, but they were wrong. Once the 33rd degree of Free Masonry ended, the seeker then became Enlightened, Illuminated, an Illuminati. Not all 33rd Masons were accepted into the Brotherhood. It was the first level of real trust, and the only one Tony needed. For a decade now, he’d run a black ops division of the NSA, usually right out of the Blue Moon Base. With this promotion, he’d be given the security clearance needed to get Simone into the underground bases, and Vasco into the Brotherhood’s party the night of the solstice.

Tony took a hard drag off his cigarette and slowly frowned. It also meant something horrific was going to happen. By his hands.

CRYSTAL STORM

June 14, 2012 - 10:44 AM

Alexandria, VA

SVT Think Tank

Robert Terenzio carried his mother's features, and his father's love of science. He was the only one—an anomaly, really—that came from Liliana Terenzio's bloodline and had turned to neither business nor weapons, but to academia. This was not to say he didn't know how to use a gun. He was an excellent shot, thanks to his mother's insistence that he learn. He also loved a good chess game. He just wasn't the violent sort.

He was slightly overweight, but smart with his wardrobe. Going to the gym twice a week was only helping slightly, because like a good Italian, when it was meal time, it was meal time. He was of average height, with his father's thick eyebrows, and dark brown hair. His eyes were also green, not gray—another anomaly. Regardless of his few differences, his mother was proud of him, which never failed to provide him with a little-boy-like delight, and Marcello had considered him an asset. Though Marcello had been closely involved in SVT Think Tank, Robert often come up with the more ingenious security enhancements that allowed SVT Securities to

collect information more secretly and efficiently. Maybe he wasn't that far off the marker, after all.

Six Omega Cadre, a special elite force of the Alcyone Island military, trailed Robert as he entered SVT Think Tank. They wore full combat gear, but for propriety's sake had left their assault rifles in the SUV. Each carried dual .40 mm handguns at their waists, and the expression on every man's face, and the one woman's, was hard and alert. The Omega Cadre were not simply muscled idiots that were only useful when being told what to do. Omega General Tia Kahlo was a hardass, but intelligent. Stupidity on any level was unacceptable. If a soldier couldn't think for him- or herself, they got voted off the island real quick.

That knowledge put Robert's safety concerns at ease, because two of the Cadre carried a thick, closed container. It contained a very powerful weapon that had been stolen, over a century ago, from the Brotherhood by Stefano's sister, Liliana, at her brother's request. The weapon had been built by Nicholas Tesla himself, and in a briefcase handcuffed to Robert's arm were the blueprints that the Terenzios needed to make more of them. For Robert, working on a design by Nicholas Tesla was akin to writing a bestselling novel or winning the Super Bowl; amazing and damn near surreal. Considering how

solid their team of scientists was, building five more was going to be a lot of fun.

Abe threw open the door to the accumulator, sweating. "Holy fucking shit."

Shirley and Derek looked up from where they were monitoring Abe's meditation session on the computers. "I've got to hear this," Shirley said.

"What happened, Abe?" Derek asked.

"I don't know." Abe walked quickly to the water cooler, and drained three paper cups before he could speak. "I felt... I felt this explosion. A surge of energy racing up my spine, and it exploded from the top of my head, and I could pretty much see it, but my eyes were closed."

Shirley smiled reassuringly and walked over to him, rubbing his back comfortably. "Easy there, big fella."

"Was it uncomfortable?" Derek watched him closely.

"No." Abe frowned. "I laughed at first, it felt so good. But it just kept going, and I felt like I was going to float away or something. It finally freaked me out a little." He turned back to the cooler and filled up the paper cup again, draining the water in a quick gulp.

"I think you just had a Kundalini activation," Shirley said.

Derek grinned faintly. "That's pretty funny that the skeptic out of the group gets one of those."

Abe eyed Shirley. "What the hell is a Kundalini activation?"

"The medical symbol, the caduceus, is a representation of a Kundalini awakening. Kundalini energy is said to coil like a serpent at the base of the spine, and when awakened it spirals upwards, and merges with the crown chakra. Supposedly it's a very powerful form of awakening," Shirley said.

"Potentially dangerous, too, from the few things I just read, because the energy is so powerful. You're going to want to meditate pretty frequently now, Abe," Derek cautioned.

"I bet being in the accumulator helped eased some of the physical symptoms." Shirley looked at the machine, then back at Abe. "You'd probably be really freaking out if not for the accumulator."

Abe rubbed a hand across his jaw. "Great. I've officially lost it."

Derek chuckled. "Or finally gotten it."

"I'm jealous. I didn't have a Kundalini activation," Shirley huffed.

The elevator doors dinged opened and Robert and his Cadre crowded into the lab. He smiled warmly and

excitedly. "Geek squad." It was his affectionate term for the three scientists. "Ready for the mother of all projects?"

"Does it come with a raise?" Shirley teased as she stepped forward to kiss Robert's cheek.

"You bet we are." Derek rubbed his hands together.

Abe nodded at the group and got another cup of water.

"If you can build it, I'll definitely consider it." Robert directed the Cadre to set the container on one of the empty tables, and put the briefcase, still chained to his wrist, next to it. It took Robert a few moments to get detached, pull out Tesla's blueprints and spread them across an empty table.

Derek slid on his glasses, and Shirley and Abe stood next to him, looking down at the intricate drawings and instructions.

"What do you think?" Robert asked after a few minutes.

"This is amazing," Shirley said, barely above a whisper.

"It can really do that?" Abe looked at the container that was still closed, and then back at the blueprints.

Derek rubbed the back of his neck and looked at Robert. "Once we get the nomenclature down, and with a working model to follow, this shouldn't be too hard, actually."

THE AWAKENING

“That’s what I wanted to hear.” Robert smiled and took off his blazer. “Let’s get started.”

Chapter 8

“An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come.”

-Victor Hugo

June 20, 2012 - 10:11 AM

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Board Room

Vasco stood in front of the long window that exposed a calm ocean from the 47th floor of the Dion Corporation building. It was time to shake things up, plant a few seeds, and pull back the curtain on a few motives. It was time to let the entire family know what direction it would be taking over the next six months.

“I like this first order of business. Dear family, for a few decades, we’ve been secretly at war with this race of aliens that controls the world. We’re about to put the smack down. In or out.” Lucien sat to the right of Vasco’s chair, which was at the head of the table, and lit up a cigarette.

"I can't wait to see the look on Amadeo's and Olivia's faces." Simone's eyes glittered with the hard edge of anticipation.

"Think Kayla will crack? I'm betting she doesn't even blink," Lucien said.

"I'm a lot more curious who they contact first," Vasco turned away from the window. The three of them would have to tread carefully, but they decided it would be impossible to move the family in the direction they needed to while they were under the cover of shadow. They didn't have a lot of time, and things would move a lot faster if they could operate out in the open. The only reason they were not going to take Olivia, Amadeo and Kayla out of play was because doing so would lead to questions as to how they knew, and that might point a finger back at DeMarco. It was imperative that they keep their relations with that family secret, so DeMarco could continue to operate from the inside.

A light rap came on the conference room doors, before Caleb pushed one open and stepped inside. "We've run the preliminaries on what you're looking at from your army, and it's good. They're not so loyal to Amadeo that you'll lose all of them should it go that route. Half, at most. The Air Force is utterly loyal to Archer, Isabella and Christopher."

Involuntarily, the faintest trace of a smile sneaked onto Simone's mouth when Caleb came into the room. It faded away in the next breath, replaced by the more serious expression from the news he was feeding them. He was proving his worth a thousand times over, and she wondered where the hell she'd been that she hadn't noticed what an asset he obviously had been to Grandfather. Plus, she just generally liked him. "What about the Omega Cadre?"

Caleb looked over at Simone. "Yours without question."

"And Olivia's sector of SVT Sec?" Vasco asked, moving to sit down.

"Trickier to quietly get information on. At this point, we have to assume that the agents she's in direct contact with will follow her lead. The others will do as you say," Caleb said.

"So, unless they bring in outside forces, if it goes down like that, they're out numbered," Lucien said blowing a thick cloud of smoke into the well ventilated air.

"Exactly." Caleb looked at Lucien, then spread his gaze between the three of them. "The Worthington twins, your best spies, will be split up. One on Olivia, the other on Amadeo."

"We're about to find out how good our spies really are," Vasco said, sipping from his coffee mug. "Taps in place at Amadeo's and Olivia's houses?"

"They will be while they're in the meeting. We've got to assume they have their own people watching out. We've identified a few point guards, but I suspect there may be more. If everything goes as planned, they'll be fully bugged by the time they walk out of here," Caleb said.

"Which means something will go wrong and they'll be halfway bugged, at most." Vasco set his elbow on the arm of the chair and pressed his fingers against his temples. "Make sure they don't risk exposure."

"You're such a wet dream killer, V," Lucien said good naturedly, though he agreed with his brother; nothing ever went according to plan.

"Half is better than nothing. DeMarco and Xavier will fill in the gaps as need be. And don't forget we've got Nicholas, too," Simone said as she reached out and stole Vasco's coffee mug. She eyed Caleb over the rim. "You look tired."

Caleb smiled lightly at her. "Never." He sobered quickly "I'm going to go make sure everything is in place for the hundredth time. I'll update you all after your meeting."

"Thank you Caleb," Vasco said.

"I second that. You're a good man, Kincade." Lucien gave him a little salute, then crushed his cigarette.

"Just doing my job. But you're right, I am." Caleb smiled again, allowed it to briefly linger in Simone's direction, and left the room.

There was a small tinge of arrogance in that smile of his, and Simone noticed it. She hid her own answering smile behind another stolen sip of her brother's coffee. She'd loved that about Kyle, too, once upon a time; that cockiness that he had worn so well. And she needed to stop making those comparisons, immediately, Simone mentally scolded herself. That was a chapter in a lifetime she wasn't living in anymore. There was no time for that in this one.

Vasco didn't miss the subtleties between his sister and Caleb. He had come to a quiet understanding, too, about why Marcello had left it in his hands when Caleb should reveal himself to Simone. He was a little surprised, frankly, that Simone had not made the connection herself. But as much as he wanted to throw her that line and give her that brief bit of happiness, he couldn't. Not yet. They needed to move a few more things into play. They needed to be focused, centered, and utterly committed to what they were about to undertake before he let that kind of emotion wreak havoc on her sensibilities. It was an

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utterly Stefano-like call. Marcello had turned out to be anything but a disappointment.

Pulling back into the present, Vasco looked over at his siblings. “Lets go over these topics again. And try not to get into a fight with Amadeo, Lucien.”

Lucien stacked his feet up onto the table and pulled the laptop into his lap, grinning faintly. “I’ll give it my best.”

June 20, 2012 - 10:50 AM

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Headquarters

Kayla Terenzio never understood the concept of loss; until the day her mother died. She could describe it in no terms other than a heavy, aching weight in her heart; the same she felt today, standing in her deceased pseudo-father’s office. She leaned against full wall glass window that overlooked the tropical city. Memories plagued her, not just of Marcello, but her mother, too. Their voices haunted her. The letter Marcello left her, that she read once and knew every word of, made the strike of emotion flare up with more frequency.

Kayla turned from the window, pressing her fingers to her mouth as her dark eyes traveled over his space. A fond memory came to her, insignificant in the grand scheme of the world, but important to her.

Marcello perched on the end of the round table, next to Kayla's chair. He said something that caused what appeared to be full, genuine laughter take over Kayla's face. Marcello's eyes visibly gentled, and sadness came to mingle with his clear affection for her. "You look so much like your mother."

Kayla never felt like she was a part of this family. Even knowing she was Marilyn's daughter, she didn't feel that way. She wanted to, because she'd loved her mother fiercely. Her father's words stirred up unexpected emotion inside of her, sitting quietly behind her programming. She smiled tremulously up at Marcello. "Really?"

Marcello returned her smile, nodding slowly. "Especially when you smile."

Kayla watched Marcello, the faraway look that leaked into his eyes. "Do you miss her?"

Marcello pulled away from some fond memory and brought his gaze back to her. "As much as I know you loved her, I'd have to selfishly say, more than you can imagine."

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Kayla believed him. She would have believed him, even if she hadn't seen him the day her mother died and the days after. But, as horrible as that day had been for her—for Marcello—it was on the night her mother died that, for whatever reason, Kayla's aversion to being touched by Marcello vanished.

Kayla remembered waking up screaming. She'd never known what for; the moment consciousness took hold the images of the dream vanished, but her feelings of terror lingered. Usually, her mother was the one to chase those nightmares away. She'd been surprised when the door to her room opened, and Marcello was there. His arms folded protectively around her, and Kayla remembered that her reaction shocked her. She didn't like it when men touched her, not even her gentle, half-brother Demetrius. The man with the funny smell that was her initial teacher took care of that. But when Marcello stroked her hair and hugged her tightly, she did not feel her skin crawling or that flair of panic that told her to get away from the touch as soon as she possibly could. Instead, she'd burrowed into his chest and pretended she was his daughter, he was her father, and she was safe. The only thing in life that she looked forward to after her mother died, was a hug from Marcello.

Kayla sighed into the empty space and ran her fingers over his desk. His daughter. That's what he'd called her.

Except she was not his. She was not made in the act of love. She had been made in a violent act of cruelty and cunning. She was a product of rape; her mother drugged and taken by a man her mother and Marcello tracked down and killed. Yet, knowing that—knowing she was part of Project Mannequin, sent there to keep Marcello in check and to possibly kill him, they loved her. Both of them. Her mother had been an incredibly strong, gentle woman. Marcello was a quietly imposing man, quick with affection, especially in the privacy of his house. It was because of them that Kayla knew the definition of love; that it was real and existed as palpable as the breeze carried off the ocean. Kayla could recall in great detail how her parents looked at each other, how a man who ran an empire would find time for family, specifically for his wife. Kayla vividly remembered mornings when she'd woken to the sound of their laughter and crept downstairs to watch them engaged in some mundane act of early morning domesticity, teasing each other, touching, or simply quietly existing in the same space.

It was those memories that made her want to do as Marcello had asked her.

Maybe the Brotherhood's programming was breaking down. Except Kayla knew that was not the case either. She felt compelled, even while visiting the past in her mind, to destroy the Terenzios. That was, after all, what

she was made for. She could not deny that something inside of her thrilled at the game she played against them.

“Do you miss him?”

Kayla turned around sharply. Vasco stood in the doorway.

It was a distinct possibility that Vasco knew about her; that Marcello had told the triplets. If they wanted, they could take her into custody. Kill her, if they so choose. It made the game she played even more dangerous. If they did know about her, but left her in play, the *why* was a very, very important question. She would have to be even more careful than she had been.

His question, though, was easily answered. “Yes,” she said truthfully.

“Me, too,” Vasco said quietly, trailing those family eyes around his grandfather’s—son’s—space. After the brief silence, he looked back at Kayla. “Everyone’s moving into the boardroom now. Meeting is in five.”

“I’ll walk with you.” The memories vanished in the wake of Kayla’s job, and her ultimate motive. Marcello, like her, mother was dead. There was no one left to stop the nightmares, now, and she could not do as Marcello requested of her. Even if she wanted to, Caesar would never allow it.

“I hope you don’t feel stifled, Aunt Kay; that we’re in a place you probably wanted,” Vasco said as he held open

the office door for her, pulling it shut once she had stepped through.

Kayla shook her head. "Not at all, Vasco. To be honest with you, I didn't want it. Not the stress of all this. I'm too old to take those reins. You, your sister, and your brother will handle it just fine." She smiled convincingly.

"I think we will, too." Vasco shot her a sideways glance, returning her smile. "Thanks, for the vote of confidence, though."

Inwardly steeling herself for how uncomfortable the contact would make her, Kayla looped her arm through Vasco's as they stepped into the elevator. "Of course. Isn't that what family is for?"

Amusement flickered through Vasco's eyes. "Amadeo and Olivia must have missed that lesson."

"They'll learn. Eventually."

June 20, 2012 - 11:00 AM

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Headquarters

Seated around the long conference table was every blood Terenzio. Isabella sat at the head of the table, opposite the triplets. Christopher sat on her left. Agata

came in with her father, Dominic, and they chatted quietly while the others filed into the room. Nicholas came in shortly after his father and sister, smiled briefly at Agata, ignored Dominic, and sat down. Kayla sat next to Simone, and the two talked about mundane things while they waited for Olivia and Amadeo, who both arrived ten minutes later.

“Nice of you to join us,” Lucien said.

Amadeo rolled his eyes. “Some of us work, Lucien.”

“All right, Vasco, we’re all here. Why?” Dominic asked, lacing his thick fingers together and looking pointedly at his cousin.

“To inform you of the new direction this family will move in.” Vasco flicked his eyes around the table.

“Well, it’s not really new, but we’re bringing it out in the open,” Lucien amended.

“What new direction?” Agata asked.

“This is going to be a lot to swallow all at once. It should come as no surprise that there are some very powerful men who control the world, and they use criminal organizations like us to do their bidding. They call themselves the Brotherhood. Stefano Terenzio obtained this island by making a deal with them. His end goal, however, was not subservience. He joined them so that, one day, we could turn around and beat them. That time is now,” Vasco said.

Agata's brows arched. She appeared to be the only one outwardly affected by this news. The rest of the family didn't look so surprised. Only Olivia's gaze darkened slightly.

"We're listening, Vasco," Isabella said quietly.

Vasco nodded once at the eldest Terenzio. "Stefano set the foundation. Grandfather—Marcello—spent his life collecting information on them. Eventually, something pushed him to turn his hand against them openly."

"Why did Dad do that?" Kayla asked, studying Vasco.

"We don't know," Simone easily lied. "That was never made clear to us."

"We know that before Julian and Dom Jr. died, the family did a lot of jobs for the Brotherhood. After they died, that all seemed to stop. We can speculate that something happened during that period," Vasco said.

"What type of work did we do for them?" Dominic asked. He knew, of course, but he wanted to know how much the triplets knew.

Lucien looked over at Dominic. "After WWII, top Nazi scientists were smuggled out of Germany into the U.S. and United Kingdom. They called it Paperclip, and we assisted with that."

Dominic whistled lowly. "My, my, when you said controlling the world, you weren't kidding."

Vasco nodded. "Our entire existence, we've done as we pleased, or thought we have. We've battled petty, criminal groups for a piece of the pie and muscled out the weakest links. We set our sights on the world, because our ambition runs that high. Now, we're going to use everything we've built up to help humanity."

Olivia rolled her eyes. "We, the Terenzio family, are going to save the world?"

"Well, at least give them a shot at saving themselves," Lucien said.

"We're on a deadline, too," Simone said. "On the winter solstice something massive, and a little on the mystical side, is going to happen. What, we don't exactly know, but we do know the Brotherhood wants to stop it. And we're the ones who can stop them."

"This Robin Hood approach is pretty fucking stupid, if you ask me," Amadeo laced his fingers behind his head. "Why aren't we supporting this Brotherhood? Underboss to the Don?"

"That's funny, Amadeo, I don't think we did ask you." Lucien leveled a hard gaze on him. Amadeo had a thick head of graying hair and his goatee made him look more like a pirate than army general, Lucien thought. "But to answer your question, that's not how we operate anymore. Not when it comes to the freedom of the whole world. We might not be saints, but there's a line."

"With all due respect, Lucien, I have to agree with him," Dominic said calmly. "You're talking about going up against what is apparently a major force to be reckoned with and one that's been in place for what, centuries? If we already have connections with them, I don't think it's wise to continue to spit on that."

"Too late," Simone said.

"This isn't a discussion on whether or not we're doing this," Vasco interjected. "This is to inform you all what the real goal of this family has been since S.V.T ran it." It was weird, very weird, to talk about himself in the third person, but he continued unflinchingly. "Marcello believed this was the right thing to do, and we do as well. We're going to end this and find out just how good we really are."

Christopher's blue-gray eyes lit up. "You tell us what you need, Vasco, and you'll have it. I, myself, haven't been in a good fight in years." Before his retirement, Christopher had followed in his father's footsteps and served as General of the Air Force. It was rumored that he was a better pilot than his father, especially in combat. If anyone asked him, Christopher would tell them that it was his mother's fault. Instead of being a great shot with handgun, like she had been, he preferred a 20 mm cannon.

"I heard you got into one last night, Uncle Chris." Lucien grinned lightly. Even though they were all cousins, Lucien and the rest of his siblings had always called Isabella and Christopher Aunt and Uncle, respectively. Isabella and Christopher had been authority figures in the triplets' lives—parents, almost—especially Christopher to Lucien.

Christopher shot Lucien a heatless glare.

"Xavier works for Homeland Security. Is he our man on the inside?" Olivia asked, watching the triplets closely.

Vasco shook his head. "No. In fact, I'm not sure he's aware of the potential mess he's sitting in the middle of. We broke ties with DeMarco a few decades ago, and we have every reason to believe they are supporting the Brotherhood. I haven't involved Xavier, yet, because I don't want to put him in compromising position or endanger his life."

"I appreciate that," Christopher said. Xavier was his son. "But he can handle himself. You need to use him, use him."

"Thank you, Uncle Chris." Vasco tipped his head in his direction, and then looked at the rest of the family. "We need everyone's support on this."

"You have it," Isabella said easily. "I could never see my mother, or Uncle Stefano, being subservient to anyone. If this was the plan, then it's a good one."

Simone quietly flushed with pride. She could almost see the battle-ready instinct light up Christopher's eyes and the love of the game burn like a flame in Isabella's. Thank God no one on her side of the family had wound up working with The Brotherhood. The Liliana in her would have been pissed.

Lucien was pissed as he watched Amadeo and Olivia. "And you two?"

Amadeo shrugged. "Seems I have little choice, doesn't it?"

"If you want to burn this family to the ground, fine. Do it. I'll be standing on top of the rubble shouting I told you so." Olivia leaned back in her chair, folding her arms over her chest.

"How can you be so fucking self-serving?" Lucien snapped, his temper rising.

Amadeo smirked unkindly. "Right. Because you're the epitome of one for all, and all for one, playboy."

Vasco reached out, putting a staying hand on his brother's arm. Olivia snickered.

"My affairs lie in the company dealings, as does Agata's, but if you need us, Vasco, of course we'll assist," Dominic said smoothly, purposely failing to acknowledge Nicholas's involvement in Dion Corporation's dealings. Agata was the current CEO of the Dion Corporation.

Nicholas, who ran the Eastern sector of Loyalty Airlines, wasn't surprised. His father's treatment of him still pissed him off, but he hid it, like he normally did, and looked over at the triplets. "I don't see any problem with this. Why the hell not, really. I'm in."

"Thank you, Dominic," Vasco said, "And Nicholas. This operation may call for the use of our military, and we need someone in charge that's fully committed to this task." Vasco traded glances with Isabella and Christopher. "Isabella, because you are the Governor of Alcyone, would you have any objection to your brother coming out of retirement and assuming full command of the Alcyone Island military?"

Amadeo bristled. He shot to his feet, pressing his palms into the conference table. "Excuse me?"

Simone barely contained a grin at the furious expression on Amadeo's face. Asking Christopher to assume control of the military had been her idea.

Isabella flicked a disapproving glance at Amadeo. "Sit down, Amadeo. For the duration of this exercise, given your obvious reluctance to participate in it, you will accept a temporary demotion to Lieutenant General. Christopher—"

"Will gladly take control of our military," Christopher said, watching Amadeo with hard eyes.

Amadeo's neck turned red, but he swallowed down the biting retort, tipped his head in the elder Terenzios' directions, and sat back down in his chair.

"Thank you, Aunt Isabella, Uncle Christopher," Vasco said. "Olivia, we see no reason why you can't keep control of your SVT office, but you'll report directly to Lucien."

"How wonderful." Olivia's voice dripped with sarcasm, and she refused to look at Lucien.

Vasco continued: "We'll be using Loyalty a great deal over the coming months. Nicholas, get with Sim-one."

Nicholas nodded. "Of course."

"Agata, your days will continue as normal. Keep the company moving," Vasco gave her a small smile.

Agata nodded. "That's what I do."

"Are Robert and the Think Tank involved?" Kayla asked.

Simone nodded. "Yes. That's why he's not here. Our geek squad is in the process of building a device that will make our jobs easier. Well, my job, at least."

"Which is?" Olivia asked.

"Need to know," Vasco said. "For security reasons."

Olivia frowned. "You want us to help you take on the powers that control the whole fucking world, but you won't tell us how?"

Lucien threw up his hands. "You don't even want to help, but you want to know how? Make up your fucking mind."

"Enough," Christopher interrupted. "We have always been a need-to-know family. That's nothing new."

"And you three—" Isabella eyed the triplets. "—will keep me in the direct loop of your activities. I will not fish around, nor come hunt you down for answers. Understood?"

Simone's mouth twitched. "Crystal clear."

There was a faint curve to Vasco's mouth. "Yes, ma'am."

"You will be the most in-the-know member of this family." Lucien gave Isabella a little salute.

"We've got a lot to do and not a lot of time, so everyone keep their phones on, please." Vasco looked around the table. "This meeting is adjourned. Aunt Isabella and Uncle Christopher, please stay. We have a few things to go over with you."

Chapter 9

“The absence of darkness in a person does not suggest an abundance of light, for to know the light you must have known the darkness.”

-Anonymous

June 20, 2012 - 11:11 PM

Vatican City

Catacombs

What is ours we take tonight; As ring of fire burning bright; We stand behind the burning light; and cast no shadows in the night.”

The golden blade of the knife was stained red. Crimson crawled down metal, dripping soundlessly onto the stone slab. The chant continued around him, a hypnotizing melody that fed the dark energy of the ritual sacrifice.

Tony stared into the face of the dead child. The boy could have been no more than eight or nine, and so closely resembled his nephew that Tony couldn't stop the tremble that ran down his spine and made his hand shake. He was one of them, now. A blood brother. He was

one of the privileged few that would rule over the slaves of Earth and worship the great gods, the Anunnaki.

Catacombs intertwined under the world's Holy Empire, where this darker secret laid in wait. The air was thick and heavy with the lowly vibrating energy that crawled through it. Candle light flickered off the old walls, and Tony closed his eyes, seemingly to draw in the energy of the moment. In truth, it was to control his tears. No one would believe that such atrocities could be committed, especially not underneath the Vatican, with the Pope sitting on a stone throne watching over the ritual.

For anyone who understood how to condition a human mind—how the deepest layers of cult programming worked—this was a simple means to an end. Part of the Brotherhood's success over the centuries, despite the occasional leak, was because of this conditioned loyalty. The killing of another human adult could be easily justified in a target's mind. They could rationalize he deserved death, for numerous reasons, or simply dismiss it as their right over a slave. But to kill an innocent child, especially one chosen to look like the initiate's own child or close relative was a lot harder.

The ritual was proven to produce trauma and an almost mind-numbing denial in those who witnessed it, even if it wasn't their first time. It brought fear, and fear

was what They wanted. It brought about a slow decrease for the love of one's self. Self-worth and self-esteem were reduced to nearly nothing, replaced by group think. After doing something so horrible, where would the participants be without the group? Who would they be without the support of their brothers? Humans were just as afraid of their darkness as they were their light, because they knew that they were capable of both. A human was not born either good or evil; they simply were. Time and their own lives would thrust them into the game of duality. An imbalanced society would make them choose.

"We welcome our Brother with perfect love and perfect trust," the Grand Master said.

Tony opened his eyes, slowly turned and placed the bloody knife back on the red velvet sash. He went to his knees in front of the Grand Master so the final rites could be recited, and he could get the fuck out of there. Lifting his eyes to the Roshaniya's, he kept his expression both humble and reverent and let his thoughts keep him sane. *I really can't wait until we kill you.*

June 20, 2012 - 11:11 PM

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Headquarters

“Our Agents were about to enter Amadeo’s house when they realized someone was there.”

The triplets, Isabella, and Christopher looked at Caleb, who stood in front of the conference table. “Who?” Vasco asked.

Caleb shook his head. “We have no idea. Our Agent was able to get a picture of him, and we’re running it through our facial recognition software. What they told me was a little odd, though. They reported he was blinking in and out of existence. They also reported he was holding a long golden rod with a diamond-shaped crystal attached to the top of it.”

The triplets looked at each other. Simone frowned. “Maybe two people got away from whatever happened underneath the Antarctica?”

Christopher arched a brow, looking between the three. “Care to fill us in?”

“Long story. The cliff notes are Atlanteans use to live underneath Antarctica. The scientists at the Think Tank found a guy named Menes, who was carrying a gold rod with a crystal attached to the top,” Lucien said.

“For every hero there is also a villain,” Isabella mused.

“All right. So, we’ve got nothing on Amadeo.” Vasco clucked his tongue. “What about Olivia’s flat in New York?”

"That's done. Her office here, as well," Caleb said.

"One out of the two isn't bad," Simone said.

"Amadeo, Olivia and their guest left the island right after the meeting. Do you want us to try it again?" Caleb asked.

Vasco shook his head. "No. If he's got aliens, for lack of a better word, around his property, we don't know their capabilities. We might have already been made. Do we know where they've gone?"

"Sort of." Caleb looked over at Vasco. "Worthington trailed them to Loyalty's airport. They used Nicholas to screw with their flight manifest, but he says their destination was Rome."

A wry smile touched Lucien's mouth. "Gone to meet with The Brotherhood to tell them what we've done."

Simone glanced at her brothers. "Think any of the De-Marcos will be able to give us a heads up about what goes on in that meeting?"

"Possibly," Vasco said. "When you talk to Xavier, Simone, find out,"

"Caleb, there is a security center underneath the mansion, in a chamber off the cellar. All information collected from those bugs goes directly there," Isabella ordered.

Caleb nodded. "Yes, ma'am. Backups make the same flight to the compound?" Twice a month all information collected at Phoenix Isle was taken, by hand, to the

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compound where the triplets had had their past life session. Leone Vaughn, chief of the island's military police, made those secretive trips.

Isabella nodded. "Absolutely."

"You know, if it wasn't for those fuckin' mooks, I could be playing poker with a hot redhead in my lap right now." Lucien sighed wistfully.

Simone smirked. Vasco stifled an eye roll. Isabella smacked Lucien upside the back of his head, and Christopher glared at him. "Glad to see you've got your priorities in order. Let's get to work."

June 21, 2012 - 7:11 AM

Vatican City

Offices of the Papal Gentlemen

Religion had been a powerful control mechanism for centuries. More people had been killed in the name of some "God" than in any war fought over politics. It should come as no surprise Vatican City was one of the most powerful places in the world.

When someone didn't speak the same language, or understand the symbolism which surrounded them, it was ridiculously easy to hide in plain sight. Cathedral

Square was rife with symbolism, and none of it Catholic. The most significant was the huge statue that resembled a pine cone. It was called the Court of the Pine Cone, and in front of the massive statue, an open sarcophagus laid at its base. The statue was a symbol for the pineal gland: the open sarcophagus representative of the journey one took to open up the potential power that lay hidden in the brain. The awakening of the potential of the human mind was often linked to a death, then rebirth, an intense metaphysical transformation brought about by the activation of the pineal gland.

Standing in one of the Papal Gentleman's offices, Enlil stared out the window, twilight draping itself over his view of the square. He was in full human form, the epitome of an aristocrat; what everyone expected the Vice President of the United States to be. It was the perfect position for an Anunnaki who wanted to keep a close eye on his disciples. Very little attention was paid to the Vice President, and that allowed Enlil the freedom to move about unnoticed. His actions were rarely questioned, and there was little risk of becoming a possible highlight in one ambitious reporter's news reel. Of course, the Roshaniya controlled the most popular, well-known media outlets. Nothing was shown on any major news channel that didn't have someone's stamp of approval. Regardless of that iron-fisted control, Enlil was always

Careful, especially since the silly spiritual awakening had taken hold of the planet.

More people questioned instead of blindly accepting. Less people read the newspapers or put their complete faith in mainstream media. The internet was the Roshaniya's biggest problem, but censoring it would have caused a backlash they wanted to avoid. On the positive side, the internet provided the means to take advantage of the free information the humans gave away. The conspiracy theorists were usually partially correct. If the slaves had ever learned to piece things together from different sources, they might have seen the full, terrifying picture. Even that would have been acceptable, though, provided they bought into the Us versus Them mentality and stayed locked in Duality.

But they weren't.

The humans weren't arming themselves with weapons or holding onto anger and hate. They were quietly educating themselves and pulling their support—more importantly, their energy—from the thought-controlling systems. They abandoned organized religion, choosing a more direct, personal route to "God". They became the change they wanted to see in the world, and while certain atrocities angered and saddened their souls, they didn't cling to such darkness. They loved, they forgave, and they continued on their journey. The problem with that sort of

energy was it didn't require a majority of the population to be effective, and it riled Enlil's anger to no end.

It didn't matter, though. Their little spiritual revolution wasn't going to help them anymore than the Galactic Federation was. Earth belonged to the Anunnaki. Period.

"Sir?" One of Enlil's Secret Service agents came into the room. He, too, wore a false human skin; one of the Zetas. Centuries ago, the Anunnaki and Zetas formed a treaty. The working class Zetas served the Anunnaki on Earth, while Zeta scientists were allowed to abduct humans in Anunnaki designated areas for whatever purpose they so chose.

"Yes?" Enlil didn't turn from the window.

"Amadeo and Olivia Terenzio are here."

Enlil smiled. "Send them in."

After the meeting with the triplets, Dominic pulled Olivia and Amadeo aside and told them they were going to Rome. He didn't say who they were going to meet, only that they needed to bring Loki. A car would pick them up.

Olivia and Amadeo hadn't been surprised, until they arrived at Vatican City. That surprise grew when they were shown into the suite and saw the Vice President of the United States standing there.

THE AWAKENING

The moment Loki walked across Cathedral Square, he could feel what happened beneath them. A very dark, heavy energy rolled underneath his feet. He didn't like the sensation, but his options were limited. He could not allow the Ascension. Clutching the crystal in one hand and staring at the Vice President, Loki narrowed his eyes. He could see beyond the disguise to the true form of the Anunnaki underneath.

"You've done well, bringing an Atlantean to me," Enlil said, his attention on the crystal.

Olivia smiled. Amadeo nodded. "And in exchange—"

"Yes, we know what you want. But your acceptance into our folds will come at a higher price than what you've brought us. Though, I have heard very good things about you from Kayla."

"It is a sad fact that you are the lesser of two evils," Loki said quietly.

Enlil's smile sharpened. "Where is the other crystal, Atlantean?"

"Destroyed with Rainbow City," Loki said.

"How are you so sure?"

"If one of them had taken it, they could have used it to escape and I would still feel their presence." Loki paused, his jaw tensing. "I am the last one."

A pleased expression slid over Enlil's face. Even if the Terenzios' team of scientists found the Cave of Creation,

they would not be able to access it without the crystal. Enlil pulled his gaze from Loki and looked at Amadeo and Olivia. "Your family has admitted its wrong doings and wishes to try and stop us?"

"The stupid ones, yes," Olivia said.

Enlil looked briefly amused. "If you can keep your family contained, then perhaps we will hold you in a higher regard than foot soldiers. I have more to speak with you about, but for now, leave us." He waved his hand.

Olivia opened her mouth as if to say something but Amadeo grabbed her arm, squeezing tightly, and made her silent. "Yes, sir." Amadeo tipped his head towards Enlil and Loki and guided Olivia from the room.

When the door clicked shut, Enlil's eyes transformed, exposing his true reptilian irises. "It has been a long time since I've tasted the blood of an Atlantean."

Loki's shoulders tensed. "That is your intent for me? I can help you stop this Ascension."

"I no more need your help than I do that of a human," Enlil walked closer.

Setting the crystal carefully aside, Loki stood his ground. "You could not beat us on our own planet, reptile. You will not beat me on this one." A pale purple light suddenly surrounded his hands.

THE AWAKENING

“You have blocked yourself by your traitorous actions and the fear that clings to your heart,” Enlil hissed, his serpent-like tongue licking out between his human lips. “You are no longer more powerful than I.”

“We will put that to the test,” Loki snapped, and charged.

The sounds of their battle were fierce. Waiting in the hallway, Amadeo and Olivia glanced at each other as the walls shook and the lights above them flickered. At intervals, furious animalistic growling and the imposing shout of a man resonated throughout the Holy See. When silence finally reigned, no more Atlanteans lived on Earth.

July 4, 2012 - 9:12 AM

Alcyone Island

Loyalty Airlines International Airport

Kayla leaned against the sedan as the private jet taxied to a stop. When Caesar emerged from the cabin of the plane, she forced the tension in her body to ease. They had posed as a happily married couple for the last twenty years, and yet the very sight of him made her uneasy. Fortunately, she was exceptional at hiding what went on

inside of her—especially how much she hated it when he touched her; how much it nauseated her and left her on the brink of a panic attack every time he decided to take his “rights” as a husband, but more importantly as her handler, and roughly, often cruelly, fuck her.

Caesar smiled at Kayla as he walked towards her, despite his lingering agitation with his new set of orders. Patience. He just needed to exercise patience. Before he’d come to Alcyone, he’d brought a group of abducted children to the Chrysthamum Underground laboratory, then removed three ineffective Trainers. Trainers were highly specialized servants that kept the other mind-controlled minions of the Brotherhood in line. Both small assignments had helped take the edge off, but he still wanted Terenzio gone. “Hey, baby.” Bending down, he kissed her, and Kayla returned it as a loving wife who had missed her husband should. Inside, her stomach turned.

“How was Guatemala?” she asked, waiting until he climbed into the back seat of the car before she slid in beside him.

“Productive.” Once enclosed in the vehicle, Caesar put up the privacy window. “Orders have changed. We’re not going to kill the triplets, yet.”

That was surprising, Kayla thought. “What about their team at the sacred site?”

Caesar shrugged. "Tony told me they would take care of it. They're probably waiting until some sacred day to kill them, and the triplets, too. You know how much they like their rituals."

"Victor is becoming useless. He got caught cheating, and Simone is going to divorce him."

"Fucking idiot. Have Dominic get rid of him before he ends up shooting his mouth off."

"All right."

"Nicholas still earning his keep?"

Kayla slowly nodded. "He's been very helpful with small, fill-in-the-gap bits of information here and there."

"That's a real hard ass, right there. I probably would have been pretty fucking pissed off if I'd lost my family like that when I was supposed to have inside information."

Kayla turned her head to look out the tinted window, watching the island scenery flash by. "His father knew. He decided not to tell him."

Caesar laughed. "What a fucked up family." He dropped his head back against the seat. "How was the funeral?"

Her father's letter came to mind. She should tell him. If Marcello knew about her and Caesar, it was possible other family members did, too. It was information that

should be reported. Kayla decided not to. She would have to share the details of Marcello's letter with him, and she didn't want to do that. That was hers. She would play this one herself, and if exposure was a true threat, she would deal with it then. "Typical. I reined Olivia and Amadeo back in. They should be monitored, though."

"Put Dominic on it. He's good at that."

"All right."

"Are the triplets in their ivory tower?"

"Yes." Kayla looked over. "Are you going to see them?"

"Yeah, I'm going to pay Vasco a visit. If he's been through his past life therapy session, I want to know if remembers me. And if he does, that might be enough leverage to get the Brotherhood to let us kill them sooner, rather than later."

Kayla studied Caesar for another moment, then merely nodded and stared straight ahead. If Vasco was Stefano, the master of wearing the veil, then Caesar's plan wasn't likely to succeed. Marcello had welcomed him with open arms, treated him like a trusted son-in-law, and known differently. Kayla wondered what that kind of knowledge did to a man who loved his children despite the evil that resided within them.

"But first, why don't you come over here and make the boss happy."

THE AWAKENING

Nausea spilled into Kayla's gut. She felt a cold sweat immediately start to cling to her skin. Yet she smiled, turning in her seat to reach for his belt. "Yes, sir."

Chapter 10

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

July 4, 2012 - 12:12 PM

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Headquarters

Don' move yet, please. I love tha way ya feel.”

Vasco sat at the head of the conference table with his fingers against the side of his temple. His eyes were closed. Memories clicked away like the flash of a camera, all of Stefano Vasco Terenzio's second wife, Cleona DeCalvante; the one Vasco had gotten a moment with this lifetime and lost after mere hours, because it was her turn to end her existence on this planet. Slowly, Vasco rubbed his fingers across his temple, as if the gesture could soothe him in some small way. He missed her. God, did he miss her.

He supposed it was Karma. Stefano had left her, after all; a costly misjudgment that had taken him away before

he'd gotten the chance to say good-bye. That misjudgment left Cleona with seven decades of misunderstanding why Stefano allowed himself to be killed. She thought he'd done it simply to bring his son onto the chess board. While that was true, the reason extended a lot further than that.

Stefano walked into the assassins' bullets because his son *had* to become the heir. Marcello had been the perfect mix of strength and gentleness to set the game where it was now; with them in position to win. Stefano could never have stood idly by and watched, and he had not been foolish enough to think he would have been a good father. His death was a catalyst that set so many other things in motion; like his sister.

Vasco sighed into the silence and stood up, restless. He found it almost amusing to know that even in those semi-noble moments, Stefano's ego had never been far behind; he'd also known, when the time came, he'd be back to finish what he'd started. But Vasco was realizing his alter ego misjudged a few things. Stefano couldn't have known the type of man he would reincarnate as, and this man wasn't so concerned with ego. Vasco might carry a natural affinity for wearing the veil, keeping both thought and emotion private, and his love of the game was in his blood, but he lacked the quiet excitement he felt a lifetime before. Vasco felt robotic in his

movements. He was playing the game because he had to, because he was good at it, and because he was meant to. He no longer felt any motive deeper than that. He was tired; tired of the intrigue, of the constant manipulation of pieces, and soul weary of the violence and loss that came with living the way Terenzios chose to.

Brief, wry amusement flickered in Vasco's eyes. If Stefano were to meet himself today, he'd call him a pussy.

The phone on the conference table beeped, pulling Vasco back into the present. Turning around, he pressed the speaker phone button. "Yes?"

"Dr. Medicci is here to see you, sir."

Vasco's eyes darkened, and that thick plate of steel slammed into place. "Send him in."

Caesar Medicci. Kayla's handler. Enemy. The man Stefano Terenzio hated most. Of course, Vasco knew Caesar this lifetime, even before his experience remembering his past lives, he never particularly liked the man. As Kayla's husband, Caesar had been in the family for years, though he didn't work in the Terenzio Empire. Caesar's cover story was that he was a doctor, and often volunteered for *Doctors without Borders*, an international humanitarian group which worked in third world and war torn countries. Caesar's involvement in the program explained his disappearances.

Caesar pushed open the conference room doors and smiled warmly at Vasco. "I'm not bothering you, am I? I just wanted to pop in and see how you are."

Now that the connection was made, Vasco could see the likeness Caesar had with Roman, Stefano's enemy from a lifetime ago, and Vasco immediately felt an answering tension creep up the back of his neck. Caesar didn't look like a typical doctor, but because of the third world countries he supposedly visited, he could get away with his shaved head, big rough hands, and stocky but athletic build. He did work, on occasion, at Alcyone Memorial, so his M.D. was legitimate. His smile could be easily described as comforting and warm, except it never quite touched his eyes. Few people really looked, though.

"No." Tempering down his urge to snatch a pencil off the conference table and slam it into Caesar's neck, Vasco returned Caesar's smile and walked around the table to greet him. They clasped hands and hugged, just like family. "We're overwhelmed, but dealing. It's good you're back. Kayla took the losses hard."

"I know she did." Caesar sighed. "I got a little teared up. Marcello was like a father to me. Kayla is a trooper, though. She'll pull through it."

"It's in the blood," Vasco agreed. The irony of their conversation was not lost on him. "How was your trip? Where were you this time?"

“Guatemala. It was by turns disappointing and rewarding.”

An interesting coincidence, Vasco thought. He had no doubt that Caesar had been in Central America. He was also positive Caesar had not done anything that even remotely resembled the kind of work Doctors without Borders did. “That must be hard. Lots of people need help.”

Caesar shrugged. “You learn in this job you can’t save everyone.”

No, Vasco thought, but they could put people in a position to save themselves. “Wise words.”

“How’s the leg? Rains coming in.” Caesar watched Vasco’s face closely.

Vasco looked down at the limb. The dull ache in his left leg alerted him of the incoming storm hours ago. It was a left-over physical reminder of his life from the past. Nearly a century ago, S.V.T walked with a slight limp. Caesar was trying to figure out if he remembered his past life, Vasco realized, and almost smirked. *Fucking amateur*, Vasco thought. “Acting up like it usually does.” He shrugged. “I’m used to it.”

Lucien bumped open the conference room doors, carrying two brown paper bags. “I brought you lunch, because I’m such a good brother.” He paused mid-step when he saw who was in the room, but in the next second

had a smile on his own face. "Well, welcome back, doctor."

"Thanks," Caesar smiled. "I won't keep you guys, I just wanted to let you know I was back. And if you need anything, prescription for Valium, whatever, just let me know, all right?"

"That's awful nice of you. Isn't it, V?" Lucien kept his expression humorous as he set the bags on the table and opened them.

"It is. Thank you, Caesar." Vasco offered his hand to his enemy again. They hugged once more. Caesar gave Lucien the same embrace before he left.

After the door swung shut, Vasco waited thirty seconds before he picked the phone up off of the conference table.

"I'm so proud you didn't kill him," Lucien said as he took a seat and pulled out his sub sandwich.

"Yet," Vasco said while he listened to the phone ring. When the Sergeant answered Vasco said, "When General Zhane gets back on base, ask him to come meet me in the conference room at the Dion Building right away. Thank you."

Lucien watched his brother as he hung up the phone. "You're not sending Uncle Chris after him, are you?"

“No. But Caesar was in Guatemala, which means he was watching our team there.” Vasco sat down next to his brother, pulling a thick sandwich towards him.

“Ah. Sending them some military protection?”

“Exactly.”

“Good call.”

“Where’s Simone?”

“Having lunch with Caleb in her office, and plotting to blow shit up like you told her,” Lucien said around a mouthful. “Those two have potential.”

For just a moment, amusement passed over Vasco’s face. “Yes, yes they do.”

July 4, 2012 - 12:12 PM

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Headquarters

Simone stood with her arms folded across her chest, studying the hologram floating in front of her. It was a map of the United States with small red icons shaped like military bases marking the location of every concentration camp.

"I can't believe they get away with calling them Illegal Immigrant Detainee Stations. Do they expect we're going to be invaded by Mexicans?"

Xavier Terenzio-Zhane's voice came over the speaker phone. "You would think alarm bells might go off, but no, they're good at getting away with pretty glaringly apparent things." Xavier worked for Alexandro in Homeland Security.

"Centuries of practice," Caleb said as he shouldered open the door, a deliciously smelling bag in one hand, and two sodas in a drink tray in the other.

"That too," Xavier said.

Simone caught herself smiling when Caleb walked in. "That smells good."

"Brain food. Lucien brought your brother lunch, and I promised him I'd bring yours." Caleb flashed a quick smile, pulled the Italian subs out of the bags, and situated one on a paper plate for her. "Don't let me interrupt."

"You're not. Thank you." Simone touched his arm as she sat down. "Keep going, Xavier."

"The National Security Agency, NSA, has become the top dog. Homeland Security sits right underneath them. We are responsible for running the camps, and will be the intermediary during the transition from local law enforcement to the military, just so you understand who all the players are. The NSA has compiled three lists. People

on the red list are the ones they consider the greatest threat. Those people have ascended, for lack of a better word. They're carrying the highest vibration, and they're lifting up others with their mere presence. They will be taken to the camp just outside of Sedona, isolated, and made examples of."

Simone frowned as she dropped her napkin into her lap. "Do I want to know what that will entail?"

"No, you don't. We're going to try to hold off on the torture as long as we can, for as many as we can, but it's a slippery line. If the Brotherhood keeps to the original time table, they'll only be in there for a week before you bust them loose."

"Okay. What's next?"

"After the red list comes the blue list. All your outspoken journalists, writers, conspiracy theorist, spiritualists, people who believe in the constitution, free speech, democracy, et cetera. Anybody who was getting ready to jump ship, or started to pull their energy from the system, is on it."

"How did they determine who these people are?" Simone asked.

"Big Brother is watching," Caleb said around a bite from his sandwich.

"Exactly, Caleb," Xavier said. "One of the reasons the internet hasn't been censored is so they could monitor

search terms, websites visited, and easily identify who the ‘troublemakers’ are. The NSA really doesn’t have to monitor cell phones much anymore. Social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook are telling them all they need to know.”

Simone’s frown deepened. “Control disguised as freedom.”

“In a sense. They’re really good at that. Hell, the NSA will buy independent journalists to purposefully set up control groups, disguised as activist organizations for some cause, just to spread dis-information. It’s called Project Chickenfeed.”

Simone snorted and shook her head, picking up her sandwich. “I bet they get a real kick out of themselves.”

“Wouldn’t you if you were getting away with the crap they are?”

“I’d laugh a little bit,” Caleb said. “Thankfully, I’m not that mean-spirited.”

“You’re secretly a really nice guy, aren’t you?” Simone shot Caleb a sideways glance.

“Well, I’m not *that* nice.” Caleb winked at her.

“Few people are. But we only need a few.” Xavier chuckled. “Simone, Alexandro has confirmed the information Marcello collected on the top five bases is accurate. Those are the camps your SVT teams will spring people out of.”

Simone set her sandwich down, dusted off her hands, and pressed a button on the laptop next to her. The hologram shifted, bringing up a bird's eye view of the bases with statistical information on each scrolling down the side. She drummed her fingers on the table, thoughtfully. "I'm not sure we can handle all these."

"You're going to get back-up. There is a pretty large group that will rendezvous with your team called the White Lotus Society."

"Chinese group?" Caleb asked.

"Yep. You'd be surprised by how many organized and really effective groups have been giving the Brotherhood hell over the years," Xavier said.

"Good," Simone said. "The more the better."

"Definitely. We're counting on a lot of pieces falling into place, the night of. Those bases are guarded with some pretty advanced artillery, like ROWS, so it's vital that Lucien knocks ELIMINT off line. He does that, the solar storms start, and the base will pretty much shut down."

"What are ROWS?"

"Remote Operational Weapon Systems." Caleb looked over at Simone. "They are heat-seeking, mechanized rifle systems that automatically lock onto anything in sensor range."

“Sounds like we should have a few.” Simone studied the hologram. “Talk to me about the underground bases.”

“Okay. Tony got us great intel. For smoke and mirrors, you’re going to let Olivia and Amadeo think you’re targeting a phony list.”

Simone nodded, despite the fact that Xavier couldn’t see her. “I’ve got that file.”

“Good deal. Now, for the bases you’re actually going to hit. You’ll start at Mt. Shasta, California. There’s a hidden entrance in an abandoned mine shaft. The base is five levels deep, but you only have to access level one, where the station is. Set up the bomb, jump on the train, and you’ll go to Sedona, Arizona next.” As Xavier spoke, the holographic images in front of Simone shifted to show the bases’ access points. “From there, you’ll head to Dulce, New Mexico. You’ll see several different destinations on the train, but you want the Chrysanthemum Bio Genetics facility. It will be written in a very old Sumerian dialect, but you should have what it looks like in your file. Some really nasty stuff goes on there. Next stop will be Mid Way City in Kinsley, Kansas. Mid Way connects the east and west coast, hence its name. Your final stop will be in Denver, and this is the one big one. It’s right underneath the airport.”

“The train I’ll be taking is the magneto-levitation train, right?” Simone asked.

"That's it. It will take you ten to fifteen minutes to travel between these spots."

"I've heard they hit speeds of 1500 MPH." Caleb's eyes lit up. "That's badass."

Simone slowly drew her gaze over to Caleb, studying him. Kyle had said similar things to Lil when he talked about his airplanes and how fast they could go but, just because Caleb liked things that moved fast didn't mean he was Kyle. Simone sighed silently and came back to the present. She would get nothing accomplished by missing something that had been. "The train won't be offline when the bases' power grids go down?"

"Yes, it will, but we're going to give you this handy little device the Pleiadians made to jump start it. Oh, something you probably don't know. The entrance points to each base are blocked off by a huge door. That way, if something goes wrong in one area, they can isolate it from the others. The Pleiadians have a device for that, too, so you'll be hot-wiring them open. Shouldn't take you more than a minute or two to do that. You're also going to get what we call Thermoptic Camouflage devices. That's a fancy name for an invisibility cloak. It will also hide your heat signature, so not even infrared will pick you up. It's a small thing. Wear it on your belt, and it will work in ten minute intervals. Two problems with it,

though: one, it's going to make you really nauseous each time you use it, and two, you can't wear Kevlar."

"Oh, goody," Simone said dryly.

Caleb chuckled. "Well, if we're invisible, I suppose we don't have to worry about being shot at."

"Compared to your previous life, Simone, this should be a walk in the park." Xavier chuckled.

Simone laughed lightly. "True. But, there's nothing like the real thing. Anything else I need to know?"

"Not at this point and I've kept this connection open long enough. I'll let you know if there are any changes."

"Xavier, one last thing. Amadeo and Olivia went to Rome. Do you know who they were meeting with?"

"When did they go?"

Simone glanced down at her notepad. "June 21."

"The day of the summer solstice. They might have met with Enlil. I'll see if Tony knows."

"Great. Thanks Xavier."

"No problem. Tell my Dad I said hi."

"Will do." Simone pressed the button to end the call, and looked back at the holograms. "I never thought that, one day, I'd charge into underground military bases to blow them up. My ambition didn't extend beyond taking control of the black market."

Caleb smiled. Simone's goal in life didn't surprise him, considering what she'd done in previous lives. "Just imagine what you'll be doing after that."

Simone laughed and shook her head. "I can't. I can't fathom how different the world is going to be after we're done removing the powers that be."

"Probably a lot more fun." Caleb stood up, collecting her empty plate and the trash.

"Thank you." Simone tracked his movements, caught her mind wandering places it shouldn't go, and turned her attention back to the hologram. "I've never even handled a gun this lifetime."

"We'll you're going to get five months of practice in. Got some time, now? I could take you down to the shooting range."

"Are you a good shot?"

Caleb slowly grinned. "Madame President, I'm not a good shot, I'm an above excellent shot."

Caleb's grin was infectious. Never mind that it was familiar in ways that Simone refused to think about. "Modest, too."

Caleb walked over to her office door and pulled it open, amusement swirling around in his eyes. "Honest. There's a difference."

THE AWAKENING

July 10, 2012 - 11:21 AM

Alcyone Island

LT Boxing Rings

"You're getting slow, old man," Lucien goaded his uncle.

He shouldn't have spoken so soon.

Christopher pushed off the ropes and came at Lucien hard and fast, a barrage of punches breaking through Lucien's block and rattling his brain in his skull.

Lucien got stuck in the corner, half grunting and half laughing. "Goddamn! All right, Uncle, uncle already!"

Christopher backed off, but not before giving Lucien another strong strike. "They didn't call me Fangs Out for nothing." Fangs Out was the term assigned to military pilots who liked flying in attack mode.

Lucien grunted, breathing heavily. "I know everybody on Lil's side of the family is angry, but I would have thought Kyle's genes would soften you up a bit."

Christopher smirked. "That's a common misconception people had about my dad. He loved a good fight just as much as mom did. He was just a lot more subtle about it. Trust me, you didn't want to piss off my father, or my mother. Period."

"And now you make sense." Lucien chuckled.

Christopher ducked under the ropes and had one of the gym attendants help him with his gloves. "I want you to report to the army's training facility tomorrow morning."

Lucien followed him and quirked a brow. "Why?"

"Because you're the point man on an important assignment, Lucien, and you're lazy and out of shape," Christopher said, reaching up to pull off his own helmet.

Lucien frowned. "I am not."

Christopher eyeballed him. "You just got beat by a seventy year old man."

"That doesn't count."

"Hey." Christopher grabbed him by the front of his sweat-soaked shirt, giving him a hard shake. "Get serious. I know you thought, once upon a time, you were going to skate by with a cushy corporate job, liquor, and women, but the plans have changed." He lowered his voice. "Out of everyone's jobs, yours is the most important. And you will not fuck it up."

Lucien's jaw tensed. "I'm getting real tired of holding the title of Family Fuck Up I don't deserve it."

"You don't deserve much else, either, and you know that. Time to earn a few things." Christopher released him, slapping his cheek.

Lucien pursed his lips together. "You ever remember your past lives?"

Christopher shook his head. "No."

Lucien took a hand towel from one of the ring assistants, then sat down on the edge of the ring. "I used to be able to balance things out pretty well when I was Julian. Wake up with a different woman every morning, go out and make my family a shit load of money, handle it, party half the night away, and do it again the next day. Then Stefano died and everything changed."

Christopher sat down next to him. "As I've heard the story, a lot of things changed when Stefano died."

"I don't know if it was things so much as it was us." Lucien twisted the towel in his hands. "Lil was so different after that. So was Carissa. And it wasn't just the shock that he was dead. I think we thought that bastard would never die. But learning what he was doing, how big it was, what he was willing to sacrifice even if it was partly for ego..." Lucien just shook his head. "It was crazy."

Christopher canted his head. "How do you feel about it now?"

Lucien's brows pinched. "I think I joke around so much because when I stop and think about it all, I don't know if I'm doing it for the right reasons. What's the difference between us and the Brotherhood most days? Aren't we just playing King of the Hill, trying to kick the other guy off? Wouldn't the world look just like this if we were sitting on top of it?"

“Lucien...” Christopher put his hand on Lucien’s shoulder. “Right or wrong, you know it has to be done, and that’s saying something. We didn’t have to go this route. We could be siding with Olivia and the rest of them, working it from the inside to land our spot at the table of Thirteen. We chose *choice* over everything else, and that’s what makes us different. If we were sitting on top of the world, I think humanity would still have that option.” Amusement passed over Christopher face. “Even if it’s because we’d be bored if they didn’t have a choice. But so what?”

Lucien chuckled. “Yeah, yeah you make a point.” He was quietly thoughtful for a moment. “Granddad said we needed to love the world we were saving. I don’t know if I do.”

“Do you love your family?”

Lucien nodded. “Without question. Even those two fucking morons that jumped ship.” That Amadeo and Olivia were working with the Brotherhood still made Lucien so angry he could barely see straight when he thought about it.

“Then, just maybe, that will be enough.” Christopher slapped him on the back. “That and my General foot in your ass.”

A smirk set itself on Lucien’s mouth. “What time tomorrow morning?”

"You will be rudely roused from your home at 4:30 am." Christopher hopped to his feet.

Lucien resisted the urge to groan. "People function at 4:30?"

"It will continue until I am satisfied you are adequately prepared to accomplish your mission." Christopher set the towel around his neck, loosely gripping both sides.

That was going to be rough. Lucien knew better than to argue, though, and Uncle Christopher had a solid point. If he failed, everything failed, and while they seemed to have the upper hand right now, that could all change. Drawing up straight, he gave Uncle Christopher a sharp salute. "Sir, yes, sir."

Christopher playfully narrowed his eyes, as both of their cell phones vibrated. Lucien saw the message first and whistled. "Important meeting in the conference room. Think that means good or bad news?"

"The way this family works, both."

Chapter 11

“The Light cannot exist alone: it is IN Darkness,
within the Darkness from whence it came and into
which it returns.”

-Tani Jantsang

July 10, 2012 - 1:01 PM

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Headquarters

Hi Dad.” Agata walked around her desk to kiss her father’s cheek.

Unlike Nicholas, Agata was not a disappointment. She was not as strong as Dominic would have liked her to be, but Dominic blamed most of that on her mother’s genes. Smiling warmly, he gave her a quick hug. “Do you have time for lunch?”

Agata glanced at the wall clock. “I have to run a file Lucien wanted to his office and jump on a quick conference call with HR in five minutes, but it shouldn’t take long. Can you wait?”

“Of course I can.” Dominic dropped his gaze to the file folder in her hand. “Why don’t I take that up to Lucien’s office for you?”

“Would you? Thanks.” She kissed his cheek again and handed him in the manila folder.

“I’ll be right back.” Smiling, Dominic stepped into the hallway. Opportunities to learn more about one’s enemy should never be wasted. Walking over to the elevators, he pulled out his cell phone and called the main office number. “Yes, is Lucien in his office? No, don’t pull him out of his meeting, I’ll call back. Thank you.” Dominic hung up his phone, stepped into the elevator and pressed the appropriate floor number.

As he expected, when he got off the elevator, he saw the blinds were closed on the conference room windows. Mindful of the cameras in the hallway, he walked nonchalantly to Lucien’s office door and knocked once. Silence. He tried the knob and restrained a smile when he found it unlocked. *Typical Lucien, careless to a fault*, Dominic thought.

He stepped inside, leaving the door cracked so he could hear approaching footsteps. Dropping the file folder onto Lucien’s desk, Dominic moved behind it and stood in front of Lucien’s laptop. He pushed the mouse, removing the screen saver and prompting the login to appear, asking him for a password. From the inside of his

suit jacket, Dominic pulled out what appeared to be a simple USB drive and stuck it into the side of Lucien's machine. While he was waiting for the program to crack the code, he riffled through Lucien's desk. Dominic was not surprised to find nothing of importance. It took the hacking program a minute and thirty seconds to crack Lucien's password. The wait was well worth the information that appeared on the LCD screen. It was a scanned PDF, and the bold header at the top drew Dominic's eyes immediately.

Project Mannequin.

He quickly skimmed the document, though he didn't have to go far. The first paragraph discussed patient #666, Kayla Terenzio.

"They know," Dominic whispered. What else did they know? More importantly, how did they know? Frowning heavily, Dominic grabbed the mouse and brought up the screen behind the PDF. The SVT database search result screen appeared, and Dominic caught his breath. It showed a brief summary of where the file came from.

The following documents were secured from Joseph Mengele's home office June 26, 1974.

"How in the world...." Dominic whispered again. He jerked his head up, when the low tones of a voice approaching from the hall caught his attention. He arranged the computer screen the way it was before, and

yanked out the USB drive. Tucking it into his pocket, he walked around the desk, moving straight for the door just as it opened and his son, Nicholas, appeared.

Nicholas held his cell phone against his ear and paused mid-sentence when he came face to face with his father. “Hang on a second,” Nicholas said to the caller and frowned at Dominic. “What the hell are you doing in here?”

Dominic’s frown deepened at his son’s tone. *The disrespectful little prick*, he thought. “Not that it’s any of your business, but I was dropping off a file for Agata before I take her to lunch. Move.”

“You’re doing someone a favor? Take your happy pill today?” Nicholas smirked coldly, but stepped aside so his father could pass.

Ignoring his son, Dominic strode back to the elevators. He would have to cancel lunch with his daughter; there were more important things to do.

July 10, 2012 - 2:22 PM

Alcyone Island

Home of Caesar and Kayla

“Yes, sir, three HI-MENs have been deployed, one for each triplet.” Caesar looked down at the small black case in front of him. Inside was what appeared to be a mosquito. It was actually a mechanical spying device that could record audio and video in high definition from 200 feet away. “No, Operation Matrimony is a bust. Victor fucked up and got caught cheating. Yes, sir, I’ve given the order. He’ll be taken out soon... Yes, sir.” Caesar pressed the button to end his phone call. He was standing out on the deck of his and Kayla’s beach house. Kayla was inside, making him a late lunch like a good slave.

He was happy to have learned that, at this point, it didn’t matter what the triplets did; they wouldn’t be able to access what was underneath the ruins at Piedras Negras. The most they could do was cause trouble, but their family had been doing that for a century. It was nothing The Brotherhood couldn’t handle.

Caesar closed the case with the last HI-MEN inside and turned to go into the house, when his cell phone buzzed again. The caller ID said Dominic. Dominic usually called Kayla directly. Quirking a brow, Caesar answered. “What happened?”

“They know about Kayla,” Dominic said without preamble.

Caesar went very still. “How do they know about Kayla?”

“Somehow they got Joseph Mengele’s private files. I found a document on Lucien’s computer that discusses Project Mannequin and Kayla’s involvement in it. The date it was acquired was June 26, 1974.”

Caesar frowned slowly. “Do they know about you?”

“I don’t know.”

“Fuck. Shit.” Caesar growled and shoved a hand back through his hair. “All right, stay in play. But keep your nose clean and your ears open until you hear back from me.” He ended the call, and walked into the house. He found Kayla in the kitchen. “The triplets know about you.”

Kayla was cutting his sandwich in half when she heard him. Her father—no, not her father, Marcello—must have told them. She finished her task, and set the knife down on the counter. “How did you find out?”

“Dominic found a file on Lucien’s laptop.” Caesar came closer. “Do you know how they could have gotten it?”

She was obligated to tell him; programmed not to lie to him. She wanted to, except, there was no point. Releasing a resigned sigh, she looked up at him. “Marcello.”

Caesar’s eyes narrowed. “How did Marcello get it?”

Kayla shook her head. “I don’t know.”

Caesar came at her, grabbing her by the arms in a bruising grip. “How do you know that Marcello knew?”

Kayla didn't flinch, though how tightly he held her was painful. "He wrote me a letter, and Vasco gave it to me after Marcello died. In the letter, Marcello said that he knew where I came from, and that it didn't matter, I was his daughter, and he implored me that when the moment came, I would act like it."

"Oh, you stupid, fucking cunt." Caesar struck her, hard enough to draw blood. He hit her twice, then shook her so hard her teeth rattled. "Where is the letter?"

Kayla's face throbbed. She licked the blood from the corner of her mouth. "Gone. I got rid of it."

Caesar growled and punched her in the stomach, watching her sink back against the counter and gasp for breath. "Why the fuck didn't you tell me?!"

Kayla swallowed hard and stared at the floor. "Because... because I believed him, when he called me his daughter. And even though I knew I couldn't switch sides, I wanted to keep what he said to me, for me."

"For fuck's sake, Kayla." He slapped her, a vicious strike that made her gasp. Grabbing a fist full of her hair, he yanked her head back to make her look at him. "You are not his daughter! Are you that fucking stupid? He didn't love you, he was playing you! What kind of man could love an enemy? You probably sucked the fucking life out of him every time he looked at you and saw the lie."

THE AWAKENING

It was uncontrolled, the single tear that slipped from the corner of her eye. Caesar was wrong. For whatever reason, Marcello had loved her, hadn't he? Maybe she had been incorrect. After all, what did she know about such a thing? "I'm sorry. Sir."

"Are you keeping anything else from me?" Caesar demanded, tightening his grip.

"No." She met his eyes. "Nothing."

Caesar stared at her for a long time before he released her. "Go clean yourself up. I'm taking you to one of the training centers for an update on your programming."

"Yes, sir." Drawing herself up, Kayla walked obediently past him.

Caesar tracked her movements, frowning. If Marcello had known, then he had to have someone on the inside. Caesar snatched his sandwich off the plate and took a bite, chewing thoughtfully. Joseph Mengele died years ago in a house fire. Kayla's secret should have died with him, because the file on Project Mannequin was in the Vatican's Secret Library. That meant someone either brought Marcello the file, or Marcello somehow found Mengele. Dropping his sandwich Caesar walked quickly through the house and over to his laptop. It took him ten minutes to access the Brotherhood's case file Mengele.

There were notes that the Brotherhood suspected Mengele was murdered and launched a private inquiry

specifically to find out if Terenzio was involved. “Son of a bitch.” Caesar frowned deeply as he read Matthew DeMarco led the internal investigation and concluded that no foul play was involved; Mengele died of a horrible accident.

Caesar didn’t buy it. Especially now. Either Matthew DeMarco killed Mengele and gave Marcello the file, or Marcello did, and Matthew covered up for him. Caesar suspected the latter.

“Those fucking traitors,” he muttered. Caesar had never, *ever* trusted the DeMarco family or their loyalties. It really burned him when he’d been forced to report to Tony. From his past life, Caesar clearly remembered how close DeMarco and the Terenzios were.

The DeMarcos were Illuminati, though. They were so entrenched on the inside that he couldn’t dare accuse them of being traitors. That would be signing his death warrant. Caesar rubbed his hands over his bald head, thinking. Eventually, he closed his laptop and went upstairs to get his things, a plan forming in his mind. He’d just have to prove it.

July 10, 2012 - 4:33 PM

New Orleans, LA

THE AWAKENING

DeMarco Family Estate

“Uncle Tony’s here!” Seven year-old Bobby DeMarco ran into the foyer and threw himself against Tony’s leg.

The sight of the boy brought flashbacks, clicking away fast and disturbingly vivid behind Tony’s eyes. He knelt down, pulling his nephew away from his leg and held him at arm’s length. Bobby’s face was full of color, his hair mussed, his big blue eyes bright and alive; so unlike the face of the child that Tony was forced to kill. “Bobby the Man DeMarco.” Tony forced a smile and drew his nephew into him, hugging him tightly.

“Yer shaking, Uncle Tony. Are you cold?”

“He’s just fine, Bobby. Your mother is calling you.” Alex stood in the archway, watching his brother and his son.

Tony sucked in an uneven breath and drew back, plastering the smile back onto his face. “I’m okay. We’ll throw the ball around a little later, all right?”

“Sweet!” Bobby turned around, and with the never-ending energy of a child, ran off in search of his mother.

Tony rose to his feet, rubbing the back of his neck as he walked over to his brother. “I wasn’t expecting—”

“It to hit you like that? I know. I didn’t, either.” Alex gave him a tight hug. “You did what you had to do.”

"Yeah." Tony knew his brother was right, but that didn't make it any better. "So, what's up?"

"Come with me." Alex squeezed Tony's shoulder and led him into his home office. He closed and locked the door once they were safely inside. "My meeting with Michael went well."

Tony walked over to his brother's mini bar to make himself a stiff drink. "Who's Michael?"

"The Archangel Michael."

Tony turned around, glass in hand, and blinked. "I thought you were going to meet with the Ascended Masters?"

"So did I. At any rate, we are to stay the course. He also provided us with the communication devices we'll need, when the time comes." Alex walked over to his humidor and pulled out a cigar, offering it to his brother.

Tony shook his head at the cigar. "Okay. What else?"

Amusement suddenly slid over Alex's face. "He gave me a gift to give to you. Gabriella."

Tony took a healthy swallow of his bourbon, enjoying the warming burn as it coated the back of his throat. He looked at his brother curiously. "Michael gave you a woman to give to me?"

Alex chuckled. "Sort of. Look behind you."

Quirking a perplexed brow, Tony turned around and jumped. "Whoa. What the hell is that?"

Floating in front of him was a tiny being, no more than eight inches tall. Her wings were translucent and fluttered at a dizzying speed. She had a beautiful, tiny face—or she would have, if not for the long white beard that stretched from her chin. A gold helmet sat on her head. She giggled at Tony and zipped over to his glass, poking her head into it.

“I’m not sure what the proper terminology for her is. I call her a mini-angel. Michael said you would need her.” Alex watched in sheer amusement as the tiny being sucked up a sip from Tony’s glass, then coughed.

“Number one, Tinkerbelle, get your own liquor.” Tony pinched his fingers around one of her legs and pulled her out. “Number two, what the fuck am I going to need it for?”

“He didn’t say. Think of her as your guardian angel.” Alex clipped the end of his cigar, watching his brother.

Tony frowned, letting the mini-angel go. She zipped around his head and found a seat on his shoulder, crossing her legs. “I’m fine, Alex. I don’t need a babysitter. Especially not this dwarf-pixie-angel thing.”

Gabriella huffed at Tony and looked offended. Alex laughed. “Antonio, you could at least be polite.” He grew serious after his laughter died down. “And you’re not fine. None of us who have to sit this close to evil are.”

"They're not evil. They're just fulfilling their soul's obligations. They simply *are*, remember?"

"That is true. Even so, the things we've chosen to do are not easily cast aside. In case you haven't noticed, your hand is still shaking." Alex tipped his head at Tony's hand. It trembled around his glass.

Tony hadn't noticed. He looked down at himself, frowning lightly. After a moment, he sighed in resignation. "Fine. She can stick around." He knocked back the rest of his drink in a solid gulp. "Xavier has been in touch with Simone. And Amadeo and Olivia gave Enlil one of the Atlantean Crystals."

Alex lit the end of his cigar, pushing a thin cloud of scented smoke into the air. "How did they manage to acquire that?"

"An Atlantean escaped from Rainbow City with one of the crystals and found his way to the wrong Terenzios."

Alex frowned. "We've got to find the other one."

"I think the triplets might have it. Or, their scientists do."

"Oh, good." Relief passed over Alex's face. "They'll need it to open the Cave of Creation."

Tony quirked a brow. "No shit? No wonder Enlil was so happy to have found it."

"Does he not know there were two?"

THE AWAKENING

“Apparently not. I think he believes the triplets are pretty much fucked, now.”

“Good. Let’s hope he keeps thinking that way.”

Tony nodded and glanced at his... guardian angel. “Why do I get the one that looks like a cross-dresser?”

Gabriella grinned and batted her eyelashes. Alex burst into laughter. “Oh, don’t be so superficial. I think she’s quite attractive.”

“Yeah, but you’ve got shitty taste in women.”

Amusement swirled through Alex’s eyes. “You’re just bitter because Mona shot you down when you asked her out.”

Tony suppressed a grin, getting ready for the blow he knew was coming. “That’s because she’s got shitty taste in men.”

Chapter 12

“Difficulties increase the nearer we get to the goal.”

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

July 11th, 2012 - 10:52 AM

Denver, CO

Blue Moon

To get to the lower levels of the D.U.M.B., one had to pass rigorous security protocols. It took Caesar five minutes to get through them all, and even then he was escorted, by a Grey, to the NSA offices. He went through another security check point to get into their operations center, and only then did the Grey alien leave him to handle other mundane tasks.

Caesar strode past busy cubicles and knocked on the door to Tony's office.

“Come in.” Tony was standing in front of a floating LCD screen, watching data flash across it.

“Sir, we have a situation.” Caesar closed the door behind him. “The triplets know about Kayla and probably me.”

Tony snapped his eyes over to Caesar. "How the fuck did that happen?"

"Someone tipped off Marcello years ago." Caesar watched DeMarco closely. "Someone on the inside."

"Motherfucker." Tony rubbed a hand across his stubbly jaw. "Have they made any moves against you?"

"No. For whatever reason, they are leaving Kayla in play."

"Probably so they don't alert us that they know, or give away whoever is on the inside." Tony frowned thoughtfully.

"Sir, Xavier is a blood relative. Perhaps he—"

"Xavier doesn't have that kind of security clearance. Don't be a moron. You don't think he's watched twenty-four seven?" Tony walked over to his desk, snatching up his cigarette pack, and lit one up. "How did you find out they know about you?"

Caesar tensed at the insult, but kept himself contained. "Dominic found a file about Kayla and Project Mannequin on Lucien's computer."

"Whoa, whoa, time the fuck out." Tony blew a heavy line of smoke at Caesar as he advanced on him. "Our people are snooping around the triplets' offices? How fucking dumb are they?"

Caesar frowned. "Sir, you said integrate and observe—"

“Yeah, observe, not get yourselves caught! If that’s how you’ve been running your shit the last few decades, it’s no wonder Marcello found out about Kayla. We might not have a leak, just a bunch of incompetent fuckin’ agents.”

Caesar’s eyes narrowed sharply. “Beg your pardon, sir, but if there’s a leak it’s not coming from my end. No fuckin’ way.”

“I’m not convinced.” Tony took another hit from his cigarette, then paused and canted his head at Caesar. “Wait, you said Marcello knew, but Dominic found the file on Lucien’s computer. How do we know that Marcello knew a fuckin’ thing about Kayla?”

“He wrote Kayla a letter, before he died, that she failed to share with me.” If that stupid bitch got him in any more trouble, Caesar thought, he would terminate her himself without waiting for orders.

Tony laughed without any humor. “Are you fuckin’ kidding me? There’s your leak. Where is she, now?”

“At a Training Center.”

“You make sure she doesn’t leave until it’s hammered into her skull what side she’s playing on. And you tell your people inside to chill the fuck out. No more side ops unless you get them from me. You got it?”

Caesar folded his arms behind his back so Tony couldn’t see his clenched hands. As annoyed as he was

THE AWAKENING

with the conversation, though, something wasn't right. Tony's logic couldn't be faulted. Kayla may very well have, at some point, broken down and confessed to Marcello, but Caesar didn't think the lapse in her programming was that strong. He had a strong hunch he was looking at the traitor. "Yes, sir. I don't think it's wise for me to be a continued presence on Alcyone."

"Fine. Go hole up somewhere and wait for instructions. You keep tabs on your crew, though. Think you can handle that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Wonderful. Get the fuck out." Tony walked back over to the LCD screen, still smoking heavily.

Caesar saluted him, and then let himself out. An hour later, Caesar got himself into Tony's penthouse.

July 12, 2012 - 10:10 PM

Alcyone Island

The Zanzibar Beach Club

The crowd at Zanzibar was good company; a mix of civilians, military, and Dion Corp Security. The club itself sat on the beach just outside the official city limits, about two miles from the residential complex. Door less, with

exposed beams that held up the thatch-covered roof, it was the perfect spot to stop at on the way home from work. A long bar sat on one side, a stage for the random musical acts on the other, with chairs and tables and oddities spaced in between, like the jukebox, a pool table (it was covered when rain was coming), and a strange totem that looked like a cross between an eagle and a phoenix that a crayon box had vomited on.

Coming off shift (though he left each of the triplets with a small security detail), Caleb left his suit jacket in the jeep, rolled up his sleeves, and headed inside the tiki hut. He said his hellos to the regulars and landed at the bar. Leaning into it, he scanned the selection on tap, settled for a Heineken and pulled over a stool. Leone Vaughn, Chief of Police, appeared at his side a few sips in.

"Still no fuckin' leads. Not one." Leone's voice was tight with frustration.

"Get this man something strong, Frank," Caleb said to the bartender, looking over at his friend. "I read your report. You're making some headway."

"Nothing a two year old couldn't figure out." Leone set his elbow on the bar and pushed his fingers back through his hair. "The number of people who even know Marcello Terenzio exists means it had to be an inside job. Someone wanted something from Marcello and Demetrius.

Information. And..." He leaned closer to Caleb, speaking lowly. "...we found a bug in Marcello's room."

Caleb arched a brow. "SVT Securities?"

"Someone there, yeah, probably. Someone in the upper tier, too. It's making me nervous how deep this could go." Leone straightened and pulled his cigarettes out of his pocket.

Caleb took a long, thoughtful swallow from his glass. Olivia was sloppy, leaving the device in Marcello's room. He hoped that Leone caught her. "How's home life?" Caleb asked, switching the topic to something he thought would be a little more light-hearted.

Leone lifted his glass and nearly swallowed his scotch and water in one gulp. "My wife is having an affair," he said, the lines of his richly tanned face hardening.

Caleb almost choked on his next sip. That was completely new news. "Victoria's cheating on you? With who?"

"Don't know, yet. But I'm gonna find out."

Caleb watched him, sympathetic. Even for a man in law enforcement, Leone had a gentle gaze and soulful brown eyes. In light of current news, they got a little edgy. "How do you know, Leo?"

"A man knows these things, Caleb." Leone stared down into his glass. "If a man loves his wife, he knows."

“Love is highly overrated.” Olivia strolled to the bar, sliding onto the stool next to Caleb’s.

Caleb almost instinctively tensed, but forced the tightness from his shoulders. He turned his head to Olivia, and nodded politely. “Miss Terenzio.”

Leone gave Olivia a quick salute. “Ma’am.”

Olivia rolled her eyes and waved a dismissive hand. Her long, manicured fingers were decorated with small stoned, flashy rings. “At ease, boys. We’re all off duty right now. Mai Tai, Frank.”

“I would have taken you for a martini drinker. Frank, put Miss Terenzio’s drink on my tab.” Leone lifted his glass in salute, finished his scotch, and pushed off the bar. He slapped Caleb on the back of his shoulder. “Have a good night. Ma’am.”

“Goodnight, Leone.” Caleb smiled at him, making a mental note to check on him at some point tomorrow—and to let the triplets know about Victoria’s infidelity.

“I would rather you buy me a drink,” Olivia said, turning on her stool to face Caleb.

“Sorry to disappoint you.” Caleb wasn’t, but he saw no sense in being rude. Yet, anyway.

“You know, I never understood anyone who thought once was enough. Especially when it was so good the first time.”

Caleb noticed the curl to Olivia's lips turned as coy as the hooding of her eyes. He moved his gaze from her and stared straight ahead at the racks of expensive bottles behind the bar. Everyone had a moment they did something they regretted. A drunken one night stand was not an uncommon occurrence in life. Olivia was his. Caleb was not aware of her loyalty issues at the time, and Simone had gotten married. Olivia came onto him, he'd been plastered and that was that. "That's just the booze talking, Miss Terenzio."

"I'm not drunk, yet."

"I meant that night." Caleb looked at her. Olivia wasn't a dislikeable person. She had drive, determination, and a keen intellect. She had a hell of a temper, a foul mouth, and no liver. She was also sexy, even for a woman of her age, with her short bleached white hair, and toned runners' legs. She was witty and carried a sarcastic sense of humor, but Caleb didn't know what had ever made her so hard.

"Mm. Maybe." Olivia took her tall glass from the bartender, thanking him. She studied Caleb's profile while she stirred her straw in her glass. Her mouth slowly curled. "Dare you to test your theory."

Caleb slowly shook his head. He was certain that Olivia, Amadeo, or Kayla killed Demetrius. That pissed him off, maybe more so than anyone else, because he'd

gotten to know her Olivia. “Miss Terenzio, I will thank you, but politely decline.”

“Well, at least tell me who the bitch is, so I can fight her for you.” Teasing amusement laced Olivia’s tone.

“There’s no one, Olivia,” Caleb lied, motioning Frank over to refill his glass. There was someone, but he didn’t have her. Yet.

Olivia lowered her glass and smiled. “It’s about time you said my name.”

Caleb opened his mouth, but movement out of the corner of his eye drew his attention away. Simone was standing there, watching them. Watching him. She was without her detail. She probably lost them, or intimidated them into getting lost. The thought made his mouth twitch in his effort not to grin. Even if he didn’t already feel like his soul was connected to hers, it would have been hard not to fall in love with Simone Terenzio.

“Well, well. Hello, Simone. Aren’t you out past curfew?” Olivia called out.

Simone snapped her gaze toward Olivia. It had been a long time—a very long time—since Simone felt her hair rise. Nothing was going on, but Olivia kept looking at Caleb like he belonged to her. And that was pissing her right the fuck off.

The illogic of her sudden emotion wasn’t lost on Simone. She had no relationship with Caleb. She could

not have a relationship with Caleb. She didn't want a relationship with Caleb, she told herself sternly. But none of those thoughts lessened the utterly feminine, battle-ready tension in her form. She met Caleb's gaze across the room; steely gray locked on that warm, amused blue. She loved his eyes. They reminded her of...

Without another thought, she stalked to the bar and deposited herself in the small space between Olivia and Caleb.

Caleb drew his hand over his mouth to hide the smile that broke free. He certainly wasn't going to object. His only issue was his want to slide his arm around her waist and pull her closer. Tempering back his urges, he asked, "Can I get you a drink, Madame President?"

"My usual," Simone answered automatically, regarding Olivia.

Olivia hated Simone Terenzio. As much as Olivia hated Simone's brothers, though, she just might hate Simone more. She hated everything Simone was spoon fed because of whose side of the bloodline she was born; the side that fucked everything up. "Caleb and I were having a conversation. Why don't you run along and figure out how to pretend you have a fucking clue how to run his family."

Olivia was a traitor to her own family, but even if that damning piece of information hadn't been true, Simone

knew she still wouldn't like her. The condescending tone Olivia fed her, and the intimate way she said Caleb's name, made Simone's fingers itch to kill someone. Hell, at this point, she'd have settled for punching that smug look right off Olivia's makeup-heavy face. Simone's spine straightened. "Since I do run this family, I think it's time you started getting used to taking orders. From me. Mr. Kincade and I have a more important matter to discuss, so you're dismissed. But since I know times are tough for women your age, I can always call the Islands Brothel for you."

It took every ounce of self-control Olivia possessed to not bash her glass across the stupid bitch's head, and slit her throat with the shards. They couldn't afford another incident, though, not with Kayla watching their movements as closely as she was. And Simone wouldn't be in power for long. "You're lucky to have Caleb watching your back, Simone. Very lucky." Olivia rose from her stool, meeting Caleb's eyes over Simone's shoulder. "Next time, Caleb." Taking her drink in hand, she stalked off.

There wouldn't be a next time, Caleb thought, but he didn't say it aloud. He nodded politely at Olivia, and once she was gone, looked at Simone. "Thank you for coming to my rescue."

The look Olivia had given Caleb was tainting Simone's victory. "You two looked cozy. I'm sorry if I interrupted."

Caleb opened his mouth to correct her, but the words died before they were given a chance, because something slowly became apparent: Simone was jealous. Jealousy implied caring. It filled Caleb with no small sense of triumph—of relief, really—to know that Simone was jealous. He would have liked nothing more than for her to lay claim to him. Then, he could do the same. He intended to, the moment Vasco lifted the gag order, but until then, he swallowed back a flirty reply and changed the subject. "What happened to your security detail?"

"I sent them home."

"I can't protect you if you won't let me."

"One, it wasn't you. Two, I'm safe right now."

Caleb recalled her father's crime scene. He reached out, touching her arm. "You might not be."

Simone lowered her gaze to his hand. Slowly, she lifted her eyes back up to his. "I can handle myself, Caleb."

"I know you can. But there's never anything wrong with an extra set of eyes, so humor me." He smiled faintly. "Besides, I've got to go away sometimes. Give you a chance to miss me."

Simone bit back a grin. "If by saying 'you' you somehow mean my brothers, then you're absolutely correct. Otherwise, your logic is faulty."

Caleb knew he had orders. Regardless, he leaned a little closer, humor staining his eyes, hiding his affection. "You wouldn't miss me if I was gone?"

She would miss him, Simone realized as she watched him come a little closer. Her pulse sped up, just a hair, and her eyes, of their own accord, drew down to Caleb's mouth. What would he do, she wondered, if she—

"Are you fucking kidding me? This is who I've gotten replaced by?" Victor demanded. He'd been across the room, flirting with some brunette when Simone walked in. At first, Victor had done his best to make sure Simone didn't see him with some other woman. Then, he noticed the way she was looking at Caleb, and that was fucking it. Victor rose unevenly to his feet, knocked over his own chair, steadied himself on a beam, and stalked towards them.

Simone's fury grew with the accusing look that Victor had the audacity to throw at her. He cheated on her, and now he had the fucking nerve to cause a scene. Simone whirled around, but Caleb very subtly touched the small of her back, stilling her as he stepped away from the bar and put himself between her and Victor. He ran his fingers over the lobe of his ear, activating the earpiece

hidden inside. Coming back online would indicate to the nearby SVT officers that they needed to pay attention. “Victor, why don’t I call a car to come and get you?”

“Don’t I outrank you, Rent-A-Cop?” Victor shot Caleb a dirty look, and dragged his eyes back to Simone. “What the hell are you doing here with him? Didn’t you get my phone calls, my emails...” His arms flailed as his voice rose in drunken anger. “...the fucking flowers?!”

Simone didn’t look at him. “Don’t make me regret leaving you alive, Victor,” she said before her mouth met the rim of her glass. She took a healthy swallow so that she didn’t turn around, pull Caleb’s gun, and shoot Victor right in his big fucking head. She couldn’t believe she’d been in love with him, once upon a time. Whatever might have been left of that emotion was further tainted by her anger every time she interacted with him.

Victor tried to push past Caleb, shoving a finger at Simone. “If you think you can just write me off like this, after everything I’ve done for you, you selfish cu—”

The final word exploded into a loud whine of pain as Caleb punched him; a hard line of knuckles, right into his mouth. Before Victor could clear his vision, Caleb grabbed two handfuls of Victor’s shirt, dragged him outside, and threw him into the arms of the SVT Agent walking up to the bar. “Make sure Mr. Russo gets home.”

Victor held his jaw and glared at Caleb. "I'll have your job for this!"

As diplomatically as possible, the SVT Agent ushered Victor firmly over to the car, putting him in the back seat.

Caleb sent Victor a hard, unmoving look, watching until the car pulled out of the small lot. He turned around to see Simone leaning against one of the beams. She looked at Caleb. "Thank you."

The lines of Caleb's face faintly softened, and he gave a short nod. "To be honest, Madame President, I've been looking for a reason to punch that clown since I met him." He walked up to her. "I told you I wasn't that friendly."

Simone felt her body tense pleasantly as he drew closer. The nearness of his presence made the memory of his touch, soft and expressive against her back, flash vividly through her mind. And the scene had brought back another memory; of a time when Kyle lost his temper and got into a bar fight on Lil's behalf. Lil instigated it a little bit, because riling her husband's temper in that manner led to the most amazing...

Keeping that less than innocent thought hidden, Simone smiled faintly. "Neither am I." She simply looked at him for another heartbeat before she walked back inside.

THE AWAKENING

It was the way that Simone looked at Caleb that kept him motionless and wanting. If things like this kept up between them, and if Vasco didn't lift that gag order soon, Caleb was going to break orders. His gaze made a quick pass down the length of her as she took three steps in front of him, and then he was nothing but professional as he followed behind her.

Neither one of them noticed the small mosquito, hovering.

July 12, 2012 - 11:01 PM
Alcyone Island
Residential Complex

When the MP car stopped in front of his beach house Victor stumbled out. He flipped the SVT Agent off, just on principal and staggered down his short sidewalk, digging into his pocket for his keys.

He and Simone needed to put a stop to their whole divorce mess. Sure, he thought, he'd fucked up, gotten caught, but come on what Italian man didn't cheat? Simone was overreacting, and she knew it. Victor loved her. He really did! He wasn't sure he was going to at first, but when he'd gotten the offer to attach himself to a

Terenzio in return for feeding Dominic and Olivia small bits of information on her movements, why the hell not? He loved the perks that came with being Simone's husband. The arrangement worked out all around. But now, just for one little silly affair, he was fucking blacklisted, and that was unacceptable.

"Stupid women," Victor mumbled to himself. He pushed open his front door, a hand flailing behind him to shut it as his opposite fumbled along the wall for a light switch. When he flicked it on, he jumped and gave a short, startled shout. "What the fuck are you doing here?"

Dominic stepped forward, a raised gun in his hand. "You've outlived your usefulness, Victor."

Victor's eyes widened. He held up his hand. "Now, wait a minute, wait just a fucking minute. I can get her back. I can—"

Dominic pulled the trigger twice, putting two bullets in Victor's temple. Another man came to stand next to him, Dominic's bodyguard for the last ten years. He was the only man Dominic trusted. "Take him out to the car." Dominic pulled his cell phone from his pocket, and punched in Kayla's number. It was answered on the first ring.

"Yes?"

"It's done."

THE AWAKENING

“Make sure they don’t find him.” Kayla ended the call and looked back up at her Trainer. “I’m ready, now.”

July 12, 2012 - 11:11 PM

Denver, CO

Penthouse of Tony DeMarco

“Jesus, I’m gonna die sometime. Can’t I just go how I want to?” Tony shot Gabriella a heatless glare as she pulled his pack of cigarettes out of his shirt pocket and threw them out the window. Tony couldn’t help but shake his head at the stubborn look she gave him. “Guess not.”

He pulled his car into the parking garage, killed the engine, and released an exhausted sigh. He hadn’t slept in his own bed in two days. Rubbing a hand over his face, Tony picked up the bag of Chinese food and climbed out. Gabriella zipped underneath the collar of his shirt—her favorite place apparently—as he walked into his building.

“Welcome back, Mr. DeMarco.” Ricky, the front desk man and another poor soul the Brotherhood controlled through mind manipulation, smiled in greeting.

“What’s the news, brother. Anything?” Tony stepped over to his mailbox, using his key.

“Naw. Nothing much ever happens around here. Mr. Medici dropped off that package you wanted. ‘Bout it.”

Alarm bells exploded in Tony’s mind, but he didn’t miss a beat. “Great. When did he drop it off?”

“Two days ago.”

“Cool. Have a good night, Ricky.” Tony waved and got into the elevator. The moment he entered his apartment, he dropped everything and tore it apart. Gabriella helped. He scanned for every bug that he knew the Brotherhood used to spy on people. He verified the books on his shelf, dumped out the pens on his desk, searched underneath desks, chairs, rugs, corners, every item of clothing in his closet. He found nothing.

Two hours later, Tony leaned against the wall of his ransacked house, itching for a cigarette that Gabriella wouldn’t let him have. Medici might have come to snoop around and decided it would be too risky to leave a bug behind, but Tony wasn’t convinced. Caesar obviously suspected him. Considering who Caesar had been last lifetime, Tony wasn’t surprised.

Pushing off the wall, Tony went out to his balcony to get some air. As soon as he stepped outside he noticed his plant in the corner. Aware that it was possible Caesar might be watching him from a distance, Tony went back inside the house for his watering can. When he returned, Tony bent down seemingly to water the plant but instead

he searched the leaves. It didn't take him long to find exactly what he was looking for. The tiny HI-MEN could have easily been a spider, but Tony knew better.

Smirking to himself, he walked back inside, setting the watering can on a table. "Stay put honey," Tony said to Gabriella. "I'll be right back." Picking up his cell phone, Tony left his apartment and took the stairs to the roof. He quickly scanned the area, just to be on the safe side, then called his brother. "Alex, can you talk?"

"Sì. Go ahead."

"We've got an issue. Dominic found a file about Kayla on Lucien's computer. And Caesar suspects I'm the leak. He put a bug on my balcony."

"We knew it would only be a matter of time. But, he has no proof so he knows better than to act on speculation. Put Caesar on an assignment that will keep him busy for the next five months. Extremely busy."

Tony nodded, even though his brother couldn't see him. "I've got a few things in mind."

"Good. Did you alert the triplets about the incident?"

"No, not yet."

"Don't. There's no need."

"I thought so, too. Kayla, apparently, held information back from Caesar. Marcello wrote her a letter, and she didn't share it with him."

“My heart aches for that girl. It’s nice to know that her parents’ love almost undid everything They tried to do to her.”

“Yeah, but her parents aren’t around anymore, and she’s at a training center right now, getting her programming beat back into her.”

“Let’s hope some things run deeper. I’ll talk to you soon, Tony. Stay safe.”

“Yeah, you, too.” Tony ended the call and dropped the phone back into his pocket. He dragged his hands over his face. Five more months. They just needed to keep it together for five more months. Tony let out an exhausted yawn, and trudged back to his house to clean up the mess and toss his food into the microwave. He never noticed the mosquito that sat patiently on the ledge on the rooftop. But it heard every word.

Chapter 13

“If you tell a big enough lie and tell it frequently enough, it will be believed.”

-Adolf Hitler

October 20, 2012 - 12:12 AM

Washington, D.C.

The White House

After the bible had been twisted into an acceptable story for the masses, and the pages of moral code hidden with instructions for the Brotherhood, Revelations foretold this moment in history. Freedom could not be allowed to linger for too long, lest the slaves act as they were acting now; like they were free. They, the Anunnaki and the Brotherhood, brought famine, war, and death to keep the populace of the world in the right, lower vibration. But, it was not commonly known, except to those that gave religion great independent study, that not all four horsemen of the Apocalypse were evil. There was a white horse, a warning to the Brotherhood it was possible they might fail.

Enlil was more determined than ever to make sure that didn't happen. According to his Anunnaki Magi and Seers, it was possible that Terenzio might have one of the great crystals of Atlantis. If that was true, they could open the Cave of Creation. Regardless of the fact that ELMINT was finished and ready, he would not allow them to access it.

At the stroke of 12:12, Enlil felt it when the last of the Bodhavista, the great Ascended Masters of the past, came into form on planet Earth. From his spot beside the President of the United States, the rush of positive energy made Enlil sneer, his serpent-like tongue hissing out in clear protest.

"Sign it," he ordered the president. The man was a pawn; a smooth orator with a convincing smile, like every other president had been. Distant cousins of one of the thirteen bloodlines, they were all loyal slaves. Without pause, the president signed his name to the executive order. By the time the sun rose, every single debt owed by American citizens would be called in. Money that could not be paid on the spot would bring criminal charges. Protests would follow. So, too, would the call for revolution. The people would arm themselves, lock themselves in the duality of us versus them, and give the Brotherhood, their government, more reason to take their

freedom away. It would be the beginning of the end of the nonsense of this Ascension.

“Good boy,” Enlil cooed mockingly. He petted the president like the man was a dog and looked over at Alex and Tony who were standing in front of the desk in the oval office, watching. “I want those SVT Offices shut down and Terenzio removed.”

“Too soon, Enlil,” Enki said. He sat on one of the couches, disguised in a common, unassuming human form, watching his brother.

Tony nodded. “I agree, sir. You’ve got your hands full right now. Let your inside men keep riding on Terenzio and verify whether or not they have the crystal.”

Enlil frowned. “I do not want any surprises.”

“Did your Seers tell you that Terenzio had the crystal?” Tony asked.

“Of course not,” Enlil snapped. “If they had, Terenzio would be dead.”

“Then leave it be for now, brother,” Enki reasoned. “They can’t stop you, no matter what they try and do. Their time is coming, but you have more important things to worry about.”

Enlil studied his brother in silence, then smiled. “I am glad to see that you are finally coming around.”

“I have accepted, Enlil, that some things must be done.”

“Good.” Enlil looked at Tony. “I want their team of scientists in Guatemala arrested and kept out of the way. I want their SVT Think Tank building on twenty-four surveillance. And you inform me the moment Kayla has found out whether or not they have the crystal, do you understand?”

“Of course, my God.” Tony clasped his hands together as if in prayer and bowed low.

Enlil flicked his reptilian eyes over to Alex. “Do your job. I want those concentration camps full.”

Alex mimicked his brother’s motions. “It will be done, great God.”

Enlil slowly smiled. “I never tire of hearing that.”

October 21, 2012 - 11:12 AM

Dion Corporation

Alcyone Island

Simone stared down at the papers announcing her divorce was final. She realized after some silent introspection she didn’t feel anything except a sense of relief. Victor hadn’t been seen or heard from in months, and that suited her just as well, too. One marriage down,

she thought with wry amusement, and the husband had escaped unharmed.

Simone slipped the papers back into their folder and filed them away in her desk drawer. Maybe she'd have more luck with her second husband. Not that she was looking, but if she were to pursue a relationship again, that man would have to run a close line to what she'd previously had, what she knew was possible. She wanted a connection; a bone deep, soul-filling connection.

What she wanted in a relationship, though, was a trivial matter compared to the intensity and importance of the game she was playing now. Rubbing her hands over her eyes, Simone decided, before she submerged herself back into how they were to attack the concentration camps when the time came, she was going to take a break. Standing up from behind her desk, she stretched her arms and paused. A memory came running into her mind, from a lifetime not so long ago. As if she were reliving the past, she saw the door open, and Kyle walk in. She felt herself smiling, warming to his very presence, as a heady rush of anticipation filled her; she recognized the look in his eyes.

The memory faded as smoothly as it had arrived, and Simone sighed softly. She could still feel it; his arms around her, the needy, loving weight of his kisses. When those memories assaulted her so vividly, she wasn't

certain whether or not remembering past lives was such a good thing.

Giving a little shake of her head to clear it, Simone walked out of her office, heading down the busy carpeted hallways of the Dion Corporation building, to a set of double doors. She pushed through them and out into a small garden, a soothing place for employees to take a break. It was not uncommon to find a member of middle management or anywhere in between out there, meditating or cat napping. At the moment, though, Simone was alone.

She moved leisurely into the sunlight, tipping her face up into its warmth and closing her eyes, drawing in a calming breath. She needed to silence the furiously continuing thoughts; the plans, the moves they were making, and the knowledge of how much failure at each junction would cost them.

She sensed another presence more than actually heard it. Opening her eyes, she glanced over her shoulder and saw Caleb walking towards her. He was another issue entirely. If things were different, she could have seen herself— No, she thought. There was no reason to even touch upon that subject.

Simone's brows slowly furrowed as Caleb approached. Strangely, he looked more than familiar to her. She took in the sharp angles of his face, the slightly curling sweep

of his light brown hair, and the intense set of his clear blue eyes. He had clear blue eyes. Just like— *Oh, God. Just like Kyle.* Simone swallowed hard.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to disturb you,” Caleb said with a warm smile.

Simone pushed the thought away, blaming it on silent yearning and her recent memory. “You don’t have to apologize, Caleb, and you’re not disturbing me. Is something wrong?”

“Vasco sent me to find you.”

Simone opened her mouth to answer him, but was forced into silence by another sudden rush of memory. It phased out her vision from the present to the past. She saw them—Lil and Kyle—after a job. Kyle had gotten shot, but not fatally. Liliana had been attracted to him, but didn’t plan on acting on it.

“Have dinner with me.”

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea.”

“Why not?”

Lil was coming off of Jack’s murder, her divorce, and her husband’s lack of real reaction at her affair. She wasn’t ready to jump back into anything. “It’s just not.”

Kyle hadn’t given up. Liliana had given in two weeks later. She wasn’t without him after that.

“Simone? Are you all right?” Caleb took a few steps towards her, his brow creasing.

No, Simone thought, she wasn't. She was going to end up losing her mind if this continued. She wondered, fleetingly, if Vasco suffered from the same torture of remembering past loves. She covered her face with her hands. "I'm sorry. Long day. Is he in the con—" Her hands fell away as she looked up at Caleb, and she was struck mute again. The concern marking his features wasn't familiar to Simone, but it was to Liliana. *He couldn't possibly? Could he?* She had to know. She had to know right then, or she wasn't going to be able to function, let alone play the game.

"I have to do something." It wasn't much of an explanation as Simone closed the distance between them determinedly. Her hands lifted, framing Caleb's face between the gentle strokes of her fingertips.

Every muscle in Caleb's form coiled into a tight knot. He wanted to reach out, but he was afraid that in doing so, he would break whatever spell had come over Simone and she would stop; before she kissed him. That was surely her intent, he thought, and he was proven correct when he felt her lips brush in the most featherweight touch against his own. She felt like silk. It was addicting. Instinctively, he licked his lower lip and barely restrained himself from crushing her in his arms when she covered his mouth with hers a second after, taking advantage of

his slightly parted lips to slip her own tongue inside, catching the tip of his.

He was suddenly so ridiculously familiar to Simone, she knew it with complete certainty; *Kyle*. That became the only thought that dominated her mind; that and the taste of him. She wanted more proof. As if Caleb was reading her mind, she felt his arms finally lift, and slide around her, lightly at first, and then tighter the harder she kissed him. Caleb licked intimately at the inside of her mouth, until she moaned with quiet longing. It was the sound she made, echoing in her own ears that pulled Simone back into sanity. *He* didn't remember. To Caleb, Madame President started making out with him for no reason.

Simone pulled back as unexpectedly as she leaned in, putting two big steps between them. Her breath was coming fast. Her face was flushed. She looked into those blue eyes again and almost broke down. Shutting her eyes, Simone turned her head away, searching for that family-bred control. "I'm sorry, Caleb. You... reminded me of someone. It won't happen again."

Caleb watched her intently. "Understood. But for the record, you can kiss me anytime you want. And I promise not to get fresh." He winked.

Simone lifted the family held dark gray eyes to him, and couldn't stop the almost sad upward curling of her

mouth. "Thank you, Caleb." She wasn't just thanking him for his light humor at the situation, but he wouldn't understand what the moment meant to her. Composure regained, the veil slide neatly over her eyes. "Is my brother in the conference room?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Simone nodded, walked hurriedly past him and back inside the building. Caleb remained rooted in place. He didn't turn around to watch her walk away. He bowed his head and drew in a few silent, calming breaths. "You're welcome..." he whispered when he heard the doors slide shut. "Liliana."

October 21, 2012 - 11:34 AM

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Board Room

"What's happened now?" Simone walked into the board room. Vasco and Lucien were sitting at the table, looking up at one of the projector screens which was airing a newscast from the states.

Lucien waved her over. "Looks like DeMarco's estimate was off by a few weeks. They just declared Martial Law."

Simone blinked in surprise. Pulling out a chair, she joined them.

The President of the United States was addressing the nation, and Vasco used the remote to turn up the volume as he began to speak.

“My fellow Americans, I come to you with a heavy heart. As your leader, you have tasked me with making the hard, impossible choices. Today, I must make one of those choices. As you all are well aware, our country is in dire financial straits. My attempts to jump start the economy have failed. Despite the increase in troops to Afghanistan, several immediate pending threats challenge the security and very freedom of our nation. You have demanded a solution, and I have found one. The only one.”

“I don’t get how people can look at him and not realize how full of shit he is,” Lucien muttered. “The only threat to their security is you, asshole!” he yelled at the screen.

“The financial bailouts of 2008 took on the debt of major U.S. corporations. It is a debt now owned by the Federal Reserve, and in order to keep our nation afloat we must call in that money owed. Today, all financial agreements must be paid in full. Those who cannot pay will be given limited options.”

The triplets watched as a sudden panic seemed to escalate from the press in the room. The president paused

until the noisy hum died down. "Additionally, so that we may preserve the safety of our nation and its people, Congress will vote today for America to merge with Canada and Mexico, forming a North American Union. This has been on the table for discussion for years, and I'm very pleased it will finally come to a resolution. The European Union has been a wonderful model of success, and we have no reason to believe it will be any different here. This move will push us one step closer to a world government of democracy, peace, and safety for all mankind." The noise level in the room went up again, and the president raised his hand to quiet them. He spoke above them. "Martial law will be in effect while debts are collected. The Federal Emergency Management Agency will be coordinating this juncture. Military police forces will take over the duties of local police. They will also be available to answer questions concerning our new policy in detail, so please don't hesitate to speak to them. I know the sight of the military in your hometown can be frightening, but do not be afraid. This is not, I repeat, this is not an act of aggression against American citizens. They are there for your protection so that this new transition can be made as smoothly as possible."

Simone slowly shook her head. "Did you ever think you'd see the day it came to this?"

"I always thought we'd be the ones giving that speech." Lucien's lips twisted wryly.

"They won't be prisoners for long." Vasco pressed a button, turning off the newscast. "I wonder if there's ever been a U.S. president that was not under the Brotherhood's control."

"Kennedy." Lucien got up to help himself to a cup of coffee. "I—Julian—killed him, though."

Caleb burst into the room. "Your team in Guatemala was arrested."

Vasco released a quiet sigh. Lucien frowned.

"Jesus. Was anyone hurt?" Simone asked.

"The small military squad you sent to watch over them was killed. The scientists are all right, though."

"What charge are they holding them under?" Lucien asked.

"We don't know yet. How do you want to handle it?"

Vasco clucked his tongue. "Send an SVT agent to keep their eye on the situation, and the scientists."

"You don't want to get them out?" Simone glanced over at her brother.

Vasco shook his head. "No. As much as being in jail probably sucks, we don't need to stir that hornets' nest, yet."

"What do you want to tell Derek's team?" Simone asked.

“Have Robert tell them they’ve gone offline for a while, for their safety. I don’t want their worry to distract them from their current task. They’ve got to get those weapons finished,” Vasco said.

“Sounds just like Stefano when says shit like that, doesn’t he?” Lucien chuckled.

“Yes, he does.” Simone half-smiled, then looked over at Caleb. She could still taste him. Pushing that knowledge aside, she asked, “Would you update Robert, please?”

Caleb looked at Simone. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Thanks.” Simone stood up.

“Where you going?” Lucien asked.

“Down to the shooting range. Want to come?”

“Nu uh. I’m going to take a nap. Nobody tell Uncle Christopher.” Lucien stifled a yawn.

“I’ll come with you, Simone.” Vasco stood up. “If I’m going to kill six members of the Brotherhood, I should make sure my aim is on point.”

November 25th, 2012 - 12:22 PM

Alexandria, VA

SVT Think Tank

“The only video cameras on their floor are in front of the elevators.”

Olivia sat in the passenger seat of a van with heavily tinted windows, looking at the SVT Think Tank building from the parking lot. “That’s very convenient for us. What time do they leave for lunch?”

“Between twelve-thirty and one. They don’t always go out. Sometimes they use the cafeteria. I hear it’s pretty good,” the SVT agent said.

Olivia looked down at her watch. She needed the scientists to leave. Their departure would provide her agents with the right opportunity to get inside their lab. Cleverly passing it off as a training exercise, she was able to utilize her SVT office to her own ends. Twenty minutes later, Olivia was smiling as she watched Robert leading two others out of the building.

“One’s missing,” the agent said, looking down at his laptop. “Derek Vaughn isn’t with them.”

Olivia tapped her fingers against her mouth in thought. She’d have to risk it. Reaching up, she touched her ear communicating with the two agents she had waiting to follow the scientists when they left. “Operation Watchtower is a go. And remember, we’re on a time table. Your success in this assignment will heavily influence whether or not I determine I need you on this team.”

“Roger that, Alpha. Targets in sight.”

Perfect, Olivia thought. She climbed into the back of the van. In order to make Operation Watchtower a success, her agents need only swipe one of the team members' access cards and bring it to her.

Thirty minutes later, the back of the van opened, one of her agents standing there, dangling Dr. Shirley McDermott's access card from his fingers. "Well done." Olivia put a red wig on her head and slipped the colored contacts into her eyes. "Put me in the security system, Ray."

When one knew how a system was set up, it wasn't difficult to hack into it. Five minutes later, Olivia's retinal signature replaced Shirley's. "You're good to go, Alpha," the SVT agent said.

"Good." Letting herself out of the van, Olivia slipped her arms into a white lab coat, held the access card casually in her hand, and walked into the building. Lunch time saw a decent flow of traffic in and out of the building, and Olivia took full advantage, merging with a small group of employees as they walked past the security station and got into the elevators. The group got off on level two. She slid the card into the slot and pressed the button for the fourth floor. The panel beeped and a computerized voice said, "Good afternoon Doctor. Please identify yourself." Olivia leaned forward so the retinal scan panel could scan her eye. "Confirmed. Dr. Shirley McDermott.

Welcome back,” the computerized voice said as the elevator began moving.

“Alpha, this is Red.” A voice came through Olivia's ear-piece. “I'm in their security system. There is no one in front of the elevators. You are clear.”

Even better, Olivia thought. The doors slid open, and Olivia stepped out cautiously, pausing to listen. It was quiet. Derek was probably in his office. She walked quickly past the spiral staircase, toward the empty lab. She pressed Shirley's ID card against the security panel and the door slid open.

It was obvious from the setup inside the lab that Derek and his team were building something—some sort of device. Olivia walked to one of the cases, and lifted the unlocked lid. She didn't recognize the device inside. Pulling out her cell phone, she took a picture. Closing the lid on the case, she opened up three more. They contained the same strange device, but the fourth made her gasp in surprise. Inside was the mirror image of the crystal rod Loki had carried, that Enlil had been so happy to discover.

If she brought the rod to Enlil, she could stop jumping through hoops to win his favor. Decision made, Olivia snapped the case shut and wrapped her fingers around the handle.

A stern voice sounded behind her: “Don't move.”

Olivia went deadly still. Fuck. She heard the click of the gun being cocked and probably pointed at her head. “Easy,” Olivia said. “I work here.”

“No, you don’t.” The male voice said. “We have a sit—”

Olivia whirled around and smacked the Cadre with the case. He released a startled grunt, and Olivia hit him with the case again, hard against the side of his head. The man hit the floor, but the case opened and the rod spilled out, clattering to the floor and rolling halfway across the room as if it was trying to get away from her.

The radio on the Cadre’s shoulder echoed out: “Brian, do you copy? We’re coming downstairs.”

Growling, Olivia kicked the fallen solider in the stomach, then touched her earpiece. “Red, do you read me? Set off the fire alarms, now. Hurry.” She jerked her eyes over to the crystal, just as the Cadre groaned and started coming out of his daze. She wanted to run over and grab it, but she couldn’t risk getting caught. She would have to leave it. She rushed out of the lab room to the sound of heavy footsteps coming down the spiral staircase, and pulled the gun from her back. She lifted the weapon and started firing towards the stairs, the bullets striking metal and sending off sparks, the noise of gunfire halting the Cadre coming to check on their comrade. Olivia squeezed the trigger a few more times as she slammed her shoulder into the stairwell door, pushing through it.

THE AWAKENING

Just as she got there, the fire alarm went off, an insanely loud, annoying noise. She tore off down the stairs, and people started filing in with her. She hid the gun back under her lab coat, ducked her head down, and blended in with the crowd.

Once outside, Olivia broke past the crowd just as fire trucks screeched to a halt in front of the building. She was at the van when she heard the shout for her to stop, and saw the Cadre running towards her.

Smirking, she fired a few rounds in their direction before she closed the door, snapping at the agent in the driver's seat. "What are you waiting for? Go!"

The young man looked startled at the live gunfire but peeled out, tires squealing. Olivia ripped off her wig, and climbed into the passenger seat as the Agent drove the van straight through the security gate. She patted the man's arm comfortingly. "Well done, Agent."

"That looked a very real, ma'am." The Agent shot Olivia a sideways glance.

Olivia smiled "It's supposed to. How else will I determine how well you can react under duress? Take us back to the office." She needed to get in touch with Dominic.

November 25, 2012 - 3:33 PM

CRYSTAL STORM

Alcyone Island

Dion Corporation Headquarters

“Someone broke into SVT Think Tank.”

Vasco sat behind his desk and arched a sharp brow at Caleb. “Continue.”

“They didn’t steal anything. Luckily, one of the Cadre assigned to Robert caught the woman as she was trying to take the crystal.”

“Anyone hurt?”

“No, nothing serious. She got away, though, and we can’t make out her face on the security cameras.”

Vasco clucked his tongue thoughtfully. “All right. I want the whole operation moved to the Compound. Do it quietly, very quietly.”

“Yes, Mr. President.” Caleb turned to leave, but paused. He looked back at Vasco. “Sir, about the gag order.”

A subtle smile touched Vasco’s mouth. “I imagine it must get harder every day.”

Caleb matched Vasco’s smile. “Yes, sir, it does.”

“Soon, Caleb. A few days more soon. Let me know once our braniac team is at the compound.”

“Yes, sir.”

THE AWAKENING

November 30, 2012 - 9:12 PM

MIEC

The Octopus

“I was right in my assumption. The crystal has made ELMINT stronger.”

Alex smiled as he and Enlil waited for the underwater train to arrive. “That’s good news, my Lord.” *Fucking Anunnaki*, Alex thought. There had been a two hundred year period the Anunnaki left the planet, and put sole control in the hands of the Brotherhood. The Anunnaki had matters on their home planet to attend to, and they wanted to explore the inside of the Moon. Earth’s moon was a giant space vessel built specifically to monitor the planet. At some point in the galaxy’s history, it had come under attack, as visible by the many craters on its surface. Whatever race built it vanished without a trace, but the technology they left behind was of some curiosity to the Anunnaki.

On Earth, during the time the Anunnaki were gone, seven different alien races came to visit, and a few attempted to assist humanity in breaking loose of its chains. It was also while the Anunnaki were gone the Brotherhood began to disagree on how to handle the masses. A united core of thirteen split into three separate

camps, and their internal battle lasted for seven decades. When the Anunnaki returned, humanity was breaking free, the Brotherhood was losing control, and it seemed the Ascension was finally imminent. It was because of Enlil's skill as both a general and a leader that the attempt was thwarted, and the Brotherhood was put back together. Those were considered the dark days for the Brotherhood; several of the elite bluebloods were killed, entire families removed and replaced with the next waiting to be chosen worthy. It was because of the Brotherhood's errors that Enlil realized the Anunnaki needed to be more effective at handling leaks of information. The public suddenly knew too much, and the only way to combat that was to give them alternative versions of the same story from seemingly credible sources. It had gotten to the point that they needed to control not just conspiracy theorists, but spiritualists, too.

"It is. Everything is right on point." Enlil stepped into the luxurious train cabin first, and Alex followed obediently behind him. Underneath the Statue of Liberty—which was a tribute to Isis, the wife of Enlil who died during one of The Great Wars—was the entrance to the underwater tunnel that connected the United States and Australia. It went straight to the Military Industrial Extra-terrestrial Complex, classified as a D2, called The Octopus.

THE AWAKENING

The Octopus was one of five M.I.E.C.'s on Earth. Anunnaki and Zeta scientists worked alongside select, mind-controlled, and cult conditioned humans. Contrary to conspiracy theorists' beliefs, Dulce was no longer a joint alien/human base. After a group of rebellious Zetas and humans tried to burn it down, the Brotherhood and Anunnaki decided to keep all such bases underwater. The Octopus had two main objectives. The first was to perfect the Programmable Life Forms. Known as PLFs, they were robots with organic parts. The second base objective was mind control through channeling and false mystical experiences.

Using an advanced form of HAARP, the Brotherhood frequently made NSA selected individuals believe they were channeling some mystical being. The target thought he or she was communing with angels or benevolent aliens, when in truth, they were talking to someone in the base who was literally reading a script.

Now that martial law was declared nearly worldwide, the Brotherhood would need these machines much less. Alex looked out the window, watching the underwater tunnel blur by as the high speed train traveled at 1500 mph towards The Octopus. Alex often marveled at the things human beings were capable of; especially when he looked at things like the Octopus. Its design came from human ingenuity. Alien technology made it possible. It

was a huge dome, with six separate arms extending out from it, each housing a different function of the base. At this depth, the sun's rays didn't penetrate the ocean, making windows pointless. The only light that emanated from the dome was a dull blue glow that pulsed rhythmically from the roof.

"Tell me, have there been any improvements in the escalation of violence because of martial law?" Enlil asked.

Alex shook his head and feigned annoyance. "No. It's all gone, surprisingly, very peacefully, and we don't understand it. The amount of violent outbreaks has been extremely low. Even in the camps, people are not combative. They're angry, but they're peaceful, forgiving almost. It's very strange."

Enlil growled. "Damn this ascension. It won't happen. I'll be dead before I let it happen."

"Of course it won't, my God. It's impossible. Wait until after the winter solstice. The people will change their tune then." Alex assured him.

"Yes. Yes, they will," Enlil promised with malevolent intent. "I've decided to move up the attack on Terenzio."

Alex didn't miss a beat. "If you think that's best. May I ask why, my God?"

"Olivia confirmed they have the second crystal. They are also building what sounds to me like one of Tesla

weapons. I knew Stefano stole one, I just couldn't locate it."

"Good idea, then. Who did you send?"

"Family against family." Enlil smiled coldly. "After killing a few thousand humans, we've finally gotten the new PLF's operational. They're going to get their first test run against the Terenzios."

Chapter 14

“To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right.”

- Confucius

December 1st, 2012 - 10:11 PM

Alcyone Island

Phoenix Resort Hotel

*They were twenty days away. Twenty days from the end of this war, and the undeniable fact that someone would be proven right. It came down to a very simple, startling duality; the Ascension would happen, or it wouldn't. There was no in between. No more walking the line for humanity, a choice had to be made. Even with that tension hanging in the air, the family decided to celebrate. Isabella insisted. The triplets were thrown a birthday party, day of. The elders of the family spared no expense on the young heirs, the ballroom of the Phoenix Resort

THE AWAKENING

Hotel turned into a private, festive celebration that spilled out onto the beach. The majority of the family was there, except Amadeo and Olivia, but their absence didn't surprise anyone.

Security was on high alert for obvious reasons, and the area was patrolled with Dion security, military police, and the Omega Cadre standing in the shadows, against walls, and on either side of the open doorways. They prowled between the crowds of people on the dance floor, or out on the beach, watching the party-goers taking advantage of the free liquor, and doing the occasional drug. Every thirty minutes or so, the distant hum of a helicopter tainted the noise of the party goers, the music that thundered from the wireless speakers, and the steel drums and bongos played by the bohemians near the bonfire-lined ocean.

Caleb was armed, but not dressed in the uniform of Dion security with the Phoenix symbol and company words bled in red on the right hand side of black suit jackets. He wore the fitted tuxedo Lucien took him to get hours earlier. His ear piece was in place, but it stayed silent. It was for emergencies only. Period. It wasn't just Terenzio's night for celebration.

Caleb moved as fluidly as a Terenzio, but with his own unique style; his body smoothly maneuvered through the crowd, deceptively languid, but on complete alert. He

was a man on a mission, a man who had barely taken his eyes off of Simone Terenzio, who was dancing with her older brother.

At Simone's request Vasco pulled himself from his corner of solitude and taken her out onto the dance floor. "You're not allowed to ask me again for a week. I promise I'm fine."

Simone smirked softly, setting one hand in Vasco's and placing the other on his shoulder. "You've heard that tired old cliché, haven't you? About what 'fine' really stands for?"

Vasco chuckled lightly, shaking his head. "That doesn't apply here. I'm just not colorful enough to use any other adjective." He led Simone into the simple step dictated by the rhythm of the music, but did confess something a moment after. "I miss her. That's all."

Simone's heart tightened with sympathy. So did her hands. "I know," she said quietly, glancing down at the square of dance floor beneath their feet. She, of all people, knew what it meant to truly miss someone. She felt the hollow ringing of loss—intensified, perhaps, because her soul's twin had seen fit to take another spin at this thing called life in none other than Caleb Kincade. Simone laughed, almost to herself, and shook her head as she lifted it. "Come on, Vasco. Be a Terenzio. Suck it up."

"I am. I haven't cried once." Well, not since he had the first time, Vasco thought. "An urge my alter ego is horrified was ever an option." Amusement flickered briefly through his eyes. "How's life without Victor?"

Simone laughed again, and it wasn't to herself. "It isn't dull, but I don't know how to describe it better than that."

The humor in Vasco's eyes lifted from Simone to some point over her shoulder; more specifically to a figure moving through the crowd behind her. A subtle smile crawled across Vasco's mouth. Simone narrowed her eyes. Vasco only smiled like that when he was up to something. She opened her mouth to demand just what he was plotting, but Vasco interrupted her. "We can do better than that." He tipped his head close to Simone's and whispered, "He's a little less of a pussy this lifetime." Vasco drew back and spun Simone out from him, releasing her hand.

He knew. *Vasco knew?! The whole fucking time*, Simone seethed, Vasco knew the truth about Caleb, and he hadn't bothered to tell her? Fury licked up Simone's spine, stiffening it. That same fury dissolved in a tingling flush of anticipation as someone caught her hand. That someone was Caleb. Simone opened her mouth a second time, and still no words came.

Caleb curled his fingers around Simone's and drew them into his chest. He slid his arm around Simone's

waist, pulled her closer, and silently led her away from the crowd and back onto the floor. For the first time—openly, at least—there was nothing remotely professional about the way he was looking at her. He had never looked at her like that; not in this lifetime. "Happy Birthday," he said quietly.

Simone's body tightened as a heady rush of longing swept through her. For the last five months Caleb was always there—sometimes standing just out of sight—ever vigilant, but never obtrusive. The moment he took her into his arms, his presence overwhelmed her. He consumed each of her senses. Simone tightened her fingers around his before the current bore her away, and lifted her gaze to his. "Thank you," she said just as softly.

He leaned forward, brushing his cheek against hers, and said, "Since you made me ask you to marry me twice, I decided to recruit some help with the dance."

December 1, 2012 - 10:11 AM

Loyalty Airlines International Airport

Cargo Runway #17

Amadeo sat in the backseat of the sedan parked on the runway. Olivia was next to him, lighting a cigarette. He

THE AWAKENING

pressed the button to crack her window and asked, "What time is it?"

Olivia looked down at her diamond and gold watch. "Fifteen past the hour."

Amadeo pulled the cell phone out of the inside of his suit jacket. "Is Kayla sure about this?"

Olivia snapped her eyes over to him. "When did you turn into such a fucking pussy? Haven't we been waiting long enough for this day? Make the call."

Giving his cousin a hard look, Amadeo pressed the speed dial button, and brought the phone to his ear.

"Yes?"

"Nicholas, where are you?"

"On my way to the triplets' party."

"We'll all go together. Meet us at the airport. Runway 17." Amadeo reached over for his cousin's cigarette, plucking it out of her fingers, and pulled hard on the filtered end.

"When?" Nicholas asked.

"Now."

December 1, 2012 - 10:22 PM

Alcyone Island

Phoenix Resort Hotel

Simone closed her eyes, slipping her arm around Caleb's shoulders and digging her fingers into his shirt. A sharp peal of emotion knifed through her, and she released a hard, shuddering breath. He knew, too, she thought. Jesus Christ, *he knew*. And suddenly, every reason why she couldn't have a happy ending with Caleb floated right out the window. She could have the now. Fighting the urge to fan her lips against his jaw, Simone turned her face into the warmth of Caleb's neck. A small smile tugged at the corner of her mouth. "So, you're planning to ask me a third time?"

Caleb turned his face into Simone's hair and pulled her closer to him, his feet barely moving over the floor. "Only if you promise to say yes the first time."

Simone drew back, but only as far as she needed to in order to hold Caleb's face between her hands and look at him; really see him, because burbling through the tide of happiness that swept through her was a hint of misgiving. "You want to do that? Take a chance on a woman you barely know, for the woman she used to be?"

"Not just because of the woman you used to be. Because of the woman you are now." Caleb pressed his face closer, so he could set his forehead against hers. "You can't hide from me, in any incarnation. I know you."

THE AWAKENING

No one had known Liliana like Kyle had. No one had loved Liliana like Kyle had, either. Ever. She closed her eyes, drew a deep breath, and tightened her hands. "Then kiss me," she breathed, opening her eyes and locking their gazes. "Really kiss me, and don't stop."

December 1, 2012 - 10:22 PM

Loyalty Airlines International Airport

Cargo Runway #17

"Why am I here?" Nicholas leaned down into the open window of his cousins' sedan.

"Call it in that the security team for this shipment is going radio silent for fifteen minutes," Amadeo said.

Nicholas arched a brow. "Why?"

"Obviously, because it's not cargo in that plane, Nicky." Olivia gave him a condescending smile. "Just do it."

Nicholas ignored Olivia's crassness, lapsing into thought. "I can't guarantee this. Not with all the new security protocols in place."

"Be convincing," Amadeo said. "The plane lands in ten minutes."

“Do this right, Nicky, and you’ll never miss a tip from the Brotherhood again.” Olivia winked.

The look that Nicholas gave Olivia was sharp and deadly. He didn’t give a fuck what rank she was, he would kill her if she made a remark like that again. “I’ll see what I can do.” Stepping away from their car, he jogged over to the hangar. Flashing his credentials to the guard, he waited while the Dion Corp security guard pulled the finger print scanner from his pocket and pressed Nicholas’s thumb onto it. Identity confirmed, the guard opened the door to the wide, open space ready for one of the usual late night transports. Five guards prowled the perimeter, always alert. Three Packdog Operators stood near the waist high robots that would unload the plane’s cargo, smoking and chatting. Nicholas climbed a metal staircase to the small office above the hangar’s security pod.

Nicholas smiled at the sergeant in charge. “I need to radio into headquarters.”

December 1, 2012 - 10:25 PM

Alcyone Island

Phoenix Resort Hotel

THE AWAKENING

Heedless of the game in which Simone was submerged, the eyes on them, or the crowd that surrounded them, Caleb's arms engulfed her as he brought his chin down and covered her mouth with the needy weight of his own.

A flood of memories surged through Simone, filling her mind with glimpses of their past; his face—Kyle's face—limned with early morning light, crisp sheets folded against the blade of his hip, the eager grip of his hands on her shoulders, his mouth on her breast; moments of tender affection and explosive passion that settled in her consciousness like dust on a windowsill, only to burst into the air in a flurry of golden chaos as the past gave way to the present and left her reeling; left only Caleb, with his heart beating against her chest and the taste of him on her tongue. Making a quiet but fierce sound of need into his mouth, Simone wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her body flush against his.

Caleb didn't want to break the contact. He truly didn't. He wanted to trace the curves of Simone's body with the warm pressure of his hands and reacquaint himself with every inch of her. He wanted to reminder her, in this lifetime, what it felt like to be loved.

He was going to, just in a more private setting.

With great effort, Caleb pulled his mouth away from Simone's. "I have a suite upstairs. And as soon as we get

there, I promise, I'm not going to stop kissing you," he whispered, and drew back, only to take Simone's hand and fold it in the crook of his arm.

Neither of them noticed the almost too intent stare of Kayla. Pausing mid-sentence in her conversation with Dominic, Kayla took a step to the right and watched Caleb and Simone walk over to the bank of elevators. Across the room, standing at the bar behind Lucien—who was actively engaged in talking to his “birthday presents”—Vasco noticed. It was the first time that he had seen an openly predatory look in his aunt's eyes. It gave birth not to a sense of dread, but one of cold knowing. He desperately hoped he was wrong.

December 1, 2012 - 10:33 PM

Loyalty Airlines International Airport

Cargo Runway #17

Nicholas walked back to the Sedan, tucking his hands into the pockets of his light coat. “It's done,” he said when Olivia rolled down her window.

Olivia eyed him with patient amusement over the rim of a raised glass. “Great job, Nicky.”

THE AWAKENING

“What did you tell them?” Amadeo asked, leaning over to look up at Nicholas

“I told them I had a birthday present for the triplets on the plane, and since it had to be taken out of the crate before it was delivered, I didn’t want the potential for a leak. I said I needed fifteen minutes and that Lieutenant General Terenzio was with me to ensure security while communications was down.”

“That’s very smart of you.” Olivia winked at him, and then turned her head to watch as the big cargo plane made a smooth landing on the runway. It taxied slowly inside the hangar, and two outside guards pulled the big metal doors shut.

“What’s on the plane?” Nicholas eyed the two of them.

The sound of fierce shouts and the dull thud of gunfire tainted the air of the immediate vicinity. A dark smile spread across Olivia’s mouth. “A present from the Brotherhood.”

December 1, 2012 - 10:33 PM

Alcyone Island

Phoenix Resort Hotel

Caleb had Kyle's eyes. Simone felt him in Caleb's touch. She saw the same humor glinting in the glances he had cast her way. Their personalities weren't all that different, but that was where the similarities ended. Caleb did not taste like Kyle. He did not smell like Kyle. The angles of his body felt foreign beneath her hands, but he was warm. He was reassuringly solid, and she had wondered for some time now just what it would be like to be pressed against him in a moment like this. It was exquisite. Traces of the man he had been mingled with the man he was, the man who had driven Simone quietly crazy the last five months. Echoing the groan that escaped Caleb when she yanked him into the elevator and kissed him, she ripped open his shirt, heedless of their surroundings. Caleb gave a short, husky laugh against her mouth. "If you keep that up—" He was forced to hiss in a breath when Simone smoothed her hands over his chest. "—we'll never make it to the room."

"That's never stopped us," Simone panted, lifting into Caleb to claim his mouth again. He did nothing to help the matter by kissing her back, harder. Absently, he heard the elevator ding and doors behind him open. At the last possible second, he jerked his foot back, his heel catching the doors to make them reopen. Caleb swept Simone into his arms, backing out of the car.

THE AWAKENING

Bumping their way down the hall, Simone plied hot, open-mouthed kisses over the side of his neck and into the hollow of his throat, and wrapped her legs around his waist. Her shoulders barked up against a door. “Keycard,” Caleb mumbled against the curve of her jaw. “Pocket.” Simone slipped a hand into his pocket, seized the keycard, and reached behind her to slide it into the lock.

“Doorknob,” she murmured into the underside of his chin. “Now.”

December 1, 2012 - 10:35 PM

Loyalty Airlines International Airport

Cargo Runway #17

The first version of Programmable Life Forms were government sanctioned, genetically created grey aliens designed to “abduct humans.” The first version allowed the Roshaniya to test their mind control technology on unwitting suspects as well as explore forms of genetic manipulation. The newest version of the PLFs, as they were called, were actually soldiers to use in combat. They were all six feet tall, thickly muscular, with solid, soulless black eyes that had no irises. They were dressed in Special

Forces fatigues, with the All Seeing Eye that was found on the back of the one dollar bill tattooed on their left cheeks.

Nicholas stared in shock as they marched out of the hanger. One PLF broke the rigid formation to shoot both outside guards, then fell back into the marching line. Amadeo got out of the car just as a line of SUVs came screeching to a halt near his vehicle.

“When the mafia just isn’t not enough.” Olivia was almost orgasmic. “Time to take this family back.”

The PLFs stopped in front of the cars. One broke formation again, coming from the far right side to meet Amadeo’s approach. “You were briefed?”

“Yes, sir. On the plane.” The PLF’s voice was low and creepily monotone.

“I’m looking forward to seeing your men in action, Captain.” Amadeo removed the keycard from his pocket, passing it over to the PLF. “You’ll need that to get into the security center.”

“Yes, sir.” The captain saluted Amadeo, turned on his heel and shouted a command. The rest of his men fanned out and climbed into the SUVs. Amadeo watched them move, a sense of finality sharpening the reality of the moment.

“We’re on a time table, cousin!”

THE AWAKENING

Olivia's shout pulled Amadeo into motion, and he got back into the sedan. "Meet us at the hotel, Nicky," Olivia said, rolling up her window. Their car led the deadly entourage from the back roads and straight for downtown.

Nicholas climbed back into his own sporty vehicle and immediately pulled the cell from his pocket. "Name dial, Leone Vaughn."

December 1, 2012 - 10:44 PM

Alcyone Island

Phoenix Resort Hotel

Caleb twisted the knob, uncharacteristically clumsy in his passion and haste. He kicked the door shut and didn't bother with a light. He bumped into an end table, which sent a lamp crashing to the floor, and Simone caught them against the wall, distractedly hoping in that precarious moment that they didn't fall. Heedless of the small destruction, Caleb kept moving, until they tumbled over the arm of the couch. He yanked out his earpiece, and quickly set his sidearm on the floor. Once his hands were free, he impatiently pushed the beautiful dress up Simone's thighs and set his mouth open and warm

against the column of her throat, the tip of his tongue marking a damp path on her skin.

Simone shuddered. Closing her eyes and drawing a sharp breath, she arched into Caleb and tugged his undershirt over his head, so that she could kiss the warm slope of his shoulder and tease the tightly coiled muscles with the scrape of her teeth. For a moment, Caleb savored the heated play of Simone's lips and teeth. In the next, her dress joined his shirt in a pile on the floor. Intimate columns of moonlight gazed in through the tall windows of the suite, exposing all of Simone's sexy, feminine curves to the natural light and Caleb's heated, memorizing gaze.

"Christ, you're beautiful," Caleb whispered as he cupped a strong hand around the curve of her breast and lifted it to his eager mouth.

"I think we have a problem." Vasco touched his brother's shoulder.

Lucien set his empty glass on the bar, excused himself from the women, and turned to his brother. "What's wrong?"

Vasco didn't answer right away. He watched Kayla pull her cell phone out of her pocket and step away from the crowd to take a call.

"V?"

"Call Headquarters, tell them to get our plane ready and have a team standing by. Operation Ghost is a go, right now."

Lucien's brows shot up, but he didn't hesitate to pull the phone from his pocket, pressing the speed dial button. "Talk to me, brother."

Vasco took a step away from the bar as a line of SUVs came screeching to a halt on the sandy beach, earning angry shouts from the party goers. "The Brotherhood's calling check."

"Me?" Simone looked down at Caleb, lightly shivering as he set his mouth on her and flushed her with heat. "Look at you." Pressed over her body and with cool moonlight slanting down his back, he could have been a Grecian statue, hewn out of marble and exquisitely detailed. Simone had seen him—Kyle—from this angle countless times, and the sight still sent a peal of sensation right through the middle of her, down to the damp heat growing between her thighs.

Caleb laughed huskily against her skin. He lifted his head, and his humor faded in the darkened, passionate glow of Simone's eyes. He captured her mouth, got rid of his pants, and then he rose over her, to position himself between her thighs.

Simone cupped Caleb's face between her hands, holding him against her as she kissed him slowly and deeply, over and over, and grazed his hips with her thighs. Soft pleading limned the edges of her murmur. "Don't stop."

"Goddammit, Amadeo, stop!" Christopher shouted furiously.

The party was over run. One moment, there was celebration, family and friends. Now, dead bodies littered the floor. Most were security. The ballroom doors which faced the beach were yanked shut and guarded by the PLFs.

Those still alive were held at gun point, by their own family. Nicholas looked briefly surprised to discover that his father was part of all of this, and immediately wondered if the old man knew about his family.

Once some measure of order was attained, Amadeo went over to Lucien and struck him.

Lucien grunted, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth. He worked his jaw back and forth, wincing slightly, and leveled his gaze on Amadeo. "Your uniform shouldn't read Lieutenant General. We're going to give you a new special title: Olivia's bitch."

Amadeo hit him again, viciously. When Lucien fell to the floor, he began kicking him. Stopping at Christopher's shout, Amadeo smirked coldly. "He's not going to be alive much longer to protect you, Lucien. Don't feel too secure, all right?"

"Go fuck yourself, Amadeo," Lucien wheezed.

It was difficult to watch his brother get beaten and not lose face. But, he managed. "How do you intend to get away with this?" Vasco asked nonchalantly.

Olivia set a calming hand on Amadeo's shoulder and looked pointedly at Vasco. "When you're all dead, the army will have no choice but to follow our orders. And there are more of us on the way." Her smile was razor sharp. "Where's your sister?"

When Kayla finished giving an order to PLFs' captain, she walked over to Isabella and Christopher. "I know where they are."

Don't stop. As if he ever could. Neither could he make them wait any longer. Caleb curved his hand around Simone's hip, stilling her for the slow penetration that took his breath away.

This was what love felt like, Simone thought. The faint stirrings of affection that she felt for Victor, once upon a time, were like tiny sparks flickering in the dark. They were nothing compared to this consuming blaze of emotion. She lifted into Caleb, reaching for him with her hips, and moaned into his shoulder as he slid home.

Caleb lifted his head just to press his cheek against hers and breathed into her ear, "I love you. I know I do."

Shuddering under the sweet torture of Caleb's words and the delicious friction of their bodies, Simone pressed a hand to his cheek and held him close, committing to memory the way the light played over his shoulders and silvered the fine hairs on his arms. "I love you," she murmured with breathless intensity. How could she not love the man who she had loved countless times before? "I always have. I always will."

"Show me." Caleb demanded huskily, a second before his mouth smothered hers.

“Show us, Christopher. Show us all that proud loyalty, now.” Dominic’s smile was cold and laced with the shadow of victory as he watched Kayla walk over to Christopher, pull back the hammer on her revolver and press the muzzle against his forehead.

Isabella let her eyes fall shut. She was no fool; she knew what happened next—to her little brother. Her heart began to ache, and her years felt like a sudden weight on her back. She pressed her hand to the left and found John’s, squeezing it tightly. John had been in charge of her personal security for years. And some of the rumors about their relationship were true. It was a small comfort when he squeezed back.

Kayla’s gray eyes were a blank steel wall as they locked with Christopher’s. “Choose.”

Simone had little choice, as those two simple words infused her with a fresh dose of memories. How many times had Kyle said them to her the lifetime before? A hundred times? A thousand? And how many times had those two simple words coursed through her, ripping a sharp cry of pleasure out of her? At least once more, before Caleb sealed their mouths and the first tightening of sensation slipped through her. Simone pressed against

him. She lifted her hips. She spread her knees and dug her nails into his shoulders, urging him closer, begging him deeper as she slaked her thirst for old lusts and new love in the heat of his mouth.

Christopher stared up at Kayla. "Your father knew what you were, Kayla. We all did. He loved you. We loved you. Be a part of this family. Stand on the right side." The latter sharpened and raised his voice, his heavy mix of emotions tightly expressed.

There were five seconds of silence. Lucien felt like his heart was going to pop as he watched; felt like the breath would never get down into his lungs. His eyes darted from Kayla's gun to Uncle Christopher's face. He had to do something. Someone had to do *something*.

Vasco kept his steady, impassive gaze on Olivia and Amadeo. Inside, the heart that lived with the pain of the loss of three others prepared for the loss of another. *Good-bye, Christopher.*

"Wrong answer," Kayla said softly. She squeezed the trigger.

Simone's cry vibrated against the hard, messy press of their mouths. Caleb pulled back, but only far enough he could watch the way the lines of pleasure moved on her face. He wanted her to be as lost as he was; so far gone that past and present collided and exploded, leaving nothing but the emotion that brought them together from one lifetime to the next. Caleb demanded more out of her, tested the nearly nonexistent lines of his own control when he met her raised hips with shorter thrusts. Each hard movement earned Simone's answering cry. Each cry was sharper than the last. Every touch became more desperate, until she was clutching at him, raking him with her nails, and writhing beneath him. Sweat glistened in the hollows of her body. Her breath came in half, shuddering gasps. She kissed him hard enough that she tasted blood.

"Caleb," she panted, "I'm... Kyle, I'm—!" Simone went rigid, breathless anticipation etched onto her face, and with a wavering cry of release, she broke.

"You fucking bitch!" Lucien jumped up in blind rage and was knocked down again by the furious strike from the butt of Amadeo's gun. He didn't get back up.

Olivia smirked, and spoke to Lucien's motionless form. "Don't worry, she'll ask you, too."

A single tear slipped from the corner of Isabella's eyes as she heard the sickening thump of her brother's body hitting the floor. Kayla stepped in front of her. Isabella looked up at Kayla with firm; immovable Terenzio resolve. "You know my answer."

Kayla pressed the muzzle of her gun against Isabella's forehead. "Yes, I do."

Caleb groaned roughly into her hard kiss and went with her, shuddering against her, pulsing hotly, deeply inside of her, clutching her to him in a bruising grip that would leave its own passionate mark.

Surrender had never been so sweet.

Trembling from exertion, Simone sank into the welcoming folds of the couch and pulled Caleb down with her, pressing a damp, flushed cheek to his. Her heart pounded against his chest, beating an answering rhythm to his own. Smiling faintly, she closed her eyes and let herself drift in the haze left in pleasure's wake.

When he could catch his breath, Caleb murmured lazily against her skin, "Do you know how long I've wanted to do that to you?"

“Do you know how long we’ve been waiting to do this?”
Olivia asked Vasco

Ignoring Olivia, Vasco called out to Kayla, “If only your mother could see you, now.”

Four out of five pounds of pressure sat on the trigger of Kayla’s gun. Isabella was certain she saw something move, come to life, in Kayla’s cold, blank stare.

“If you don’t shut up, Vasco, I’m going to make you.”
Dominic slanted his darkly promising eyes over to his cousin.

“You remember Marilyn, don’t you?” Vasco asked, ignoring Dominic’s warnings.

Kayla stiffened, turned her head, and set the full force of her gaze on Vasco.

The corner of Vasco’s mouth curled; just enough. A second later, the door at the far end of the ballroom blew open.

Simone pieced together the presence of mind to laugh, and to give Caleb’s shoulders a light squeeze. “No, I don’t.” Her smile deepened when she caught a glimpse

of his, and she tilted her head back to meet his eyes. She stroked his face. "How long?"

Caleb took the opportunity to kiss her, softly. "First time we met, five years ago. The day I dropped my coffee cup on your shoe." His smile grew.

Simone grinned faintly. Had he known who she used to be that day? Had he known who he used to be? She opened her mouth to ask him those very questions when his phone buzzed across the floor. Caleb tensed and pushed off her. It was the last thing that he wanted to do, but, if his phone was ringing, nothing good was happening. "You should probably start getting dressed."

It wasn't the phone call itself that had Simone moving, but the tension in Caleb's body, and then his suggestion. She pushed off of the couch and snatched her dress off of the floor. "What's wrong?"

Caleb looked down at the message that appeared, and his blood ran cold. "Everything."

Chapter 15

“The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering.”

—Ben Okri

December 1, 2012 - 11:22 PM

Alcyone Island

Phoenix Resort Hotel

When the door blew open, all hell broke loose a second time. All eyes flew to the smoke filling the entrance way. It barely concealed the movement of the military police as they rushed into the room, guns blazing. John threw his body into Isabella's, knocking her to the floor and out from underneath the muzzle of Kayla's gun. Vasco took advantage of the distraction, lowered his shoulder, and barreled into Amadeo and subsequently Olivia. Thrown off balance, Amadeo went crashing to the floor under Vasco's weight and Olivia stumbled backwards, barely managing to catch herself on a bar stool.

Kayla drew her gun's attention away from Isabella and pointed it towards the doors, backing up as the PLFs moved to cover her. Another explosion rocked the room when the second ballroom door blasted open, this one behind Vasco's position. A swarm of Dion Corp Security guards rushed in, crouching down and moving quickly over to the two heirs.

Amadeo moved fast, throwing his fist into Vasco's jaw and flipping him off. Amadeo clambered to his feet, just to duck down as bullets flew over his head, coming from the Dion Corp guards. Amadeo grabbed Olivia by the arm and pulled her towards the doors that led out to the beach. One of the doors stood open, with a member of the PLFs crouched inside of it and waving a hand at them.

"C'mon, we've got to go!" Amadeo shouted at her.

"No, we don't!" Olivia wrenched back from his grip, pointing her gun at Vasco, who was bent over trying to pull up his brother. "Not until they're dead!"

The MPs formed a line and raised their bullet proof shields to provide cover. Leone saw Olivia from across the room, raised his own gun, and fired at her. Amadeo saw it and knocked Olivia to the ground just as she pulled her own trigger, both bullets barely missing their targets.

"We can't kill them in here. Wait for back up. They won't get off the island alive," Amadeo hissed, roughly

grabbed Olivia's arm and hauled her to her feet, dragging her.

John got Isabella safely out into the hallway. She was shaken, but otherwise as sharp as ever and mad as hell. "Get me a radio. Is the triplets' plane ready?"

"Army is scrambling," a MP soldier told her, handing over an ear piece. "Two fighters are going over to Loyalty right now. The others are getting ready to engage the enemy. They've got more coming."

"Sir, we've got to go!" one of the Dion Crop security guards shouted at Vasco, grabbing him by the arm. Vasco smacked Lucien across the cheek again, and his brother came awake with a start and a groan.

"My fuckin' head," Lucien muttered, wincing.

"C'mon. Get up." Vasco pulled him to his feet, following the guards out into the hallway.

"Where is Madame President?"

"Upstairs. You send a chopper to the roof and bring them to the airfield. Do it now," Vasco ordered, and the Agent brought his wrist to his mouth, speaking hurriedly into the radio. Vasco looked over at Isabella. "We need to go."

Isabella met Vasco's eyes. "Yes, you do." She stepped into him and kissed his cheek. "You finish it. Go."

For a brief moment, Vasco's brow creased. He took Isabella's hand, squeezing it tightly. Lucien stood at his

brothers' side, his eyes raw and pained. "We'll get them, Aunt Isabel. I promise."

Isabella gave Vasco a quick, reassuring smile, then turned it onto Lucien. She kissed his cheek. "He loved you like his own son," she said, meaning Christopher. "And he was very proud of you. We all are."

Tears sprang into Lucien's eyes. "I love you," Lucien said in a trembling voice.

Isabella smiled and patted his cheek.

Leone rushed over to them, the sounds of shouts, gunfire and violent chaos echoing out around them. "They're going to overrun this hotel any second. You've got to get out of here. We'll hold them off."

"Let's go." Claspig his brother's shoulder, Vasco nodded once at his family. He didn't expect to see them again. Not this lifetime. He and Lucien jogged off with the small crowd of Dion Corp security agents around them.

Outside, it was a war zone. Dion Corp agents stood around a bullet proof Hummer, frantically waving Vasco and Lucien over. The sky above them was littered with the black, hulking shadows of attack helicopters that deposited wave after wave of men in combat uniforms. They carried assault rifles and fired at the Alcyone army below.

“We can’t leave without Simone!” Lucien shouted at his brother as they were shoved into the back of the hummer.

“We won’t. Caleb’s with her. They’ll make it.”

Lucien’s jaw set in quiet fury. “I’m going to fucking kill every one of them, Vasco.”

“Yes, brother, yes we are.”

Dominic and Nicholas took cover on the beach behind a line of black SUVs that transported the PLFs.

“How long have you been a part of this?” Nicholas asked his father.

Dominic spared his son a brief glance. “Thirty-eight years.”

Nicholas felt a slow fury crawling over him. His father would have been deeply entrenched in the Brotherhood when his family was killed. It was unlikely the Brotherhood would forget to warn both of them. “Did you know about my family? Did they warn you?”

Dominic thought that his son’s family was dysfunctional. If Nicholas had a wife and a mistress, that would have been fine properly handled. Instead, Nicholas had a wife and a lover—a male lover; one who was allowed in Nicholas’s home and allowed to taint Dominic’s

grandchildren with his disgusting lifestyle. "It doesn't matter. Stay focused on the matter at hand," Dominic snapped.

"You knew," Nicholas said lowly, but louder the second time. "You knew?!"

Dominic looked back at his son, sneering in revulsion. "Of course I knew. I didn't tell you to teach you a lesson. I hope you've learned it. Now, get ready to move."

For seconds, Nicholas saw red. He knew his father was a hateful, spiteful, selfish man, but Nicholas never thought him truly evil. Until then. Nicholas raised his gun and pointed it in his father's face. "I'm not on your side. I never have been."

Dominic stared at his son with furious incredulity. "How dare you. Get that gun out of my face. Of course you're on this side."

Nicholas laughed bitterly. "Oh, no. After my family, I turned. I've been ratting you all out to Marcello for years. And I'm going to make sure that you rot in hell."

Dominic's eyes widened, his face turning red; a combination of anger and sudden fear. "Nicholas—"

It was the last word he spoke.

Nicholas pulled the trigger, blowing a hole in his father's face. Stepping over the dead body, Nicholas shot him again, just because his rage bled that thickly. The sound of the chaos around him finally roared back into

his ears and spurred him into action. He shot out the tires on three out of the four vehicles, ran to the fourth, opened the driver's door, and killed the man at the wheel. Yanking out the dead body, Nicholas climbed into the drivers' seat, peeling out and pulling out his cell phone. He needed to get to his sister and they needed to leave.

"Roger that, we'll meet the helicopter on the roof," Caleb said quietly, poking his head out of the door to the suite. On this floor, the hallway was quiet. "C'mon." Gun in hand, he slipped from the room and took Simone's hand in his other, moving quickly towards the stairwell.

"Just what the hell is going on down there, Caleb?" Worry clouded Simone's features.

"I don't know how bad, but the island is under attack. We're in evac mode." Caleb halted her by the door to the stairwell, listening. He pushed the door open a crack, his gun raised as he stepped in. He looked over the railing, just as Kayla looked up from three floors below. "Shit. Move fast and stay low, babe. They're on our ass."

Heart pounding, Simone took off her heels and ran past Caleb as he instructed, darting up the staircase and keeping herself bent over. She could hear shouts below her, immediately followed by the sound of gunfire.

Bullets ricocheted off the metal, sending off small sparks and pulling a startled cry from Simone's lips.

"Keep moving. Eyes straight ahead," Caleb urged from behind her. He didn't bother trying to shoot back yet. He needed the rounds for when they got to the roof. He touched his ear piece and said, "That helicopter better be waiting."

"It's a fucking shit storm out here, sir," came the static-filled reply, "but we're almost there. AF is cleaning house."

"That guy better be as good of a pilot as you used to be!" Simone shouted, slightly out of breath.

"Few pilots are as good as I used to be, but so long as he can dodge bullets and not crash, we don't have that far to go." Caleb managed a quick grin, hoping Simone could hear it in his voice.

They reached the door to the roof, and Caleb used his security code to get the door open, pausing to quickly check outside and make sure they were alone. When he didn't see anyone he motioned Simone through and shut the door, just as a hail of bullets ripped into it. Caleb stepped back and shot the control panel, buying them some time.

They ducked behind an air vent and he trained his gun on the door. "This would be a lot more fun if you had

that cute little revolver you used to carry on your thigh,” Caleb said, double checking his clip.

Simone smirked. “I’m really pissed off right now that I don’t.”

“It’s okay. Now, I don’t have to worry about accidentally shooting myself in my haste to get you unclothed.” Caleb winked at Simone, and she smiled at him, just as the door to the roof blew open and their helicopter appeared. An Omega Cadre sat in the open helicopter door, letting loose a round of cover fire.

“That’s your ride, babe. Go, I’ll cover you.”

“Tell me you’re coming with me,” Simone demanded.

“Right behind you. Playing hero applies this lifetime, too. Go on.” Caleb poked his head around the vent and fired two shots that landed in one PLFs’ head as he tried to get out the door. Simone hesitated, but relented, and ran over to the helicopter. The Cadre reached down to help her up and was pulling her inside when he got shot in the neck.

Simone fell in and looked over at the soldier, startled. The pilot looked back, confirmed that she was on board, and began pulling them up into the air.

“Wait!” Simone grabbed the assault rifle out of the dying soldier’s hands and leaned out the side of the helicopter. In her current incarnation, she had never

used a gun like this, but she had a few of Liliana's memories to rely on.

"Ma'am, I have orders to get you to the airfield!"

"If you move this helicopter without my husband, I will shoot you myself!" Simone snapped, and then jerked her eyes back to the ground. She didn't even notice what she had called Caleb. What she did notice was that he was pinned behind the vent as the PLFs began creeping out onto the rooftop.

"Caleb, get over here!" Saying a little prayer, Simone hoisted up the gun and squeezed the trigger. The first few rounds went haywire, and she cursed like a sailor. Memory, sharp and vivid, flashed behind her eyes. She adjusted her grip on the gun, and the next time she pulled the trigger, a heavy tide of bullets sent two of the soldiers that looked human, but didn't, right to the ground.

Caleb jerked a glance over his shoulder and saw Simone with the assault rifle in her hands, eyes blazing determinedly. Suppressing a grin, he pushed off from behind the vent and sprinted over to the helicopter. "Take her up, take her up," Caleb shouted to the pilot as he jumped in. Simone fired another round at the soldiers below, just because she was pissed, as the helicopter flew away.

Kayla pushed past the PLFs and came out onto the roof as the helicopter gained altitude then whizzed off

towards the airfield. “Are you all this useless?” she snapped her eyes over the PLFs and brought her radio up to her mouth, “Simone got away. All forces to the airfield. The triplets don’t leave this island alive.”

Agata was in her office in the Dion Corp building when the world went insane. Three men in all black fatigues with a strange symbol painted on their faces rushed into the building, nearly deserted at this hour, and pulled her from her office. Her demands to know what was going on were met with the response her father had sent them.

Now, she was sitting in the back of an SUV in front of the building, with those same soldiers guarding the car. Agata didn’t like whatever the hell was going on—it sounded like a war zone around her—but it seemed like answers weren’t coming any time soon.

Nicholas pulled his SUV to a halt behind the similar model double parked in front of the Dion Corp building. He slapped a fresh clip into his gun before he climbed out of the car. “Is my sister secure?”

The soldier in charge nodded. “Yes, sir.”

“Thank you.” Nicholas shot that man in the head. As the other two soldiers turned to respond, Nicholas shot

them, too. He stepped over to the car and pulled open the back seat door. "Get out. You're coming with me."

"Nicholas? Nicholas, what the hell is going on?" Agata demanded, staring at him in shock. She couldn't believe her brother was carrying a gun. When she saw the dead soldiers on the ground, she thought she might faint.

"Agata, I can't explain right now. We've got to go." Nicholas grabbed her arm and began dragging her over to the car.

"I'm not going anywhere unless you give me some answers!" She dug her heels into the ground, pulling against his grip. "Where is Dad?"

"Dad's dead!" Nicholas tightened his grip, still trying to move her. "Aggie, please. I double crossed them. The triplets' plane is going to leave any second, and we need to be on it."

"Dad's dead?" Shock registered on Agata's face. "What do you mean, you double crossed them? Nicky, what did you do?"

Nicholas opened his mouth to answer, but a Hummer screeched to a halt behind his car. Nicholas whirled around, raising his gun, but not in time. A bullet landed in his shoulder. Agata screamed, and Nicholas shouted in pain, his gun clattering from his fingers as he stumbled back into the car.

THE AWAKENING

The door to the Hummer opened, and Olivia stepped out, walking briskly over to them. "How long have you been a traitor, Nicholas?" She glared at him.

"What are you two talking about? Olivia, put the gun down!" Agata moved to her brothers' side, staring wide eyed at Olivia.

Breathing heavily, Nicholas sneered. "Everybody plays the game better than you, Livy."

Olivia shoved the gun into Nicholas's forehead and pulled the trigger. Agata screamed again, and Olivia shot her in the head, too. They fell on top of each other as they hit the concrete. "Apparently not."

"Let's go, Olivia!" Amadeo shouted from the car.

"Such a waste." Shaking her head, Olivia turned around, marching back over to the Hummer, and got inside. "Get us to the airport. Hurry."

The majority of Alcyone Island's small but effective military force was stationed at the Loyalty Airlines airfield. Under Christopher's direction, they secretly trained for this kind of scenario for the last five months. Holding the perimeter until the triplets' plane got off the ground was the primary objective.

The triplets' Hummer zoomed through the gates, skidding to a stop on the tarmac in front of the plane. Vasco was the first to climb out, and Lieutenant General Richie Archer was waiting for him.

"Our air force kicked their ass, so the skies are clear. The ground is a mess. They took the hotel. We lost contact with the governor and Chief Vaughn," Lieutenant Archer explained.

Sadly, Vasco had expected as much. Lucien frowned darkly.

"Where is Simone?" Vasco asked.

"She'll be here in five minutes. Both she and Mr. Kincaide," Lieutenant Archer said.

"Thank you. Have the Omega Cadre put on their plane. The remainder of the Dion Corp Security team is to come with us."

"What are your odds of holding them back after we're gone, Archer?" Lucien looked over at the men guarding the airport, then back at the L.G.

"Sir, General Christopher Zhane made it very clear that if this day came they would be fighting for something greater than themselves. Not false patriotism, or an orchestrated terrorist attack, but something a lot simpler and a whole hell of a lot more valuable. He said they'd be fighting to give people like them a choice. It was a very inspiring speech, sir. So, to answer your question it

doesn't matter. They'll fight until they can't, because they choose to."

That sounded like Uncle Christopher, Lucien thought. His eyes teared up. Jaw working back and forth, he nodded, unable to say anything because of the knot in his throat.

"Rest assured, Archer, General Zhane was right." Vasco clasped his brothers' shoulder and led him over to the waiting plane.

"I believe you, sirs."

"Lieutenant General," a soldier lowered his binoculars and pointed, "We've got incoming! A whole fuckin' lot of them!"

Chapter 16

“You have enemies? Good. That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life.”

- Winston Churchill

December 2, 2012 - 1:12 AM

International Airspace

SVT One

The Boeing 787 was its own version of Air Force One. The triplets could have run things from their plane for the next twenty days if they chose to. They sat in the conference room, trying to come to terms with what happened. They had all been a lot harder in their past lives. While those memories were helpful in some ways, they didn't take away the pain, or the reality of the current moment. Lucien's eyes were as raw as he felt. Watching someone die in front of him, someone he loved and respected, simply hurt. He slouched into his chair, with his fist pressed against his mouth, and stared down at the polished wood of the table.

THE AWAKENING

Simone felt numb. While her family was being attacked and murdered, she was giving into something that wasn't hers to claim this lifetime. She knew better. She fucking knew better, but the selfish, undisciplined part of her wanted something she'd had before, instead of focusing on what she needed to do now. She was here to play the game, and win it. She might die trying to accomplish it, but so long as she and her brothers called checkmate, who cared?

Vasco walked into the tensely silent conference room and took his seat. Briefly, he traded glances between his siblings, locked in their internal struggles. As a family, they had prepared for the worst; expected that, at some point, the members of the Brotherhood would decide that it was in their best interest to get rid of the force that was working so hard against them.

Plans and reality were always so very different.

It was with an odd sort of detachment that Vasco observed his own feelings. The loss of family was a blow, but they had a very important task to accomplish, and he just wanted to get it done. "All the SVT offices have been vacated and moved to the ghost locations Marcello set up, twenty miles away from each concentration camp we're going to hit. Derek's team is already at the compound. We'll get the status of our weapons when we get there."

“What about the Island? Leone and Isabella? Do we know what’s going on there?” Lucien asked.

Vasco shook his head. “Caleb is in the control room and has just informed me we’ve lost all contact. The boys on Phoenix Isle knew that when code red hit, they were to destroy everything so the enemy couldn’t use it.”

Anger was a much more familiar, much easier emotion than pain. Simone latched onto it, instead of her grief. It helped her think. “I know we’ve got an escort, but how far away are we from landing? I don’t understand why the Brotherhood wouldn’t just scramble a few of their own fighter jets and come after us. They’re pretty much in do whatever the fuck they want mode.”

“We’re an hour away from Casablanca. And they still mi—”

Caleb threw open the door to the conference room. “Hang on, everyone. We’ve got bogeys coming in.”

Simone frowned darkly. “I spoke too soon.”

“How many?” Lucien asked, sitting up.

“Five.” Caleb answered. “That’s not good.”

Vasco stood up. “What are the odds—” His words died mid-sentence because of an explosion just outside one of the windows. The plane shook. “That was one of ours, wasn’t it?”

Caleb braced himself on the doorframe. His headset exploded with noise, and he nodded grimly. “Yes, sir.”

"It's going to be a real fucking bummer if we get blown out of the sky," Lucien growled, and gripped the arms of his chair as the plane suddenly broke a hard right, sending coffee mugs sliding off the table, and shattering on the floor.

"Why the fuck do we have people on the inside if, at pivotal moments, they're useless?" Simone hissed, then jumped, startled, when two more explosions thundered in the sky.

Caleb looked over at Vasco. "Sir, is there anyone you can call—"

Suddenly, one of the uniformed soldiers from the control room crashed into Caleb from behind. There was an excited, relieved expression on his face. "Sirs. Ma'am. We've gotten assistance from an—an—"

"Jesus Christ, spit it out!" Simone snapped.

"An unidentified flying aircraft."

Vasco arched a brow. "A what?"

"Come see for yourself, sir," the soldier said, and then braced himself, because two more explosions stained the sky, littering it with balls of fire, clouds of black smoke, and broken pieces of metal, raining down into the ocean below.

"Unidentified flying aircraft," Lucien repeated as he, his siblings, and Caleb followed the soldier out of the

conference room, and up a short flight of stairs to the control room. "Does he mean a UFO?"

"I'm not sure what else it could be." Simone followed the soldier as he knocked on the cockpit door, then pushed it open. From behind them, another soldier, sitting at a terminal, announced with no small amount of relief in his voice, "Sir, remaining bogeys are booking out."

Lucien stood behind the co-pilot's chair, peering out the windshield. "What am I looking at?"

Archer waited a moment, searching the sky himself, and then he pointed. "Right there." At first, the triplets saw nothing. A second later, a long, oval-shaped aircraft appeared where it had not been before. They could barely see it. It looked almost translucent against the black sky, and when it passed through a cloud, it became invisible again.

"Wow," Simone whispered.

"There's that help when we needed it," Vasco said. "Have they made radio contact?"

"No, sir. Just showed up and started blowing the bad guys out of the air. It appears to be following us." Archer grinned. "I'd love to get in the cockpit of that thing."

"All right. Stay on course." Vasco stepped out of the cockpit, his siblings following him. Lucien walked up to

THE AWAKENING

the solider that had originally alerted them of the UFO's presence.

"By the way, it's called an interdimensional traveling vessel, okay?" Lucien clasped the young man's shoulder.

Simone smirked, and Lucien shrugged. "Just trying to educate him."

December 2, 2012 - 2:15 AM

Alcyone Island

Phoenix Isle Command Center

"They got away. The fighters that on standby, in case we failed, were attacked by an alien vessel and destroyed."

Kayla heard the sound of something breaking on Caesar's end of the line. His angry voice came next, "Goddammit, Kayla, we sent you an army. How did they manage to get off the island?"

"Nicholas was a traitor. He warned them ahead of time. We also underestimated the efficiency of the Alcyone Island military."

"Fuck," Caesar growled. "Who's alive that might know where they are?"

"Only Leone."

“Fine. Work Leone until he squeals.”

“Yes, Caesar. Did your team capture the scientists?”

“No. Call me when you know something.”

Kayla disconnected the call, tucking the phone into her pocket. She understood Caesar’s irritation. The Brotherhood wouldn’t be pleased with the multiple failures. Kayla stepped out of the conference room in the Phoenix Isle Command Center. Once populated by the Alcyone Island military, the center was a mess of destroyed computers and dead bodies.

Olivia walked up to Kayla, curling her fingers around the mouthpiece of her head set. “FBI started their raid of SVT offices and every single one, so far, has been empty. No files, no computers, just empty desks.”

Kayla arched a brow. “Every single one?”

“Yes,” The lines of Olivia’s face were strained. “We have no fucking idea where they’ve gone.”

“Clever. Very, very clever. They knew about us for a long time.” Kayla turned her back on Olivia, walking to the sliding doors. “Have Leone worked until he talks.”

“Where are you going?” Olivia asked.

“To get Stefano’s journal.”

December 2, 2012 - 2:22 AM

THE AWAKENING

Alcyone Island

Cellar underneath Governor's Mansion

"What does Leone know?" John asked. The cellar underneath the governor's mansion, didn't just house the heads of the family's enemies. Isabella added a section years ago and turned it into a small personal security center. From there, they could hear and see what was going on in the Command Center on Phoenix Isle. While Kayla's robotic army was marching to the airport and the hotel was being overrun, Leone helped her escape.

"You do no good to this family dying a noble death, Isabel. Go. Your reincarnated mother shouldn't lose all her children in one day."

"A great deal. Information is backed up on the servers at Phoenix, then flown twice a month to the compound where the triplets are going. Leone makes those trips." Isabella sat in a chair against the wall. She was exhausted. She was heartbroken. She was pissed off and ornery. "Kayla's going after the journal. We need to get it before she does."

"Do you know where it is?"

"Vasco had it, so it's probably at his home." Calling upon a new reserve of strength, Isabella rose to her feet. "And then we're going to get off this island."

“What’s your plan, Isabel?” John canted his head at her.

“The airport’s overrun. But I know of a hangar they didn’t check—if we can get there.”

“Where?” John picked his gun off the table and grabbed an extra from the cabinet on the wall, tucking both into his belt.

“My father’s.” Isabella pulled her hair into a messy bun on the top of her head and took one of the semi-automatic pistols from the same cabinet.

“You know how to fly?”

Isabella gave John a look. “My father was one of the best goddamn fighter pilots ever. You bet your ass I know how to fly.”

John smiled. “Lead the way, Governor.”

Chapter 17

“We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.”

- Anais Nin

December 5, 2012 - 10:44 AM

Somewhere in Egypt

Terenzio Compound

*Zones clean?” Caleb stood in the security center in the east wing of the compound, looking at the row of monitors.

There were three Dion Corp security guards seated at the table. The one on the far right nodded. “Yes, sir. Nobody here but us.”

“Air waves are quiet, too,” said the one in the middle.

Caleb nodded. “Good. I’m going to make my rounds. I’ll be back later.”

The triplets’ plane landed in Casablanca, Morocco, three days ago. The interdimensional traveling vessel which assisted earlier followed them to their destination, and disappeared afterwards. From Casablanca, the three

heirs to SVT's empire made the long, secretive journey back to the compound. The entirety of the trip, Simone was distant. They had reached quite the climax, and Caleb had been busy coordinating the moves of the military and the Dion Corp security that came with them. He'd noticed her change in temperament but hadn't said a lick about it. Now that there was time, he intended to go and find her.

It was strange for Simone to be back in the compound. She supposed it was a bit ironic, too. It was because of this place she knew who she had been, once upon a time. It was because of this place she knew who Caleb had been, as well. It stood as a reminder of everything she once had—and would not have again. Restless, she walked the corridors of the east wing, frowning with thought.

Caleb rounded a corner and came nearly face to face with her. "How are you holding up?" he asked in a gentle tone.

Simone glanced up, startled. Her first instinct was to step into him. She resisted that urge and frowned more deeply. "How do you think?"

Caleb stepped into her and rubbed his hands over her arms. "Talk to me."

Simone stiffened, but torn between wanting to push him away and wanting to take comfort in him, she held still. "What do you want me to say, Caleb?"

"Anything but the silent treatment you've been giving me," Caleb studied her face. "Tell me you're mad as hell, tell me you scared, tell me you can't wait to go blow up their underground bases. Tell me you're heartbroken that Christopher's dead and Isabella probably is, too."

Simone had yet to perfect the mask of neutrality the Terenzios so often wore. Shadows darkened her eyes, and the lines of her face were taut. "Why? So we can pretend that we're Liliana and Kyle again?"

Caleb frowned, but he didn't let her go. Instead, he touched her cheek. "No. Because they were your family, Simone, and now they're gone. Or, we skip right over them and go to the part about why you're avoiding me."

Simone jerked back and pushed Caleb away from her. "Don't," she said, pressing a hand to her cheek. "Don't do that. You can't do that."

Caleb's brows rose as his hands dropped to his sides. "Why can't I?"

"Because everyone is dying!" Simone curled both of her hands into fists. Her nails cut into her palms. "Don't you get it?! This isn't 1927, Caleb! This isn't the world we used to know. This isn't the life we used to live. There won't be entire afternoons wasted in hammocks or stolen

moments in our offices. We won't be picking the kids' vegetables out of the potted plants in the dining room or washing mud pies out of their mouths. There will be no happy ending!"

Understanding dawned, echoing in the silence around them. Caleb loved those memories. Those memories helped him through some of the more trying moments in his current life. He didn't miss Simone's point, though. "I know what year it is. I know what's going on here, and I know how it may end. I'm not asking you to recreate the past, and the only thing I'm planning on in the immediate future is keeping you safe." He closed the distance between them and did what Simone told him he couldn't do again: took her face between his hands and looked into her eyes. "The only thing certain is this moment, right now. So, you tell me what you want for it."

"This moment?" Simone closed her hands over Caleb's, pressing desperately. "Members of my family were murdered while you and I were having a moment like this. Nothing is certain! Any one of us could go, at any time, and I won't lose you!" Her eyes were glassy with unshed tears, and her nails dug into the backs of his hands. "I can't lose you," she whispered fiercely.

Now you're talking to me," he whispered and pressed his lips against her forehead. He drew his hands down,

so he could wrap his arms around her and pulled her tight, resisting form against his chest. "They would have died even if we weren't having that moment, babe. You can't think about the what ifs. You'll drive yourself crazy. Your job wasn't to save them. You're here to finish this, and I'm here to keep you alive so you can. And love you, a lot, through it all. That's it, Simone. That's it."

"They're not what ifs. They're certainties," Simone whispered. "This won't end well. And I can't do whatever is necessary if I'm standing this close to you."

Caleb had a feeling that he wasn't going to like what came next. "What are you saying, Simone?"

Simone closed her eyes for just a moment, calling up that famed Terenzio resolve; the kind needed to make impossible choices. She pulled Caleb's arms from around her as she looked up at him. "I'm saying you're right. I need to finish this. And I can't do that if we're trying to rekindle a relationship that has its place in the past."

Caleb stiffened. "You think that's all this is?"

Simone released his hands, thickening the veil around her eyes when she saw the emotion in his. "I'm not her, Caleb, and you're not him. Just because we had something once upon a time doesn't mean we get to have it twice."

Caleb's jaw tensed. "You're not going to blow off my feelings for you as nothing but a pretty memory of what

was, because you're afraid of loss. I love you. You, Simone."

Simone struggled with a sudden knot in her throat. She loved Caleb, too. Just him. She would have without the memories of Kyle to lie on top of it all and sweeten the deal, deepening her natural affection for him, but she couldn't be wasting hours in bed with him, or sharing a private moment when, in sixteen days, the fate of the world would rest in her hands and her brothers'. If she wasted time thinking of a future with Caleb, instead of the battle—if she got her hopes up and she lost him in that battle—what was she to do, then? What was the point of dreaming if the end game was nothing but a field of land mines that she or someone else in her family might willingly step on, just to call checkmate?

She drew her arms around herself and looked away, slowly shaking her head. "It doesn't matter."

Caleb looked as if Simone had struck him. She might as well have. He stared at her in the thick silence. At length, he shook his head. "Fine. I'll play it your way. Nothing but professionalism. Excuse me, Madame President I need to go make my rounds."

Simone nodded mutely, watching Caleb walk away from her. It was for the best, she assured herself. But that didn't make it hurt any less.

From the next room, Vasco came to stand in the doorway, settling his gaze on his motionless sister. He had been eavesdropping, though not intentionally. "Everything doesn't have to be either or."

Simone whirled around, narrowing her eyes. "Keep your opinions on my personal life to yourself."

"Redirecting your anger at me isn't going to make the decision you just made any less stupid," Vasco said quietly.

Anger Simone could do. Anger felt a lot better than the ache in her chest, and what better target than her big brother? "It was necessary. And you know what, Vasco, while you were making secret decisions regarding my life, you should have done the smart thing and kept the gag order in place."

"Do you remember grandfather's recording?" Vasco continued, as if Simone had not taken that shot at him. "Specifically, the part about love?"

"Don't you do it. Don't you dare lecture me about love!" Simone came at him, eyes blazing. "You lived your last lifetime wrapped up in a cocoon of self-loving arrogance, and you've spent this one pretending your way through your existence. I don't even think you care about winning. All you're doing is going through the motions. So unless you feel something, don't begin to think you can understand me."

Vasco was the expert at veiling emotion—or had been, as Stefano Terenzio. Perhaps he was too good at it, but Simone's words were not completely inaccurate. "The mp3 player is in the library. You ought to listen to it again. We have a conference call with Xavier in an hour."

"You listen to it. I have work to do." Simone strode past him.

Vasco watched her go and sighed. Turning around, he went back into the den, sinking down in the plush confines of the leather chair, and closed his eyes.

December 5, 2012 - 11:30 AM

Alcyone Island

Phoenix Isle Detention Center

Leone was in rough shape. For the last three days, he was beaten, tortured and drugged. By some miracle, he found the will, the strength, to not tell his captors anything. After an hours reprieve they dragged him out of his cell and strapped him to a chair. Blood and dirt marked his face. His right eye was swollen shut. He was so exhausted, after being alone for about five minutes, he passed out.

When Victoria was escorted into the detention room and saw the condition of her husband, she gasped, a hand flying to her mouth. "What did you do?" she whispered.

Olivia shoved Victoria forward. "What the fuck does it look like we did? Get him to talk."

Victoria shot a brief glare at Olivia, but her gaze gentled in sympathy when she looked back at Leone. She might have had an affair, but she still cared about him. This was cruel. She never imagined sleeping with Amadeo would lead to something like this. She foolishly believed Amadeo was just ambitious. Swallowing, Victoria slowly reached out and touched her husband's hand. "Leone," she said gently.

Leone thought he was hallucinating, at first, and didn't open his eyes. When Victoria called his name a second time, he slowly turned his head and looked. Shock stained his face. "What are you doing here?"

Victoria's eyes watered as she trailed her gaze over his badly beaten face. "Tell them. Please, just tell them where the triplets are."

Leone stared at her through the one eye that wasn't swollen shut. Finally, he asked, "Did you ever love me at all?"

For a moment, Victoria felt the sharp pangs of remorse. She slowly nodded. "Yes, yes I did."

Leone sighed. "That's something, I guess."

"Answer the fucking question, Leone," Olivia's agitated voice echoed out.

Leone continued looking at his wife, pointedly ignoring Olivia. "Did you fuck him in our house?"

Victoria went very still. She couldn't bring herself to admit to her wrong doings, even now. "Who?"

"Amadeo. It's him, right? Since you're helping them."

Victoria lowered her eyes and said nothing. That was all the confirmation Leone that needed.

"Three out of five nights a week." Olivia pushed off the wall and stood behind Victoria's chair. "And he's going to do it again after your dead. Which can be a quick or slow process. It's all up to you. Where are they?"

Leone didn't even bother glancing in Olivia's direction, just continued looking at Victoria, sadly. "He'll never love you. But you don't care about that at all anymore, do you?" He sighed again. "Do what you want to me, Olivia. I'm not telling you a fuckin' thing."

Olivia's eyes narrowed. The smile that curled across her lips was like ice. "You know, I had a funny feeling you'd say that." She pulled out her gun and pressed it against Victoria's temple. The terror that shot across Victoria's face went bone deep. Tears sprang to her eyes and quickly spilled over. "So, how about you tell me, or I'll kill her."

Leone's fingers bit into the arm of the chair. "What are you doing?"

"Aww, you really love your wife don't you? This lying, cheating, whore." Olivia grabbed a fistful of Victoria's hair and roughly yanked her head back, bringing a startled cry from the woman as Olivia ran the gun barrel down her cheek. "I bet you can't stand to watch this? Can you?"

Leone clenched his jaw. "How can you be so cruel?"

"How can you be so naïve?" Olivia sneered, and looked down at Victoria. "Open your mouth. I said open your fucking mouth, bitch."

Whimpering quietly, Victoria parted her lips, and Olivia shoved the gun between them. "I don't give a fuck about you, and I really don't care about her, so it's nothing, Leone, for me to kill her and let you watch her die. So, who's got your loyalty? The triplets, or your wife?"

Leone's brow creased. His hands tightened around the arms of his chair. His gaze remained glued on the barrel of the gun in his wife's mouth. The silence sprang up, hot and thick. Olivia didn't let it linger too long.

"Guess that's your answer, then." She cocked the gun, and put four out of five pounds on the trigger.

"Stop!" Leone jerked in the chair, but the restraints kept him immobile. A harsh tear mixed with the blood

and grim that caked his cheek. "I don't know where they are. But I know a small part of what they're going to do."

Olivia watched him closely. "Are you fucking with me, Leone? Because your wife here seemed to think you knew where they were."

Leone shook his head. "No, no. It's a compound my grandfather built, and I know it's somewhere in Africa but what country I couldn't tell you. Only Marcello knew that." His lie, he prayed, would be convincing.

That much they knew themselves. Olivia pursed her lips thoughtfully, her grip still tight enough in Victoria's hair to pull a chunk out by the root, the gun still shoved in her mouth. Occasionally, Victoria would whimper fearfully around it. "All right, Leone. What do you know?"

"We don't have this discussion until you let her go," Leone said determinedly.

Olivia laughed. "Not a chance. You don't get to negotiate."

Leone glared. "Oh, no, I do. You need to know something about the triplets, otherwise your employers are going to know just how fuckin' useless you are. And I don't trust you. So you either let her go, or we both die and you get shit from me. Good luck figuring it out on your own."

Olivia's eyes narrowed. "You fuckin' weasel, I'll kill her just to—"

THE AWAKENING

“Olivia,” Amadeo’s sharp voice echoed out.

Olivia snapped her gaze over to the doorway where he stood. “What?”

“Let her go.”

Olivia frowned at him. “You care about this bitch?”

“I care about the information,” Amadeo snapped back at her. “Let her go.”

Olivia hesitated, but finally pulled the gun out of Victoria’s mouth and roughly released her hair. “Free pass, whore.”

Victoria set her tear filled eyes on her husband. She touched his hand, a gesture that was both apologetic and affectionate. Leone’s lips quirked into a sad smile, and he nodded.

“Come here Victoria,” Amadeo ordered.

Victoria rose quickly to her feet and obediently stood next to him. Amadeo centered his gaze on Leone. “She leaves when you’re done. Start talking.”

December 10, 2012 - 10:10 PM

Denver, CO

Penthouse of Tony DeMarco

Tyranny kept a person busy. Especially when that person was a double agent for such a regime. Tony glanced down at his watch, sighing. He was home only to shower and shave.

Climbing out of the car, he popped a piece of gum in his mouth. Gabriella made him give up smoking. His guardian angel, whose presence was a wonderful, constant light the last four months, took up her usual place underneath the collar of his shirt, humming to him in a pitch only he could hear. He kinda liked it. It kept him calm and clear-headed.

"Hey, Ricky," Tony called out hurriedly as he walked past the desk and over the elevators.

"Um, hi, Mr. DeMarco." Ricky kept his eyes glued to his computer screen.

Tony pressed the button to call the elevator and glanced over at the kid. Ricky glanced in his direction, and then quickly looked back down. Tony quirked a brow. Stepping away from the elevators, Tony walked over to the front desk. "What's wrong Ricky?" he asked flat out.

"I do not know what the protocol is for this, sir." Ricky continued staring at the desk.

"Protocol for what?"

Ricky hesitated. "You outrank Mr. Medicci, don't you, sir?"

Mr. Medicci, Tony thought. *Sonofabitch*. With the triplets' escape, the SVT offices empty, and the SVT Think Tank gone with the crystal, Caesar was in deep shit; possibly awaiting his death. What the fuck was he doing here? "Is he in my apartment?"

Ricky looked uncertain again, but slowly nodded.

"Don't worry about it. You don't have to tell them you told me. I won't say anything. Thanks, Ricky." Tony smiled reassuringly at the kid, and went back to the elevators. "This could get ugly, Gabriella. Move to a safer spot, honey."

As he stepped into the elevator Gabriella fluttered out from underneath his collar and perched on his shoulder. A second later, she faded from sight. Tony pulled his 9mm out from underneath his suit jacket when he got off on his floor. Inching over to his door, he pressed his ear against it. No movement inside. He used his keycard on the door, kept one arm behind him, and walked in.

"Drop it, Tony. Slowly," Caesar's voice echoed out from the shadows.

Tony stilled just inside the doorway. "You know, you've got a lot of fucking nerve, subordinate." He took the step inside and kicked the door shut.

"You're caught, you fucking traitor."

"That's a big accusation coming from the idiot that just fucked up his last assignment." Tony searched for

him in the darkness, and saw the shadow of Caesar's figure in front of him and just to the right.

"Save it," Caesar snapped. "Leone told us Simone's going to blow the underground bases. What she knows she could have only gotten from you, or your brother."

"You're pointing a gun at a member of the Illuminati. You better think real hard about what you're doing. Drop it now, and I'll think about asking them not to feed you to the Greys." Tony took one step forward, keeping his gun hand slightly behind his back.

"No, I'm pointing a gun at a traitor to his God. Drop the act. I knew you'd find the bug on your balcony, that's why I put one on the roof." Tony could hear the smug smile in Caesar's tone. "You can imagine what I have recorded. And I know all the information we've been collecting from the triplets HI-MENS are going to a dummy server. Enlil isn't getting any of those reports is he?"

Fuck, Tony thought. This would be a big kink in the plan. Caesar had to die before he told anyone else. "You know what, Caesar, you were a real lousy agent. I bet you can't use that weapon, either." He didn't remain standing to find out. Tony dropped to the floor, whipping his arm around him and fired at Caesar, just as Caesar's bullet lodged itself into the door where Tony's head had been.

THE AWAKENING

Tony's bullet didn't miss, though. He heard Caesar grunt and fall to the floor.

"Fuckin' mook." Tony got to his feet, walking through his dark house and over to Caesar's motionless form. Tony kicked his gun away, pointed the muzzle down at Caesar's face, and was about to put one in his temple, when Caesar's eyes suddenly sprang open. He kicked Tony's legs out from underneath him. Tony released a startled grunt as he landed on his back. He brought his gun up again, only to feel something that felt suspiciously like a needle stab into his calf. Three seconds later, he couldn't feel a thing, and he couldn't move, either.

Caesar stood over Tony, smirking. He pulled apart his shirt, exposing the Kevlar underneath. "You really thought you were going to win, didn't you?"

December 11, 2012 - 12:12 PM

Somewhere in Egypt

Terenzio Compound

Caleb jogged down the corridors until he reached the veranda doors off the kitchen. Throwing them open, his gaze centered on Simone's back. He walked quickly up to

her and touched her shoulder. "Madame President? You've got a video conference call. They found Isabella."

"Is she all right?" Simone asked as she followed him back into the house.

Caleb's brows drew together. "No. She escaped Alcione Island in Kyle's old seaplane. It ran out of gas just about twenty miles from Cape Verde. Someone, maybe our friends from our air fight, found her and hid her until word could get to Xavier. He had her moved to a more secure location. It's a goddamn miracle she survived the crash, and she was unconscious for a few days. She's awake now, but she's in rough condition. Real rough."

Simone was always fond of Aunt Isabella. She'd always felt a very strong connection to the woman, and after her past life regression session, she understood why. Those past connections deepened her affection, and now would heighten her pain when Isabella died. Simone rubbed her fingers against her temple, frowning deeply. She was tired of loss.

Caleb pushed open the doors to the security room. Vasco and Lucien were already there. He hadn't been terribly close to Isabella this lifetime, but that didn't matter anymore than it had with Christopher. Caleb grieved that loss privately.

On the central screen was Isabella's face. She looked beaten up, beyond exhausted, yet triumphant. Simone's

brows pinched, and she struggled to get control of the expression on her face as she walked past Caleb, over to her brothers.

"Xavier has the journal. It's on its way to you," Isabella said.

"Thank you for getting it," Vasco said. That was no small thing. If Kayla or any of the others had gotten their hands on it first, checkmate might not occur.

"No thanks needed, Vasco. I'm glad to go out this way. Though Christopher might have crashed with more finesse." There was a mixture of sadness and amusement in Isabella's aged eyes.

"Do you need anything, Aunt Isabel? Can we do anything for you?" Lucien asked, his voice cracking slightly.

"Win." Isabella smiled and closed her eyes. "Just win."

"You bet your ass we're going to win," Simone said, coming to stand next to Vasco. He and Lucien nodded in agreement.

Isabella's gaze snapped open, and her smile deepened. "I imagine that you're very much like mother used to be when she was younger."

"I've drawn a few comparisons," Simone said softly.

"You don't know what it meant, to Christopher and I, to see you two again before it all ended. Even if you look different." Isabella gazed at Simone, and then lifted her eyes to Caleb. "Sorry about the plane. Dad."

Caleb gave Isabella a trembling smile. "Frankly, Bell," he said, using the nickname Kyle had for his daughter, "I'm surprised you didn't crash it sooner."

Simone pressed her fingers against her mouth, fighting back the tears that threatened to spill over. Isabella laughed, but the motion caused her face to quickly contort with pain. She took a few deep breaths to work through it. "We missed the two of you so much when you left. To watch Caleb look at you, Simone, the way dad used to look at mom, it just reminded us what we were fighting for."

Caleb couldn't find his voice, so he smiled. Simone lost the battle and the tears came, sliding silently down her cheeks. She didn't look back at Caleb, but kept her gaze on Isabella. "I'm glad we could give that to you."

Isabella suddenly looked more alert. Frowning, her gaze darted between Simone and Caleb. "Oh, for God's sake, you two can't possibly be playing that game."

Vasco refrained from comment, though he did slide his sister a sideways glance. He was not surprised when she ignored him. "We've got a job to do right now, Isabella," Simone said quietly.

"There's always a goddamn job to do. You and dad died together doing a job." Isabella threw a hand up in the air. She set the full force of her gaze on Simone. "The past

is just a memory. The future doesn't exist. The only thing that's real is the now. Why are you wasting it?"

"Because she wouldn't be Simone or Lil if she wasn't sabotaging herself," Lucien said, sniffing as he glanced over at his sister.

Simone didn't bother shooting Lucien a murderous glare. She was too busy being proud, and heartbroken, and terrified that everyone was right. "Lil was very proud of you. And I'm so lucky to have gotten to know you this lifetime, too." She smiled through her tears. "I love you, Aunt Isabella."

Isabella's eyes shone wetly. "Regret hurts more than loss. Remember that." Thoughts of John, briefly took up space in her mind. Kayla killed him as they were trying to escape. Swallowing back her own tears, Isabella pushed the thought away so she could smile at Simone. "And I love you, too. You, too, Caleb."

Caleb swallowed hard, searching for his voice. "Kick ass and take names your next lifetime, too, Bell. Your mother wasn't the only one who was proud, and I love you, too."

"Sir, that's time. We've got to terminate the connection per Mr. Xavier Zhane's instructions," said one of the Security officers.

Vasco nodded. "Try and hang on, Aunt Isabella. Your son is on his way."

Isabella smiled. "I'll wait for him. Good luck, you three." Without lingering any longer, Isabella pressed the button to terminate the connection on her end. It would be the last time they saw her.

Caleb cleared his throat. "Excuse me." Turning on his heel, he quickly left the room.

Simone continued to stare at the blank screen, biting her bottom lip as the tears ran down her cheeks.

Lucien dragged his hands over his face. "I really can't wait until we end this."

"Me too, brother," Vasco said quietly.

Lucien looked over at Simone and nudged her with his shoulder. "Isabel was right, yah know."

Simone closed her eyes, slowly shaking her head. "What's the point of getting close to someone if you're just going to lose them?"

"Loss sucks, Si, but it comes with the territory. Besides, our remembering past lives proves that we don't really lose anything. Apparently, we get to do it all over again, anytime we want to," Lucien said.

Simone's face pinched as she wrapped her arms around herself. "That doesn't change the now."

Lucien glanced over at Vasco, and Vasco stepped closer to his sister. "You were right about me, about last lifetime, and this one. Well, semi-right. There's no

denying that SVT loved himself and his ego, but we loved other people, too.”

Simone opened her tear-filled eyes and looked up to Vasco. “I know you did. Do. I didn’t mean—”

“Wait. Let me finish.” Vasco blew out a breath. Confessions didn’t come easily. “Simone, I am going through the motions. I’ve done a lot of self-searching these past five months, figuring out where Stefano begins and I end. And what I keep coming back to, when I think about the world, is that moment I had with Cleona before she left.” For once, the veil lifted from Vasco’s eyes, exposing so much emotion. “I miss her so much I can barely function, and that moment I had made it worse. But I can’t imagine not having that opportunity. I can’t imagine not taking it, even if I’d known she would be gone when I woke up. I cannot fathom the rest of the world not having their own moments of connection in between ego, and selfish ambition, and all the other petty, human drama we choose to engage in. There’s no point without it. The rest is just a game. A silly fucking game. Those are the moments that are real.” He set his hands on his sister’s shoulders. “Take them, Simone.”

Simone drew in a deep, trembling breath, lifting a hand to wipe her tears away. She traded glances between her brothers, allowing the words to sink in. “I’ll think about it.”

Lucien chuckled, and a small flicker of amusement passed through Vasco's eyes. "Stubborn to a fault." Lucien leaned forward and kissed Simone's forehead. "Don't think too long, or hard. I'm going to go do laps in the pool."

Vasco gave Simone's shoulders a gentle squeeze. "I thought you might say that." He reached into the inside of his jacket and removed a letter. "This is for you."

Curiosity struck Simone's raw eyes. "From who?"

A subtle smile crawled over Vasco's mouth. "From you." Winking, he followed his brother out of the control room.

Simone remained, chewing on her bottom lip, staring down at the envelope like there was a bomb inside. Finally, she drew a deep breath and pulled out a piece of paper that was browning with age.

**Simone—*

I know you're frightened. Terenzios do not have happy endings. But we have wonderful, painful, exhilarating journeys. As you have seen—as I have seen—we have second chances, too. This is our second chance to experience the depthless, unconditional love of a good man.

"There's not a goddamn thing that can keep me from you."

THE AWAKENING

That's what I said to him, Simone, the third time I lost him and got him back over the course of our marriage. You will lose him. That is inevitable. You will have a third chance. And a fourth. We have loved him for lifetimes, and we will for many more.

You remember what it's like. Cast fear aside. Seize it. Enjoy it. Love him with everything that you have, for as long as you have him.

Listen to me. Listen to yourself. Trust us.

—Liliana

Her mouth trembled as she read the words. Once. Twice. Three times. Simone had to stop after that, only because her tears were making it impossible to continue. She didn't remember writing the letter, but suddenly, she did remember, as clearly as if it had happened yesterday, the moment Liliana whispered those words to Kyle;

"There's not a goddamn thing that can keep me from you."

She'd been right.

After realizing she was probably making the controllers in the room uncomfortable with her emotional silence, she looked at the man on her left. "Get me a location on Mr. Kincade."

It only took a few keystrokes before a dot appeared on the man's screen. "He's on the patio off the main living room, ma'am."

CRYSTAL STORM

“Thank you.” Determination flashing through her eyes, she stopped hesitating and strode quickly through the house.

Chapter 18

“Neither a lofty degree of intelligence nor imagination nor both together go to the making of genius. Love, love, love, that is the soul of genius.”

- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

December 11, 2012 - 12:44 PM

Somewhere in Egypt

Terenzio Compound

Simone found Caleb sitting on a stone step that overlooked the gardens. Her eyes traced the tension in his shoulders, the rigid line of his back. She could guess pretty accurately the cause of it. Taking a deep breath, she tucked the letter into her back pocket and walked towards him. “Caleb?”

Caleb felt her before she broke the silence. He pressed his fingers over his eyes and took another second to regain his composure, before he stood up and turned around. “Yes, Madame President?”

Simone hated him calling her that, but she couldn’t bitch when she was the one that had put up the blockade.

Silently, she searched his face. His eyes were still damp, lingering evidence of the tears he'd cleared away, and it made her heart ache more than it already did. He had been such a good father in previous lifetimes. He would have been in this one, too. "Promise me that you won't be the next one we lose."

Caleb's blue eyes gentled as he slowly shook his head. "You know I can't." A wry smile touched his lips. "I can only promise to play the part of the big goddamn hero."

His answer threatened to bring more tears to Simone's eyes. *If Caleb was going to play that part, then he was as good as dead. Simone couldn't—wouldn't—change him, but that meant she was right; there would be no happy endings this lifetime. At least, not for them. She could take that knowledge and make the now more precious for its fragility, or she could waste more if it and continue to shut herself off from Caleb.

"Is there anything else you need, Madame President?"

Pressing her lips tightly together, Simone shook her head. She did not miss the whisper of sadness that passed through Caleb's eyes. He nodded and went to walk past her, but her hand shot out and captured his, halting his motions. Every muscle in Caleb's form knotted. He paused and looked over his shoulder in silent question.

It would hurt when Simone lost him, regardless of the choices she made, but Isabella and her grandfather they were right. Vasco was right. Without the expression of that one precious emotion, what was she—what were they—really fighting for? The cliché was an inescapable truth; they could give humanity all the choices it wanted, but without love wrapped around it all, the world was doomed to repeat the same mistakes over and over again. *She* was doomed to repeat the same mistakes over and over again. “Don’t go,” she whispered.

“No games, Simone.” Caleb turned to face her. “I couldn’t handle it.”

Simone stepped into him, lifting her other hand to touch his face, and let the tears fall where they may. “No games. Just us.”

Caleb briefly closed his eyes. A different sort of tension knotted the muscles in his shoulders as he framed Simone’s waist with his hands. “You don’t get to change your mind twice.”

Simone shook her head. “I won’t want to. I’m so sorry, Caleb. I’ve wasted so much time.”

“Yeah, you have.” Caleb pressed his forehead to hers. “But you can make it up to me.”

A trembling smile touched Simone’s lips. “I love you,” she breathed, and before he could say anything else, she pressed her mouth tightly against his to prove it.

CRYSTAL STORM

December 12, 2012 - 9:11 AM

Somewhere in Egypt

Terenzio Compound

“When did Robert say he would be back?” Abe asked. He was standing in the laboratory in the south wing of the compound. The device on the table in front of him was three feet tall, in the shape of a bullet, with three metal, claw-like feet coming out of the bottom. Abe had a small gold panel open and was connecting two brightly colored wires.

“He didn’t. I hope everything is all right.” Shirley stood at a table across from Abe, in front of a laptop computer. “Okay, that’s it, Abe. I read her now.”

“And I didn’t electrocute myself that time.” Abe twirled his screwdriver triumphantly, then closed the panel.

“Let’s switch her on.” Derek took one end of the machine, and Abe grabbed the other. Carefully, they set the device on to the floor.

“Everybody back up in case I didn’t do that right.” Abe picked up a small remote from the table and walked to the other side of the room. Shirley and Derek followed.

THE AWAKENING

Abe pressed the button, and the feet of the device dug into the floor, making holes. Inside the shiny gold casing, an oscillator began to hum. A second later, the team felt a faint vibration underneath their feet.

Derek nodded. "Okay, she works, turn it off."

Abe pressed another button, and the vibration stopped.

"I hope when Simone uses these they do more than just make the floor shake." Shirley pulled the goggles off her eyes.

"Me, too," Derek agreed. "But we can't really test it without causing an earthquake, so we'll have to hope we did it right."

"Your science is correct."

Derek, Abe and Shirley all turned at the unexpected voice. Their eyes widened. The color drained from Abe's face. Shirley gripped Derek's arm as they all stared.

Two beings stood before them, a man and a woman, approximately six feet tall, with pale skin, blond hair, and solid blue eyes. What was more amazing than their sudden appearance was the halo of light that surrounded the backs of their heads.

"We will need to commune with you, and those who work with you," said the man.

"Are they angels?" Abe whispered incredulously.

The woman smiled. "No. Pleadians."

CRYSTAL STORM

December 12, 2012 - 10:12 PM

Pittsburgh, PA

Illuminati Headquarters

The stone floors echoed with Caesar's sharp steps. Tony wrestled behind him, but his efforts were weak and pointless. Caesar kept dragging him as if he were nothing more than a sack, and stopped in front of a pair of doors, lifting his gaze to the security camera. After he was identified, they slid open.

Inside the room, six of the twelve members of the Roshaniya were gathered. Two were in the traditional white robes. They were ready to begin a pre-celebration ritual, something they come up with to take better advantages of the energies of fear created by their propaganda machine.

Caesar flung Tony in ahead of him. The men turned, staring down at DeMarco, then looked at Caesar. Timothy Rockefeller, head of the forthcoming NAU, looked at Caesar with dangerous curiosity. "What is the meaning of this interruption?"

THE AWAKENING

“He’s a traitor, sir,” Caesar declared, and removed the recording device from his pocket. He played back one of the phone conversations between Tony and Alex.

Tony rose to his knees, with his hands bound in front of him, and cracked his neck. “I prefer the term double agent, but whatever floats your boat.”

Caesar stepped into Tony, slamming his fist into Tony’s already beaten face. Tony grunted and fell to the side, blood spilling from his lips.

“Fuckin mook,” Tony muttered, pushing himself back up to his knees, and spit another wad of red onto the floor.

Rockefeller came down the stone steps, closer to Tony. “He is feeding information to the Terenzios?”

“Yes, sir,” Caesar said.

The other members walked closer, their gazes fully focused on Tony. The air thickened, grew denser from the dark energy that radiated off of them, their nefarious thoughts swirling through the air.

Tony winced, because he could feel it; their hatred, their fear, as palpable as a touch crawling over his skin. “You know, after a few centuries, with all the scared knowledge at your fingers, I would have thought you were smart enough to get a fuckin’ clue and get over it.” He slid his gaze around the men. “Guess not.”

Underneath the collar of Tony's shirt, cowering against the back of his neck, was Gabriella. She pressed her warm little hand against the back of his neck and squeezed her eyes shut, reminding him that death was nothing but transformation, and thanking him profusely for what he sacrificed for this grand experiment called Ascension.

Tony felt her, but gave no outward indication. Rockefeller came to stand in front of him and grabbed him roughly by the hair, yanking his head back. "Is this true, slave?"

"Yeah, yeah, it's true. But I'm not your fucking slave. I never was."

"What gives you the right to think you can rise up against the very Gods that made you?" Augustus Saintclair hissed in pure anger.

Tony kept his gaze centered on Rockefeller. "You know what? My God is not your God. You go to hell." He spit right in Rockefeller's face.

Rockefeller recoiled, disgust contorting his features. Caesar was on Tony in an instant, his fist slamming with brutal force into Tony's face and head, and when Tony fell over again, Caesar began kicking him viciously.

Rockefeller wiped the bile off his face and snarled, "Enough!"

Caesar stopped as ordered, but Tony remained on the ground, wheezing because Caesar cracked a few of his ribs.

“Brothers, a sacrifice to the Anunnaki, in celebration of that which cannot be changed.” Rockefeller came forward again, and the rest of the Roshaniya followed, forming a circle around Tony. Caesar backed out of their circle, dropping to his knees, and folded his hands in front of him as if in prayer.

When the chanting began, Gabriella could stay no longer. Whispering soft words of love to Tony, she zip-ped out of her hiding place and buzzed right to the open window.

Caesar saw her. “My lords, a guardian angel!”

Rockefeller snapped his eyes towards the window, and then shouted, “Geryon, catch it! Kill it and anyone else that gets in your way.”

Four pairs of dark red eyes pierced the shadows as they opened. Geryon, the two headed Igigi, guardian of the Roshaniya, released a terrifying roar. It bounded across the room on four strong legs, jumped into the windowsill, and dove out of it, its massive wings snapping open as it chased the angel.

Tony felt Gabriella’s departure and smiled.

“You will not hold that smile for long, slave,” Rockefeller promised, his voice dripping with menace. The

Roshaniya clasped hands and began a low, steady chant. As it grew in force, pillars of flames leapt from the stone floor, licking at the high ceiling. A smaller ring of fire crawled out of the flames and slithered around the chanting men.

The mind can create very magical things, and very dark ones. It was not long before the shadows thickened and a presence could be felt. It was not long before Rockefeller's promise became truth. Tony stopped smiling. And the sounds that ripped from his mouth were those of pure agony.

December 12, 2012 - 8:22 PM

New Orleans, LA

Estate of the DeMarco Family

Alexandro sat at the piano in his den. For once, a cool breeze dusted across the Louisiana night, and the windows were open to allow it in. His long fingers moved with expert ease over the black and white keys, commanding the sounds that floated out of the instrument to play with the air. His house was quiet, save for the music he played; a calm moment inside the storm. He had an early morning flight to Rome the next day, to prepare for

his part in removing the Roshaniya from power. His son was somewhere safe, and Mona, his wife, was already in Italy, waiting for his arrival.

Gabriella was fast, but so was the Igigi. Thankfully, Gabriella was also very agile. She could cut corners, and zigzag with greater efficiency. She used that to her advantage, increasing the lead between her and the demon-like creature as she zoomed through the open window and into Alex's house. She applied the brakes a little too late, and smacked into the back of Alex's head.

Alex blinked when he felt the impact, his fingers halting abruptly. He glanced over his shoulder and saw Gabriella picking herself up off the floor, putting a hand to her head and shaking it.

Amusement twinkled in his eyes as he turned around on his seat, looking down at her. "Have you been sipping my brother's bourbon again?"

Senses back in focus, Gabriella looked up at Alex, fluttered back into the air, landed on his shoulder, and began whispering in his ear. All amusement dropped off his face. "Antonio..." His eyes closed for just a moment, and he pressed a hand against his chest. They snapped open, clouding with quiet fury when the Igigi appeared on his windowsill, its red eyes locked with vicious intent on both of them.

CRYSTAL STORM

“Go. Go and warn Xavier,” Alexandro said to Gabriella as he slowly rose to his feet, his gaze centered on the demon. “I’ll take care of it.”

Chapter 19

“Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

- Talmud

December 12, 2012 - 10:11 PM

Washington, DC

The White House

In his pseudo-human form, Enki stood in his brother's office, waiting for him to return. Something was amiss. He could sense it as acutely as he could feel the presence of the Ascended Masters and the humans of Earth that continued to vibrate in love, despite the travesty which befell not only their nation, but the rest of the world.

A short time ago, Lucifer assured him the Ascension would succeed; that Spirit, the Source, wanted it. He also knew every spark of life which came from the Source had the choice of free will. They must want the Ascension, too. By all intents and feelings, enough humans on Earth

did. His brethren the Anunnaki—his brother, more specifically—was putting up one hell of a fight, though. Enki worried his efforts may not be enough.

He stepped away from the window, rubbing his false human eyes, and felt the approach of one of their messengers. As Enki glanced up, an Igigi appeared in the window, crouching on the sill like the gargoyle statues which almost correctly depicted their appearance. Enki canted his head at the creature. “What is your message?”

The Igigi’s words rang in Enki’s head. *My message is for Enlil, my lord.*

“You will tell me, and I will pass your message onto my brother.”

The Igigi paused, studying Enki in silence. Enki allowed his eyes to flip, exposing the reptilian irises, and sent his next words directly into the creature’s mind. *Do not think to defy me. You will speak now.*

The Igigi shifted uncomfortably. *The Roshaniya have caught a traitor. DeMarco works against you, with the Terenzios.*

Enki blinked. That would be explain the wrongness he felt. He allowed feelings of anger to taint his energy field, so the Igigi could feel it, and expressed as much on his face. *Where are the DeMarcos now?*

Tony DeMarco has been killed. Geryon was sent to dispatch Alexandro, and Tony’s guardian Angel.

Enki nodded. *Caesar caught him?*

Yes, my lord.

I will alert Enlil of this. Send a message back to the Roshaniya that we have it under control. Caesar is to await my brother's orders.

Yes, my lord. The Igigi hopped around on the sill and flew out into the night.

Enki watched the beast disappear and sighed. He would have to move very carefully to conceal this deception from his brother as long as possible. As if on cue, Enlil opened the door to his office, closing it behind him.

"Did I sense an Igigi?" Enlil asked, walking over to his desk and dropping a portfolio onto it.

"No. I have not seen one." Enki turned from the window to look at Enlil. "Are you ready to depart, brother? We should not be late for the ceremonies in Rome."

Enlil turned off his computer and smiled at Enki. Walking over to him, Enlil set his false human hands on Enki's shoulders. "That I can share these moments with you again, that we will share our victory over the slaves of this planet, means more to me than I can express."

Enki's heart twisted in his chest. His brother was misguided. Enki tried so hard to show Enlil the light, but Enlil chose to live in darkness. His brother's cruel refusal to release the people of Earth saddened Enki's soul.

Continuing to hide his true motives from the brethren he loved, Enki smiled. "As am I brother. As am I."

Enlil embraced Enki tightly, and Enki returned it with genuine affection. "Come." Enlil smiled and began to transform into his true Anunnaki form. "Tonight, we enjoy the praise of the mortal kings of Earth. In ten days, we stand and laugh together as this Ascension fails."

December 13, 2012 - 5:55 PM

Somewhere in Egypt

Terenzio Compound

"We've got a few situations." Crowded around the conference table with the Terenzios' were the scientists and the Pledians. Vasco stood at the head of the table and pointed to the two in the back corner. "That's Merope and Taygeta. Pleiadians. They will be operating the teleportation devices that each team will use to get to their prospective locations."

The scientists looked fascinated by the prospect.

"Is that going to be make us nauseous, too?" Simone asked, glancing over at the Pleiadians.

Merope, who had taken on the physical features of a man, smiled reassuringly. "No. It tickles."

“For anyone who doesn’t know him, this is our cousin, Xavier.” Vasco motioned at the tall man standing in the corner in a wrinkled suit, who had his father, Christopher’s, eyes.

Xavier stepped forward and nodded at the scientists. Setting his hands on his waist he turned his attention to Simone, and her brothers. “Caesar caught Tony and brought him to the Brotherhood. They killed him.” Xavier’s jaw worked, but he pushed on. “Alex escaped. Tony put protocols in place in case this happened, so Alex can still get into the event in Rome. Tony also has a few people on the inside that are loyal to him. Simone,” Xavier reached into his pocket and removed a device that resembled a PDA. “Tony made this. Security codes are being changed, but if you attach this device to the control panel in the Underground Bases it will override them.”

Simone took the device and nodded. “Are we sure it will work?”

“It should. Fingers crossed though.”

“So the Brotherhood knows we’re coming after them?” Lucien asked.

“Tony wouldn’t have told them anything, but we don’t know how much Caesar overheard. Enki is going to do as much damage control from the inside as he can but, I’d be prepared for anything at this point.” Xavier glanced at

Vasco. "It's a sure bet Caesar will be at the celebration in New Orleans."

"It's fine, Xavier. I'll take care of him." Vasco looked over at the scientists. "Robert will meet you and the rest of your team in Guatemala. They're in jail."

"What?" Shirley blinked in surprise. Derek and Abe shared her expression.

"They're fine," Vasco assured her. "I sent an SVT agent to look after them."

"How long have then been in there?" Shirley demanded.

Vasco met her gaze. "Two months."

"My grandmother has been in jail for two months?" Shirley shot to her feet, anger reddening her ears. "Why the hell didn't you tell me?"

"Because of this." Vasco motioned a hand at her. "You would have been distracted from your task, worrying needlessly."

Shirley's expression turned incredulous. "Worrying needlessly?"

"Your grandmother is fine, Shirley, we promise," Simone said, before things got out of hand. "Worst case scenario is she's bored out of her mind. Our SVT agent on site made contact with them, so they're aware of the situation. We couldn't spring them, yet, without drawing attention to ourselves."

THE AWAKENING

Shirley still looked angry. "You should have told me."

"Yes, he should have. Vasco does this constantly, Shirley, but it's for the best." Simone touched Shirley's shoulder. "We need to move on, though."

"The good news is, you get to spring them out," Lucien added.

"What do you mean, we get to spring them out?" Derek eyeballed the triplets.

"Abe, I hear, used to be in the military," Vasco said, "And Robert has a small squad of Cadre assigned to him. It's a local prison, minimum security. You shouldn't have any trouble getting them out of there."

Derek blinked. "You're serious? You really want us to break them out of jail?"

Abe chuckled and clasped Derek on the shoulder. "Don't worry, it sounds like fun."

"After that, you will proceed directly to the site and find the Cave of Creation," Vasco continued. "The Pleiadians have given Robert his own teleportation device."

"If you think we can pull it off." Derek did not sound so convinced.

"You can, and you will." Vasco looked around at the rest of the table. "No one can move until Lucien blows up the ELMINT. At that point, we expect worldwide power meltdown, because of the solar flares. Once that happens, each team confirms to the security center here they are a

go, and proceeds. Xavier and Lieutenant General Archer will coordinate from this facility. Anyone have any questions?”

“How do we communicate with each other once the solar flares knock everything offline?” Lucien asked.

“We’re going to use these. Xavier brought them with him.” Simone slid a rectangular box across the table to Lucien. Inside were five devices that resembled standard headsets, except a small crystal sat in the ear piece, and another smaller one at the mouthpiece.

“They were made by Sirians, someone named Thoth, specifically,” Xavier said.

“As in the Egyptian god, Thoth?” Shirley asked.

Xavier shrugged. “Couldn’t tell you.”

“Any other questions?” Vasco looked around the table.

There was silence and head shakes from around the room. “I think that about covers it, V.” Lucien stood up.

Vasco nodded. “Enjoy the next week. It’s going to go by fast.”

December 14, 2012–6:56 PM

Phoenix Isle

Alcyone Island

THE AWAKENING

Caesar pushed open one of the doors to the debriefing room. "I'm not waiting anymore. It's time we got things started."

Amadeo, Olivia, and Kayla stood in the room.

"Enlil has given his orders?" Kayla asked.

"No, but it doesn't matter. I know what needs to be done," Caesar snapped.

Olivia smiled. "About fucking time someone did something without being babysat."

"What's the plan, Caesar?" Amadeo asked.

"What did Leone tell you?" Caesar sat down at the head of the table.

"What I already suspected. Simone gave us the incorrect locations of the underground military bases they are going to hit. Leone gave us the correct locations," Olivia said.

"Read them off to me," Caesar ordered.

Olivia opened the file folder in front of her and gave the names of each base.

Caesar nodded. "That sounds right. It's what I'd hit. I don't know how Simone intends to get in—all access codes have been changed—but let's assume she does. Olivia—"

"I'll be waiting for her. I've been itching to put one right in her fucking head." Olivia's eyes gleamed at the thought.

“Good. Either Vasco or Lucien will attempt to target the ELMINT.” Caesar looked over at Amadeo.

“Probably Lucien,” Amadeo said. “He spent a lot of time at the training facility on Barrier Isle, under Christopher’s orders. It was most likely to prepare for an assignment like that. I’ll meet him there.”

“Amadeo, it’s really fucking important that Lucien doesn’t prevent the ELMINT from firing. Security will be really tight, but even so.”

“I understand, Caesar. Lucien is the family fuck up. They continue to show their stupidity by letting him try. He’s not going to beat me. I’ll take care of it.”

“You better.” Caesar looked over at Kayla. “You’re with me. We’ll be at the Roshaniya’s celebration in New Orleans. Vasco will try to go after them, and I’ve got big plans for him.”

Kayla merely nodded.

“Anything else?” Olivia asked. She was ready to get her team together and come up with a game plan for killing Simone.

“No.” Caesar stood back up. “Just do your fuckin’ jobs, and at the end of the day, we’ll be the Roshaniya’s heroes, and sitting pretty on top of a rightfully controlled world.”

“Sounds like the way it should be.” Amadeo walked towards the door. “I’ll see you all the morning of the 21st.”

THE AWAKENING

Olivia slowly smiled. “What a great day that’s going to be, isn’t it?”

CRYSTAL STORM

December 20th, 2012

"I'm going to tear your world apart, piece by piece. And then I'm coming for you."

-Liliana Terenzio

Chapter 20

“If there must be trouble let it be in my day, that my child may have peace.”

- Thomas Paine

December 20, 2012 - 10:10 PM

Somewhere in Egypt

Terenzio Compound

I’m ready. I’ve got explosives, angry Cadre, and the thermopy thing.” Lucien patted himself down.

The triplets and their security teams stood in the security center. The scientists were the first to teleport out. Simone, leaning back against Caleb while the teams prepared, eased out of his arms and walked over to her brother. “You be careful.”

Lucien smiled and hugged her. “Yeah, you too.” He kissed her cheek and looked over her shoulder at Caleb. “You take care of my sister. Anything happens to her...”

“I’ll kick my own ass, don’t worry.” Caleb extended his hand to Lucien. “Good luck.”

Lucien shook it, nodding. “Thanks.”

Vasco pushed off from his lean against the wall. He stepped up to his brother, simply regarded him for a quiet moment, then reached out with one arm and pulled him into a tight hug. "Still the family's best kept secret. Thank you, Lucien, for always being there."

Lucien smiled into his brother's shoulder, clearing his throat as he was released. "Bet your ass, I am. See you guys soon." He looked over at the four Cadre standing behind him. "Ready boys?" When they nodded Lucien slide his gaze to the Pleiadian called Taygeta, who Lucien had silently noticed, looked suspiciously like Carissa. "Let's do this."

Taygeta pressed a few buttons on the crystal device in her hand. A blinding flash of pink light emanated outward. When it died down, Lucien and his small team of Cadre were gone.

"That doesn't get any less amazing each time I see it," Caleb slung his machine gun over his shoulder.

"No, it doesn't," Vasco agreed, and extended his hand. "Thank you."

"I'm not sure what for, but you're welcome, Vasco." Caleb took his hand, shaking firmly.

Vasco simply nodded, then looked at his sister. A faint smile curled across his mouth, before he hugged her. "We don't leave this place until we call checkmate."

Simone returned the embrace tightly, closing her eyes and smiling. “Be careful, Vasco. But kick Caesar’s ass when you see him.”

Vasco pulled back to look at her. “What else would Stefano really come back for?” He winked, and then looked over at Taygeta. “I’m ready.”

Again, the pink light pulsed from the device, and when the light faded, Vasco was gone.

Simone drew in a deep breath and refused to acknowledge the heavy weight in her gut that whispered she may never see her brothers again. She looked at Lieutenant General Archer. “You’ll alert us when the White Lotus Society rendezvous with the SVT teams at the concentration camps?”

Archer nodded. “Yes, Madame President.” He saluted her. “Good luck to you.”

“Thanks.” Simone fitted the alien-made headset into her ear. She looked up at Caleb. “Ready for some ground work?”

Caleb grinned. “Let’s do it.”

Simone gave a thumbs up sign to Taygeta. A second later, she and the rest of her team disappeared.

Washington, DC
The White House

“What message?”

The Igigi kept its large, ugly head bowed. *The message delivered to your brother Enki, my lord.*

Enlil’s eyes narrowed. “What was the message?”

That the DeMarcos are traitors and working with the Terenzio’s.

Never had such a sound been heard in the Vice President’s office as the one that ripped out of Enlil’s pseudo-human throat.

His brother deceived him. The Galactic Federation was interfering. Enlil knew this for fact, now that he’d actually received the report regarding the true events with the Terenzios’ fleeing aircraft. An interdimensional vessel had been involved. When Enlil found out which race the craft belonged too, there would be hell to pay.

Time was of the essence. The Galactic Alignment was little more than an hour away. It was imperative ELMINT come online to block the solar storms and waves which would emanate from the Dark Rift, attempting to push into the consciousness of man. The night of the Solstice *would* come and pass without the slaves even knowing there was an incident. Their hope would be crushed. Their fear would be allowed to reign over their other

THE AWAKENING

emotions, which would allow *his* reign on this planet to continue. And on the morning of the twenty second day, he would stand before the Galactic Federation and laugh at their flimsy attempts to interfere, their silly faith in the Great Source.

Dismissing the Igigi, Enlil snapped a silent order to the two Secret Service agents, Zetas, standing at attention inside his office. They opened the door for him, and followed at his heel as he marched down the hallways of the White House and onto the front lawn. He would no longer leave Terenzio's fate in the hands of the slaves. He would deal with them personally.

As he entered the night, beams of light began springing up on the grass. Five, ten, twenty. When the light faded, there stood his best Anunnaki Warriors in all their glory, without the false human disguise they so often wore.

Enlil did not care if the humans saw. Let them, he thought. The world would be a much different place by the time the sun rose.

Enlil let his iris flip, exposing his true reptilian eyes as he drew them over his brethren. "Warriors of Nibiru—"

"Enlil!"

Enlil snapped his gaze to the right. He was not surprised to see Enki in his Anunnaki form walking towards him. The scientist. The weakling. Enlil hissed at him.

“Your exploits have failed, brother. I know everything. After I rip the very souls out of those Terenzios, I will deal with you.”

Enki’s stern gaze centered on his brother. “Your knowledge comes too late. You cannot stop what has been created.”

Enlil growled, lowly. “I can and I will.” In the blink of an eye, Enlil shed his human skin, literally. Pieces fell to the ground and turned to dust as his true form emerged, a good foot taller than his brother. “You cannot defeat me, Enki. We both know that.”

“Physically, brother no, I cannot.” Enki motioned towards the sky. “But they can.”

Enlil looked upward and his eyes widened in surprise. The sky was suddenly full of the race of Angels. The tall, winged, disgustingly human-looking beings floated to the ground. Archangel Gabriel and Michael stood at their center. Lightning snapped and arced from Gabriel’s wings. Michael’s golden chest plate gleamed. A short sword was sheathed at his waist and grim determination flashed through Michael’s eyes.

“We need not fight, Enlil, if you would only stop this nonsense,” Michael gently implored. “Open your heart. Feel the Source. It calls to you. Your job is done, brother. Let them go.” Enlil faced Michael head on, his jaws snapping open to release his roar. The wings on his back

THE AWAKENING

extended like the head of a cobra and glowed a brilliant red. "I will not!" His claws flexed, growing an inch longer, their points sharper than a Hitori Hanso sword. "Get out of my way, Angel."

Michael drew his sword and his wings burst into brilliant blue flame. "We are the guardians, and we will not falter."

"Then you will die," Enlil spat. He roared a command, and the Anunnaki Warriors charged at the Angels.

With a speed that would be unseen to a human eye, Michael charged Enlil. Enlil snarled and surged forward to meet him. As the two collided, a blinding flash of light and flame swirled around them, erupting high into the sky.

A scientist not a warrior, Enki could do nothing but watch as the battle between Angels and Demons reflected in his sad eyes.

December 20, 2012 – 10:44 PM

Corregidora Ortiz

Police Station

"I can't believe we're doing this," Shirley whispered.

"What, you never broke anybody out of jail before?" Derek teased, but he had to admit he was pretty nervous himself. He wanted to sink even further down in the car when Abe, Robert, and five Cadre walked into the police station.

Grams was napping fitfully in her cell when the angry bang of a gunshot woke her. Climbing off her cot, she walked over to the bars, curling her elegantly aged fingers around the rusting metal. "What's going on?" she demanded when the police officer walked up to her carrying his gun. He raised the weapon silently, pointing the muzzle at her.

Grams' eyes widened, but before the flair of panic and fear could fully grip her, she was gasping in shock as the man crumbled to the floor.

"Hi, Grams." Abe smiled and set the fire extinguisher down.

Grams blinked as realization set in, and a shaky laugh escaped her. When Abe opened the cell door, she seized his face between her hands and gave him a big smooch. "The gods love you, because I know I certainly do. Phil and Steve are..."

"Dead." Robert said from down the hall. "We have to go."

"Oh, no." Grams looked pained. Now she knew what those gunshots had been.

THE AWAKENING

Abe took Grams arm. "C'mon, we're on a deadline."

"Derek?"

"Hmm?"

"Do you hear that?"

Derek peered over the steering wheel just as Abe, Robert, Grams and the Cadre came out of the station. Suddenly, the glare of headlights illuminated their figures, accompanied by a crescendo of furious shouts. "Oh, shit."

The soldiers leaning out of the open jeep started firing. The Cadre swept in front of Abe, Grams and Robert and fired back, chaos erupting as bullets from two sides ripped through the air.

"Start the car, Derek!" Shirley yelled.

Her shout spurred Derek into motion. Hand shaking, he twisted the key. Attempting not to panic, he forgot to keep his foot on the clutch and the car stalled, lurching forward. He got it right the second time, and the engine coughed to life. Shirley threw open her door, grabbing her grandmother, and Derek shrieked when he heard the plink of bullets slamming into the side of his door.

Three Cadre dropped to the ground, dead by the time Abe shoved Robert into the car. The remaining two squeezed in after them. "Haul ass, Derek!" Abe shouted.

"Seatbelts!" Derek slammed on the gas, speeding down the narrow dirt road.

"Where's that teleport thing, Robert?" Abe spared him a quick glance and slapped a fresh clip into his gun.

"I'm on it!" Robert pulled the shiny, triangular device out of his vest pocket and started pressing buttons.

"What teleport thing?" Grams looked bewildered. A second later, both she and Shirley screamed when the back windshield shattered.

"Keep your heads down!" Abe shouted, then stuck his arm out the window and fired back.

"I've got it, get ready!" Robert pressed a button, and in the next instant a brilliant flash of light surrounded them, propelling them down an ethereal tunnel. When the world came back into focus, the car was facing the ancient Mayan site.

It wasn't an ideal place to bring a moving vehicle though. Derek's eyes widened as he saw the thick, road less jungle looming in front of them. "Oh shit, hang on!" Derek slammed on the brakes, and the car hit a tree with a little less speed. A thin cloud of smoke hissed out of the mangled hood and the doors creaked a little as the team climbed out of the car.

THE AWAKENING

“Thanks for not killing us just then.” Abe slapped Derek on the shoulder.

Derek swallowed. Eyes wide and breathing hard, he nodded absently. “Yeah. Yeah, no problem.”

“Everybody okay?” Robert looked around the group. Shirley was hugging her grandmother, but nodded over her shoulder at him. “Okay, no time to waste. Let’s get the equipment out and get down there.”

December 20, 2012 – 10:44 PM

Switzerland

CERN

Being teleported really fucked with one’s sense of vertigo, Lucien realized as he and his team appeared on the snow covered lawn in front of the CERN building. Lucien took a quick second to get his bearings, then pressed the button on his stopwatch. They had ten minutes to get inside the building, and arm the ELMINT. Pulling out his gun, Lucien motioned for his team to follow, and they sprinted past several heavily armed, patrolling security squads, literally unseen.

The building that housed the ELMINT was dome shaped and sat behind the main CERN laboratory. Three

armed guards stood in front of the door, smoking and chatting. The Cadre knocked them out and took their radios.

“You two, wait outside. Nobody gets in here until we arm it. You two, with me,” Lucien whispered. Taking a deep breath, Lucien slowly pushed the door to the building open, just enough that he could slide through it. ELMINT resembled a giant telescope. It had a parabolic shaped head which sat on top of a circular tower made of metal with wires wrapped around pipes of steel. The giant diamond shaped crystal was enclosed in a glass container in the center. It stretched up three levels and a steel platform slinkied around it. On the second level, two separate rows of computer terminals took up space. A dozen men and women in white lab coats worked in the area, obviously getting ready for the night’s events. Two guards stood at the lower level, and Lucien knocked them both out with the strike of his gun to the back of their heads. Lucien’s men shot the other two guards. At that point the scientists realized something was wrong. Pressing a button on his thermoptic device, Lucien flickered into sight, grabbed one of the scientists by the back of his lab coat, and pushed him towards the door, shouting at the rest and wildly brandishing his gun.

“Step away from the terminals! You all up there, ground floor, right now! Right fucking now or I’ll put a

bullet in you! Move! Move!” Academics, not soldiers, the scientists released startled sounds, threw up their hands, and began filing down the metal staircase to the waiting Cadre.

“Keep ’em quiet,” Lucien said to his team, and sprinted up the stairs to the third floor. He pressed a button on the railing, and a plank stretched out over to the ELMINT, stopping in front of the crystal. Lucien jogged across it. When he reached the keypad, he snapped it open. The keys were marked with symbols—the Anunnaki language—not numbers. He paused to recall the code from memory, before he typed it in.

A green light flashed, and the glass panel surrounding the crystal opened. Lucien swung his pack around and pulled out a brick of C-4.

“Don’t move, Lucien.”

Lucien froze. From below, he heard warning shouts, then gunfire. Goddammit, he thought. Frowning, he turned around to face a coldly triumphant Amadeo.

“Walk forward, slowly,” Amadeo ordered.

Anger, not fear, tightening his shoulders Lucien obeyed, walking across the plank to face his cousin, who backed up a step. “Set the explosive to the side, right there.” Amadeo motioned with tilt of his head. “Slowly.”

Lucien hesitated. He could see the rapidly declining numbers on his stopwatch. His mind worked frantically

for a way out as he bent down and set both the explosive and detonator on the ground where Amadeo had indicated.

“Guns, too,” Amadeo said, evenly.

Gritting his teeth, Lucien pulled out both guns and set them on the ground. Amadeo walked forward, keeping his gaze on Lucien as he kicked the guns behind him. Then, Amadeo set his gun down on the railing. “I’m really going to enjoy this.”

Without hesitating, he punched Lucien in the face. Lucien stumbled backwards, and Amadeo advanced with a quick assault of his fists. Lucien tasted blood on the third punch. The fourth made his vision swim and the world lurch beneath his feet.

C’mon, Lucien, my eighty year old sister can block a punch better than that. He could hear Christopher’s voice in his head. Forcing himself to focus, when Amadeo swung again, Lucien smacked his cousin’s wrist, then slammed his forearm into Amadeo’s mouth. Amadeo’s head jerked back and Lucien clapped his hands against Amadeo’s ears, disorienting him. Amadeo grabbed at his head, and Lucien kicked the tender spot of Amadeo’s knee. Amadeo gave a shout, and as he fell Lucien punched Amadeo near his temple. Lucien watched him collapse, just as his stopwatch began frantically beeping.

The ceiling to the ELMINT building began to slide apart, and Lucien jerked his gaze upwards. “Shit,” he muttered. Whirling around, he dashed over to the C-4 and snatched up the brick. Running back across the plank, he placed the bomb against the crystal. He hit a button, and the case slid shut as the machine’s satellite head began tilting backwards to aim at the exposed sky.

Lucien went to punch a button on the detonator, just to realize he hadn’t grabbed it. He whirled around to see Amadeo standing, holding it in one hand, his gun pointed at Lucien with the other.

“You failed, Lucien,” Amadeo sneered. “But considering it’s you, that’s no shocker.”

Lucien lifted his hands halfway in gesture of surrender, but his gray eyes were mocking. “The nice thing about C-4 is how it reacts to intense heat. I’m thinking, when that thing charges up to fire, that crystal is going to get pretty hot.”

Amadeo’s eyes widened and his gaze jerked from Lucien to the device just behind him. “No.”

Taking advantage of Amadeo’s distraction, Lucien charged him, getting a hand around the gun and sending a shot harmlessly into the air. As the two men collided, the ELMINT engaged its activation sequence, and the Atlantean crystal began charging in preparation to fire.

CRYSTAL STORM

Outside, a monstrous pillar of fire and smoke stained the sky when the ELMINT exploded.

Chapter 21

“Find out just what people will submit to, and you have found out the exact amount of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them; and these will continue until they are resisted with either words or blows, or both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”

- Frederick Douglass

December 20, 2012 – 11:00 PM

New Orleans, LA

Gallier Hall

Vasco arrived in New Orleans at a moment of sudden panic. Just a minute before, power lines suddenly erupted in showers of dangerous sparks, then shut down, thrusting the city into darkness. High above, where the human eye couldn't see, the Global Satellite Communications system was a sitting duck to the awe-some power of the sun, and one by one, each satellite was fried by the peaking solar storms.

Vasco stood behind a tree in Lafayette Park, directly across from Gallier Hall, watching. The thermoptic device attached to his belt kept him hidden. Gallier Hall was a beautiful example of Greek revival architecture. The building had once housed New Orleans' City Hall, currently it was rented out for high profile parties, events, or the Brotherhood, whenever they needed it. The Roshaniya and select members of their followers were inside the building, but the blackout rudely interrupted their party, and now they were as confused and concerned as everyone else.

St. Charles Avenue had been blocked off from Podryas Street to Girod Street. Local police, and scattered military watched the perimeters. More prevalent were the personal security of the Brotherhood, serious-faced, plain-suited men that resembled the Secret Service. After the power went out, they stood in small groups, conversing with each other. Because radios no longer worked, they couldn't get a hold of anyone with authority, and they weren't sure what to do.

Vasco's mouth subtly curved. The mere fact the city was suddenly on a power and communications blackout meant Lucien accomplished his mission. He took a moment to savor his brother's victory. When that moment passed, it was time for his. He touched his Sirian headset.

"Compound, come in. This is SVT. I'm going in."

“Roger that, SVT.”

Vasco removed the device, folded it shut, and tucked it into the inside pocket of his fatigues. He pulled the night vision goggles from the top of his head, put them over his eyes and removed his 9mm fitted with a silencer and laser scope. Deftly avoiding brushing against any security guards, Vasco walked up the stone steps and into the building.

Tony's intel stated the Roshaniya would be on the third floor. Inside the building it was pitch black, except for the sway of security guards' flashlights over the well-dressed elite. A noisy, tense hum filled the air, and over the guests' voices he could hear the stern, but shaky, voices of their security guards, asking them to remain calm and in their perspective reception halls. Easing past them all, Vasco went to the staircase. He was halfway up when he paused. Caesar stood at the top, waving his flashlight over the crowd below, his gaze searching—and knowing. Vasco's hand flexed around the handle of his gun, but he resisted the urge to shoot Caesar right then and there. He pacified his ego with patience and walked right past his nemesis.

At the top of the stairs, Vasco made a right. The ballroom, where the six members of the Roshaniya and one hundred of their devoted followers were, was at the end of the hallway. There were three doors to get into it.

Vasco walked over to the door in the middle and cracked it open. He could hear their raised voices from within.

"Where are the gods?"

"I thought we had a device that would prevent this?"

"How will we get in touch with them?"

"Keep quiet, all of you. The cars will be brought around soon, and we'll retreat to the underground bases."

Vasco slipped in through the door, in front of a small group of men, and silently closed it behind him. A security guard flashed a light in his direction, but of course, saw nothing. Vasco eased to the right of the doorway and watched the guard walk over to the door, open it back up, peek out into the hallway, shrug and close it again. Vasco stepped onto an empty chair to give him a better vantage point and line of sight. Most of the men in the room wore their traditional ceremonial robes. The power outage had interrupted them at the beginning of Cremation of Care ritual, and aside from the illuminating beam of the flashlights, the eerie glow of candles provided some light for the room. Vasco adjusted the zoom feature on his goggles and began searching the crowd. Having memorized the faces of the men he was to kill, they were not hard to locate. They were where he thought they would be, standing around the giant owl statue that had been positioned in the corner of the room.

Vasco lifted the weapon, watching the small red dot make a perfect mark against his target's chest. He pulled the trigger without hesitation, slid the weapon a few inches to the right, and did it again. When the third Roshaniya dropped, clutching his chest, the rest of their brothers realized something was horribly wrong.

"Someone's shooting at us!"

"Find the shooter, goddammit!"

Operating on a pure hunch, Caesar came upstairs to check on the Roshaniya and heard the chaos echoing from the ballroom. He threw open the door closest to the stairs just as the fifth Roshaniya dropped to the ground.

"My brothers are dead! Help us!"

As Saintclair shouted, Caesar snapped his gaze over to the Roshaniya and saw the red dot marking his forehead. His urge to kill Vasco outweighing his duty, Caesar didn't warn the elder, but followed the faint laser line across the room. He lost it right by the second door. Shoving some panicked follower of the Brotherhood out of his way, Caesar pulled the Taser gun from underneath his suit jacket, stepped back out into the hallway, and inched closer to the door he suspected Vasco would exit from.

Vasco didn't bother to watch the last man fall after he pulled the trigger. Keeping the gun in his hand, he stepped down, pushed open the door, walked out into the hallway—and pain exploded through his system.

When Caesar saw the door open, he counted two seconds, took a gamble and squeezed the trigger. He was rewarded with Vasco's surprised shout, and the sound of a body hitting the floor, just as the devout followers of the Brotherhood began pouring out of the doorway behind him, shouting and screaming about an enemy within.

Walking over to where the taser was stuck into a form he couldn't yet see, Caesar reached down, patting Vasco by the waist, and found the thermoptic device. "Did De-Marco give you these?" Caesar switched it off, and Vasco immediately appeared, twitching violently. Caesar smirked coldly. "I bet you're pretty proud of yourself, aren't you?" He knelt and patted Vasco's cheek. "So am I."

The last thing Vasco saw before consciousness was ripped from him was Caesar's dark smile.

December 20, 2012 – 11:00 PM

Mt. Shasta California

Abandoned Mine Shaft

"That's it. Power's off. Let's move." Simone pulled off the alien headset and tucked it into her pocket. Standing at the top of the supposedly abandoned mine shaft were fourteen Cadre, Caleb and Simone. The Cadre stood in

pairs of two and carried six closed containers that housed Tesla's earthquake device.

Simone walked over to the control panel that operated the elevator, and placed the PDA-like device Xavier gave her overtop it. The device immediately locked onto the panel and began making a low humming noise. Ten seconds later it beeped and the elevator gate unlocked.

"How easy would our jobs have been, last lifetime, with one of those things?" Caleb shook his head and Simone chuckled. Caleb pulled back the gate when the elevator arrived and stepped in after Simone. The rest of the Cadre crowded in with them. There was no button to press inside the elevator. Once they closed the gate, it began descending on its own.

"Time to see if these invisibility devices really work." Simone pressed the button on her device, and the rest of the team did the same. For whatever reason, once they were invisible together, they could still see each other. Simone hadn't bothered to have Xavier explain it to her; she didn't particularly care why, so long as they worked.

"How many lifetimes do you think we've done things like this?" Simone asked Caleb as she tucked the device back into her pocket.

Caleb grinned lightly. "Probably all of them. It's what we do, babe."

The Cadre “Oorahed” and Simone laughed at their agreement. She set the timer on her watch, since their thermoptic devices worked in ten minute intervals.

Caleb bent slightly to murmur in her ear, “If I don’t get to tell you this later, you look really hot in black fatigues.”

Barely restraining a smile, Simone kept her eyes forward as the elevator shaft kept descending. “You should see what I’ve got on underneath it.”

The Cadre “Oorahed” again.

December 20, 2012 – 11:11 PM

Piedras Negras

Mayan Ruins

“Never mind where they came from, what the hell is that?!” The scientists and their Cadre were crowded around the opening that led underneath the ruins, when what appeared to be a small army of PLFs appeared. But Abe wasn’t talking about the PLFs. He was pointing at the Igigi that circled the sky above them.

“Forget about that. You’ve got to get down there. We’ll hold them off.” Robert snapped open the case, and pulled out the crystal, handing it to Grams.

"I'm with you, Robert." Abe slapped a fresh magazine into his assault rifle.

Derek and Shirley stared at Abe. Shirley was the one to speak, "But Abe—"

"Do you know how long it's been since I got to play military?" Abe cut off Shirley's protest. "Stop arguing. Get moving."

Shirley swallowed hard, leaned over, and kissed his cheek. She scrambled over to her grandmother. They were all suited up and ready to go below. Grams secured the golden rod to her waist, doubled checked her rope, and went down first.

"Hurry!" Robert shouted at them, as one of the remaining Cadre tossed a grenade.

"Please, be careful." Derek clasped Abe on the shoulder.

"Yeah, you, too." Abe squeezed his arm, then gave him a little shove. "Haul ass."

"C'mon, Derek!" Shirley yelled just before she rappelled down after her grandmother.

Derek jumped as the dirt around his feet exploded in small bursts because of the gunfire crashing into it. Shoving his spelunking helmet on, he secured the rope around his waist, tied the knot, and disappeared into the unknown.

CRYSTAL STORM

December 20, 2012 – 11:11 PM

Washington, DC

The White House

Enlil's claws ripped open the skin on Michael's beautiful face, staining it with blood. Before the wounds could heal, Enlil swiped his other in the same manner, then kicked him so hard Michael cracked into a wall of the White House. Roaring with bloodlust, Enlil gave him no reprieve and charged. Michael shook his head once, saw Enlil coming, and surged to his feet, flying out to meet him. The two crashed together and Michael took Enlil to the ground, the impact dragging up the earth underneath them. Holding Enlil down with his forearm against the reptile's throat, Michael shoved the blade of his sword into Enlil's side, a deadly place for an Anunnaki to get injured because of the close proximity to his vital organs. Enlil's roar could be heard in Maryland.

Michael twisted the weapon, closing Enlil's wound around it and preventing him from healing it. A second sound of fierce pain and harsh defiance exploded from Enlil, and his clawed hands made their marks on Michael's arms, spilling more of the Angel's blood, as he

slowly stopped fighting, his head dropping back into the dirt.

Breathing heavily, Michael stood up, looking down at Enlil sadly. "I am sorry. Return to the source, brother," he whispered.

"Michael!"

Michael turned, and a smile slid over his battle weary face when he saw Gabriel. He took a step in his partner's direction then halted. His eyes widened. A sudden flutter of white feathers, now stained with drops of crimson, fell to the ground. A clawed hand slithered over Michael's shoulder. Enlil yanked him backward, shoving the Angel's own sword through his body. "You...will come...with me..." Enlil hissed viciously. He fell to his knees before Michael did, and slumped over a second later, this time gone.

Gabriel was at Michael's side in an instant, catching the Archangel's body before he collapsed to the ground. Michael simply smiled up at him, lifting his hand, and touched Gabriel's cheek. It fell back onto his stained breastplate a second later, when a soul decided it was time to return home.

Gabriel drew his hand gently over Michael's face, closing his eyes. The remaining Angels formed a circle around them, dropping to one knee in silent prayer for a quick journey home. Enki walked slowly over to them.

CRYSTAL STORM

Tears in his eyes, Gabriel looked up at Enki. “We have done all we can do.”

Enki slowly nodded. “There is one last task I must ask of you.”

Chapter 22

“The difficulties of life are intended to make us better, not bitter.”

-Author Unknown

December 20, 2012 – 11:44 PM

Mid Way City

Kinsley, Kansas

That’s the last one.” Ten dead station guards littered the area. The device the Brotherhood used to burrow three miles into the earth, burned the walls to glass. A sign hung from the ceiling, written in Sumerian that informed the employees of their current location and subsequent destination. In front of the parked train, a giant steel door blocked the path to the next station. The Cadre took positions along the perimeter, while Simone finished arming Tesla’s device.

“Nothing to it.” Caleb winked at Simone as she finished.

That was when everything went wrong.

Bursts of pale pink light appeared on the floor around them. A second later Olivia appeared, joined by a dozen PLFs flanking her. They wore their own thermoptic devices, too, because Simone was positive that Olivia saw her. There was no other reason for the cold, heartless smile that spread over Olivia's mouth and flamed to life in her eyes.

"Simone, get on the train!" Caleb shouted, shoving her behind him as the gunfire erupted around them.

For Simone, the world slowed down, and everything became surreal. She sprinted to the train, keeping her body low. From the corner of her eye, she could see Caleb's arm jerking with the recoil of his gun every time he pulled the trigger, remaining in front of her, shielding her as they ran. Her foot passed the train door's threshold, when she saw Caleb stumble. He smacked into the side of the train and he sank to his knees, his black fatigues staining with the dark color of his blood. She couldn't even scream his name, because Olivia was advancing, shooting at her. Time sped up again for Simone as the doorway above her head sparked as a bullet crashed into it. The next shot grazed her arm, ripping open a small piece of her skin and causing a stinging pain that infuriated Simone more than it hurt her. Olivia's next shot clicked empty, and Simone reached to pull her

own gun, but Olivia crashed into her, screaming in murderous fury.

Simone stumbled back into the train and slammed into the wall, her back hitting the button to make the train doors slide closed. Olivia punched Simone in the mouth, and Simone's head jerked back, the coppery taste of blood flowing over her tongue. Hissing in fury, Simone jammed her fingers into the V at Olivia's throat. As soon as she started choking, Simone rammed her knee into Olivia's stomach, and then snatched her by the hair, yanking her cousin's head back.

"Did you shoot him!?" Simone screamed into her face, and slapped Olivia before she could answer. "Did you?!"

Olivia recoiled at the slap but set her cruel eyes on Simone and croaked out, "I was aiming for you. But he'll do for now."

The rage that tore through Simone nearly blinded her. She reared back her fist, but Olivia batted it away and grabbed Simone's face, shoving her head back into the wall. Simone's vision swam, and Olivia reached for the gun at Simone's waist. Feeling Olivia's intent, Simone snatched her cousin by the throat, the tips of her fingers digging in a claw-like grip, choking her, and Olivia brought her opposite hand up, grabbing at Simone's wrist. Just as Olivia pulled the gun free, Simone slapped

her fingers around Olivia's forearm, her muscles straining and burning as they fought for control.

*Suddenly, the train doors were shoved open and a single shot rang out. Olivia's eyes widened. Her grip slackened. Simone jerked her gaze over Olivia's shoulder and saw Caleb leaning heavily on the door with his sidearm braced in his trembling hands. A hint of a smile lifted the corner of Simone's mouth, vanishing as she glared at her cousin. "Didn't see that coming, did you?" She punched Olivia in the jaw, and watched her crumble to the ground with no small amount of satisfaction. Simone kicked the gun out of Olivia's hand and gave a small cry as Caleb's knees buckled. Rushing to his side, Simone caught him around the waist and fell with him.

It had taken a lot of sheer, stubborn, determination for Caleb to find the strength to hold the weight of his gun up as long as he did. Now that he was completely certain Simone was all right he felt his strength give. A little smile touched Caleb's lips and he pressed his head against her shoulder. "I knew you had it covered. I just wanted to shoot her back."

Simone laughed, but her voice was thick with tears. "My hero," she murmured, stroking his cheek. "My big damn hero." The front of her shirt was wet with blood; Caleb's blood. Clenching her jaw, Simone opened up the front of his fatigues. She did not recognize the severity of

his injuries, but Liliana did. Panic clawed at her chest. "Caleb. Stay with me."

"It's... it's okay babe. You knew it was going to happen like this. Dejavu, huh?" Caleb tilted his head back to look up at her. "Spend...spend our next lifetime with me."

Knowing didn't make it easier. Having lived through it once, as Liliana and Kyle, didn't make it any easier, either. With tears streaming down her cheeks, Simone pulled him into her lap and kissed him. "And the one after that, and the one after that. There's not a goddamn thing that can keep me from you."

Caleb paused, the words familiar to him in a strange way. Memory came suddenly, and Caleb's eyes lighted. Slowly he smiled. "Good answer." With some effort, Caleb lifted his hand, touching her face, his thumb catching her tears. "I love you."

A sob fell from Simone's trembling mouth. She clutched Caleb's hand and turned her face into his touch, pressing kiss after kiss against his palm. "I love you, too." She kissed his knuckles and, lastly, his lips. "Always," she whispered. "Always."

What more did a man need to hear? To feel, before he left a lifetime? Nothing, Caleb thought. Absolutely, nothing. He finally let his lids close, keeping the picture of her in his mind's eye. For Caleb, it was the perfect way to take your last breath.

Simone felt him go, but she wasn't ready for him to leave. Closing her eyes against the flood of heartache, she pressed her forehead to Caleb's, gripping him tighter to her and released a soundless sob.

"Madame President? Madame President I'm so sorry but we've got to go." A cadre touched her shoulder. There were six of them left.

Simone swallowed hard and kissed Caleb again, gently. It took her another moment to let him go. "Bring him." She told the soldier.

"Yes ma'am." The Cadre hoisted Caleb up. Simone yanked out the Cadre's sidearm and stalked back to Olivia. She used her foot to turn her cousin's body over. Olivia was still alive, though dying in slow agony because of where Caleb's bullet had struck. The pain she was in was clear on Olivia's now pale face, but just as fierce was the look of hatred that she gave Simone.

Looking down at her cousin, Simone reflected that same emotion back to her. "Checkmate, bitch," she whispered and put two in Olivia's head. Simone stood motionless for several seconds, realizing the cold sense of satisfaction she felt was overshadowed by the pain ripping up her heart because Caleb was gone too. And that just pissed her off even more. "Get her off my train," Simone said to the Cadre handing him back his gun. She pulled the headset from the front pocket of her fatigues,

THE AWAKENING

placing it in her ear. They still had one last base to hit.
“Let’s go.”

December 20, 2012 - 11:44 PM

Underground Ruins

Piedras Negras

“Oh, my God, it’s magnificent.” The new trio landed in a small room, found a hole in the stone wall they could pass through, then found themselves in a gigantic chamber. Grams cracked two cyalume light sticks, but even their light couldn’t fully illuminate the room. The stone walls were marked with Mayan glyphs and another vastly different language. Three massive stone doors provided more options than they wanted on which way to go next.

“I know those are Mayan, but what language is that?” Derek waved his flashlight over the walls.

“It’s not Sumerian.” Shirley stood next to Derek, studying the strange symbols.

“It’s Leumerian,” Grams suddenly answered.

Derek and Shirley looked over at her curiously. “How do you know that?” Shirley asked

Grams looked down at the golden rod in her hand. It was then Derek and Shirley noticed the crystal seemed to be glowing faintly. "It just told me," Grams said.

"Grams..." Shirley stepped over to her grandmother, trading glances between her and the crystal. "Are you okay?"

"Of course I am. I'm not crazy, either." Grams patted Shirley's cheek, and walked over to the doors.

"Crystals do store information," Derek reminded Shirley, watching Grams.

"This way." Grams was standing in front of the door on the left. She touched the crystal she carried to the small circular cerulean crystal embedded in the wall next to the door.

As soon as the crystals touched, the door swung loudly open. As if expecting them, the dozen torches lining the golden walls burst into flame. The same mixture of language marked the walls, but most impressive was the gigantic marble statue of the dragon standing in the center of the room. He was facing the doorway, his stern, knowing gaze fixated on the same spot the three scientists stood.

"That's amazing," Derek whispered.

"Breathtaking." Shirley took a step closer, cautiously, as if she expected at any moment the statue would suddenly come to life.

“His name is Anataboga. A long time ago, the Dragonika, as they are called, guarded the Akashic Records for us,” Grams said, staring up at the statue with a child-like smile on her face.

Neither Derek nor Shirley bothered asking her how she knew that. Apparently, the crystal had a direct download button.

“Where’s the next doorway?” Shirley asked, finally taking her eyes off the dragon to look around the room.

“Good question,” Derek said and glanced down at his watch. “We’ve got to hurry.”

“Grams?” Shirley turned to her grandmother, but the older woman was already in motion, walking right towards the statue.

“Give me a boost, Derek,” Grams said.

Curious, Derek walked over to her, and Grams pushed on his shoulders to get him to kneel. “I need to get on your shoulders.”

“What for?” Derek asked, even as he knelt. Shirley came up behind them to help.

Grams climbed onto Derek’s shoulders, and as he stood back up, she gripped his hair a little too hard to keep her balance.

“Ouch!”

Grams looked sheepish. “Sorry, lovey.” She gave his head a little pat. “And to answer your question, I’ve got to

give him this.” She waved the rod at the dragon. Derek walked closer so Grams could reach, and she slid the golden rod into the dragons slightly curled, clawed hand.

The claw snapped shut, startling Derek who stumbled back a step. Shirley pressed a hand against his back to steady him, and he bent down, letting Grams back on her feet.

Just as Derek straightened, the statue started moving. The dragon’s wings flapped once, clouds of dust jumping into the air as the statue reared back on its hind legs. A stone slab in the floor underneath it slid open, and a dim, welcoming light pulsed from within.

“Oh, my God,” Shirley whispered, amazed.

“And I really thought I’d seen everything.”

The trio whirled around to see Abe standing behind them, one arm clenched against his side, his assault rifle slung over the other shoulder.

“Abe!” Grams looked delighted. That emotion and her relief were shared by Derek and Shirley as they rushed over to their friend.

“You’re hurt.” Shirley looked down at his bleeding arm.

“Flesh wound. I’ll be okay,” Abe assured her.

“What about Robert?” Derek asked, fearing the answer.

Abe sadly shook his head. "He took a few out on his way, though."

"Are they still back there?" Shirley asked him.

"No." Abe's brows pinched together, "There were uh, well..." he finally just shook his head and started laughing nervously. "I swear to God, guys, Angels came out of the sky and helped us."

Grams just smiled. Derek and Shirley blinked in surprise. "Angels?" Derek repeated.

"Yeah. Angels. I still can't believe it, but honest to God, wings and all."

The group was silent a moment, processing that information. Finally, Shirley shrugged. "Stranger things have obviously happened."

That earned light laughter. "Ain't that the truth. C'mon, let's see what's down there." Abe led the way. Slowly, they descended a staircase. The room at bottom was easily as wide as the one above, and filled with crystals—on the floor, walls, even the ceiling. They were various shapes, and they all pulsed with the seven colors of the rainbow.

"It's so beautiful," Shirley whispered, a tear forming in her eyes.

"Yes, it is," Derek agreed, reached out and took her hand in his own. Shirley smiled at him and put her head on his shoulder.

"Now what?" Abe asked.

"Wait. They'll make everyone remember when it's time. It will free us to be reconnected with the Great mind," Grams said.

"How much time we got?" Abe looked over at them.

"Five minutes."

December 20, 2012 - 11:44 PM

Switzerland

CERN

Charred broken metal, blocks of concrete and rubble, and black wisps of smoke littered the inside of the building. Lucien came awake with a disoriented start, only to feel nearly immobilized by pain. He looked down and saw the jagged piece of metal protruding from his left side, just under his ribs.

"That's gonna fuck up my whole day," he muttered. He looked around and saw a hand sticking out from underneath a mess of debris next to him. Rolling in that direction, he grunted, and released a few growling shouts of pain, but pushed the debris aside, exposing Amadeo's open, lifeless gaze.

THE AWAKENING

Lucien's face twisted; a mixture of grim triumph and the sadness of losing family to the stupidity of their egos. "Mate, asshole," he whispered to Amadeo then fell back against the partially intact wall.

It was then Lucien realized something was making noise in his pocket: the communications device. Pulling out the headset, Lucien sucked in a breath and placed it over his ear. "Lucien here. In case you didn't realize, I blew that shit up."

"Jesus Christ, Lucien, where have you been!?" Simone's voice came through. "Are you all right?"

Lucien smiled at the sound of his sister's voice. "I won, that's all that matters. Did you take care of you?"

"We did." Simone's voice cracked, and Lucien heard her suck in a watery intake of breath. "Where are you, Lucien? I'm sending a team—"

"Don't bother, sis," Lucien interrupted, wincing. "I'm done this lifetime."

"Don't say that. Goddammit, Lucien, don't you dare. I'm sending someone—"

"Si, I'm done. It's cool, kiddo. I went out the way I wanted to. You take care of yourself. I love you. I love V, too. Tell him for me, will yah?"

There was brief silence on the other end of the line, and when Lucien heard his sister's trembling, tear-filled

voice again, it was both soothing and sad. "I love you, too, Lucien. I'm so proud of you."

Lucien smiled slowly and closed his eyes because his lids were heavy as hell. "As you should be. As... as you should be." The headset fell from his fingers.

It only took a few seconds more for the pain to stop, and Lucien Terenzio to journey home.

Chapter 23

“I will die to see my will done. And it will be done.”

-Stefano Vasco Terenzio

December 20, 2012 - 11:44 PM

Vacherie, Louisiana

Oak Alley Plantation

It came down in thick heavy sheets, bulleting from the sky, drenching the ground that could only absorb so much before it leaked up from the grass, and quickly became the swamp that was so common in the area. The glare of headlights cut through the rain, illuminating the porch of the antebellum mansion that was now empty.

Caesar climbed out of the car, whistling. He snapped open the trunk and stared with vicious glee down at Vasco, whose hands Caesar had taped behind his back. Caesar reached inside and hauled the other man out, half dragging him through the puddles of water, and shoved him in front of the stairs, facing the house. “I thought you’d want to see it one more time before you died.”

Vasco's eyes traveled slowly over the elegant, old fashioned structure. It had once been *her* home, before she —

His jaw hardened. A lifetime ago, he had made love to her against those columns, often after he'd shot a few people out among the centuries-old oaks. For a fleeting moment, his eyes softened at the phantom images.

"You know, she and I had some good times here after you got popped." Caesar grinned at his own memories.

Vasco's eyes narrowed, jealousy and fury coiling hotly in his gut. His fingers fisted around the piece of glass hidden in his palm, that he'd luckily found in the trunk of the car. The sharp edges cut into the tape and his skin, the blood washing away with the force of the rain.

Caesar turned him around so they were facing each other. "I don't get you, Vasco." He took a step back, pulling the gun out from the waistband of his pants. "Why? Out of all of them, I never thought you would choose this."

The hatred in the depths of Vasco's eyes was unhidden as he regarded Caesar. It was their destiny to be enemies, their agreement for this lifetime. He was fully committed to honoring that agreement. "Choice, Caesar," Vasco said over the noise of the storm. "I never made anyone do anything. They always had a choice. You—*Them*—you take the fun out of the game when you take that choice away.

But the better, less noble reason is I just don't like you. Or your masters. I never have."

Caesar shook his head. "I'll never understand you Terenzios. I won't miss you, either." The thunder growled, a flash of lighting exposing the malevolent gleam in Caesar's eyes as he pressed the muzzle of the gun against Vasco's temple. He should have squeezed the trigger, but Caesar's motions paused. Over Vasco's head, standing just to the right of one of the tall columns surrounding the house, he swore he saw— "Cleona?"

The tape cut loose. Vasco didn't look over his shoulder. He smacked the gun away from his temple and launched himself forward, crashing into Caesar.

Caesar grunted, and the gun fell from his fingers as he landed hard on the gravel. Vasco reared back his fist, slamming it repeatedly into Caesar's face in blind fury. Blood forming, Caesar released a frustrated sound of pain, grabbed a handful of the muddy earth, and flung it right into Vasco's face. Vasco shouted in fury as the dirt landed in his eyes, blinding him. Caesar took advantage and shoved Vasco off. Scrambling onto his hands and knees, Caesar peered through the darkness, around the blinding glare of the headlights, for his gun. He abandoned his search just in time to see Vasco's leg come flying. He rose up to his knees, lifting his arms to deflect the kick, and threw Vasco off balance. Vasco stumbled

back into the car and Caesar was on him, throwing short, hard punches into Vasco's ribs, every strike sending a sharp pain rocking through Vasco that took his breath away. Vasco batted away the next jab and punched Caesar in the throat. When Caesar choked, Vasco stepped into him, grabbing him by the front of his shirt and shoving his knee into his gut, cutting off air again. Relentless, Vasco slammed Caesar's head into the hood of the car, releasing Caesar to watch him collapse onto the ground, groaning.

Breathing heavily, Vasco jerked his eyes to the ground and saw the handle of the gun sticking out from underneath the right front tire. He moved in that direction, just as a gunshot rang out. Its echoing boom challenged the low rumble of thunder that preceded it, halting Vasco's motions completely. He looked down, but this time at himself and the stain of red soaking up his fatigues. When he looked up he saw Kayla emerge from the shadows, stalking towards him with her gun pointed.

"Fuck! Kayla, stand down!" Caesar growled as he clambered to his feet, holding his head with one hand and glaring at her. "You stay the hell out of this, understand?"

Kayla pulled her blank gaze from Vasco and looked over at Caesar. Nodding once, she lowered her weapon.

Vasco had collapsed onto his knees, the strength flowing out of him as steadily as his own blood. Gritting his

teeth, fighting against the pull of death, he stared at Caesar just as the man came at him and kicked him right in the face. Blood exploded from his mouth, tangling in the rain as he fell onto his back against the bottom porch step.

Smiling viciously, Caesar grabbed the front of Vasco's vest, hauling him closer. "I fucked Cleona after you died. Constantly."

Calm fury stained the lines of Vasco's face. "And I bet... it really burns that... the entire time she was thinking of me."

Caesar slammed his fist with brutal force into Vasco's face, until his knuckles were an angry red. When he'd had enough, Caesar closed his hands around Vasco's throat and squeezed. "You didn't beat me last lifetime, and you won't beat me this one. How does it feel Terenzio? Huh?" He squeezed tighter. "How does it fucking feel?"

The air was almost cut off immediately when Caesar started choking him. One hand jerked up to grab at Caesar's wrists, but just to make that movement, Vasco felt like he was lifting an anvil instead of his own arm. *No*, he thought. *No*. He would not lose, not like this. *Not to him*. Vasco's opposite hand dug into the dirt beside him, searching for something, anything. He almost didn't believe it when he felt the handle of a knife. The familiarity of its shape he would have known anywhere. The dagger

belonged to Cleona. Spots swam before his eyes, darkness threatening to consume Vasco as he thrust his arm up and slammed the razor sharp point into Caesar's throat.

Immediately, the grip loosened. Air rushed in, leading to his violent cough that sent more pain ripping through his system. But Vasco kept sucking it in, his grimly triumphant eyes locking with the shocked fury of Caesar's. Caesar jerked a hand up to touch his neck, and Vasco forced himself into action again, batting Caesar's hand away. "Checkmate," Vasco whispered into Caesar's face as he ripped the knife out and shoved it into Caesar's jugular.

Lightening split open the sky and Vasco held onto Caesar until he saw the life drain from Caesar's eyes. He yanks out the knife a final time and let Caesar's empty vessel hit the ground. Vasco collapsed back onto the stairs, and clutched the dagger to his chest. His mouth curved subtly as the rain began to slow, and became nothing more than a drizzle. Vasco tipped his bruised face up to it.

Kayla walked slowly towards him with her gun raised again. First, she stared at Caesar. She felt almost relieved he was dead. That did not change her orders, though. She looked back at Vasco, squeezing the trigger—

THE AWAKENING

“He was your father, Kayla. Marcello. Your biological one,” Vasco said in a quiet, firm voice.

Kayla’s motions halted with her finger curled around the trigger. “No, he wasn’t. My mother was raped she—”

“She was raped. But he didn’t impregnate her. Marcello did. You were theirs, and your father knew it.”

Kayla’s entire world shattered. Came together. Shattered. Tears sprang into her eyes. She swallowed them back and advanced on Vasco, her gun hand steady despite the emotions ripping through her. “You’re lying.”

“No. No.” Vasco slowly shook his head. “Front pocket. Look.”

Kayla hesitated, only for a moment. She bent down and did as he asked, removing a piece of paper that bore the Masonic crest. It was the letter from Deucalion, the man she had always believed to be her real father, to Doctor Mengele, the man with the funny smell that programmed her into becoming a weapon. Her mouth trembled as she read the words. When she finished the letter Marcello wrote her came floating back into her mind. Suddenly, words she thought cryptic now made perfect sense.

Kayla,

*Perhaps for a while, I did it for the wrong reasons.
Aside from Demetrius, you were the only thing left of*

my Mari. The words that left your mouth, your mannerisms, were all painfully beautiful reminders of her. I wanted those, I felt like I needed those because I had lost my anchor and there was no one there to pull me back from the edge I had to continually step on to make sure this family was prepared for the next stages of the game.

My want for that connection though, allowed me to get to know you, Kayla, in a way I doubt would have been possible before. I know how you were made. I know the woman you came from, and I see her inside of you. I see you, when your guard is down and you are not playing your game. I am here to tell you, you are my daughter. I love you, not for the woman you remind me of, but for the woman you are. I love you, for unintentionally keeping your father human. I love you for forcing me to hang onto emotions, no matter how painful, in the hope that I could express to you, what a father truly felt. This family is yours, Kayla. You are a pivotal, deciding factor in this equation. When the moment comes, please, be the Terenzio you are.

You father,

Marcello

“How did he...” Kayla looked over at Vasco. “...how did he find out I was his?”

THE AWAKENING

“A hypnosis session, one night while you were sleeping, gave him some clues as to who your first trainer was. Joey and Marcello tracked Mengele down right after your mother died, and it was in Mengele’s house that he found that letter. Mengele confirmed it was true,” Vasco said watching her face. “Your father killed him for what he did to you.”

Kayla sank to her knees, overwhelmed. Her own family. They turned her against her own family; the parents she’d loved, the father she’d wished was hers actually was. She plotted to destroy everything Marcello built, and he’d killed the man who had hurt her. Kayla covered her face with her hand, still clutching the letter, and released an agonized sob.

Vasco pressed one hand against his side, canting his head at her, his breath coming in short, wheezing hitches. “You can... you can make it right.”

“No.” Kayla dropped her hand and looked up at him. “No, Vasco, I can’t. It doesn’t matter. None of it does. Not that Caesar’s dead, or that you’ve won. The programming runs too deep, I’d never trust myself.” She pressed her lips together, a decision made. She slid her eyes to her nephew’s and gave him a tremulous smile. “Thank you. Thank you for showing me the truth. For giving me that peace.” She pressed the gun to her temple, and without hesitating, she pulled the trigger.

“Kayla don—” Vasco’s words were too late. Kayla’s body fell on top of Caesar’s, lifeless. Vasco shook his head sadly. “I tried son, I tried,” he whispered into the rain. Setting Cleona’s knife down next to him, he forced his limbs to move again, and reached into his pocket to remove the headset. Once he pulled it out, it took another minute before he could work up the energy to simply place it over his ear. “Base, come in, this is SVT, come in.”

It took mere seconds before he received a response. “Vasco? Oh, thank God.” Simone’s angrily relieved voice came through. “What the fuck is wrong with you, going off radio contact like that?”

Vasco dropped his head back against the step, a faint smile curving over his mouth. “Sorry, I had... a run in with Caesar.”

“How did that go?”

“He’s dead.” Vasco paused, then added, “So is Kayla. She... she killed herself after I told her about... about Marcello.”

There was silence on the other end. “Jesus.” Another pause, and when Simone’s voice came through again, it cracked. “Caleb’s dead. So is Lucien, V. He told me to tell you that he loved you.”

Sadness twisted across Vasco’s face. “Til next lifetime, brother,” he whispered. “Did our SVT Security teams free everyone from the camps?”

“They did it, V. Kicked ass, from what was reported.”

“Good.” Vasco covered the mouthpiece with his hand, sucked in a wheezing breath, then dropped it. “Listen, Simone, I know this is a different lifetime, but history is going to repeat itself.” He could hear his sister crying.

“Goddammit it, Vasco, you can’t do this to me again. I’m not Lil. I can’t do this alone. Not without you, not without Lucien, not without Caleb.”

“You’re not alone, Si. You... you never are. Xavier will be there with you. Alex will always be a friend. You’ve got people... people to lean on when you need it.” Vasco was forced to pause, to take another a breath. “I’m tired, Simone. My soul is tried.”

Because of the length of the silence on the other end, Vasco worried that Simone might have shot the radio communication in a moment of fury. Finally, her voice came through again. “I love you, Vasco.”

“I love you, too. You were meant to lead this family. Do us proud.” He held the device against his chest, and then brought it back up quickly. “And Si?”

“Yeah, V?”

“Mate to us.” A classic, arrogant smirk curled over Vasco’s mouth. He pulled the headset off, dropping it to the ground. That’s when he saw it; movement on that old porch. Her. Come to take him home.

CRYSTAL STORM

At the stroke of midnight, when the Sun and planet Earth aligned with the center of the galaxy, the last emotion that consumed Vasco Terenzio was love.

THE AWAKENING

December 21st, 2012

12:12 AM

CRYSTAL STORM

What goes here, is up to you.

THE AWAKENING

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Crystal Storm is a woman of many hats (pun intended). She has a wall full of fedoras). She's 5 feet tall, hates mornings, and is a night owl. Her aliases are Woo-Woo and C-Money. Readers find her dedicated to giving them stories that encourage them to find ways to make the mundane magical.

Crystal is a busy creativepreneur. She video reviews books, movies, has a vlog series, and owns a fiction podcast where she reads her books and fan fiction stories. If you're geeky gamer, you can catch Crystal live on her

Twitch channel where she plays all video games on the easiest setting.

Crystal is currently writing the next book in the Synarchy Series while sharing her creative process to give readers an immersive experience into the Universe of Synarchy. You can find details of that, join her mailing list, and keep up with her creative content on her website: crystalsimagination.com

Crystal also hates writing bios, so she asked her Twitter friends to do it for her. She thinks these are better, so she's sharing their prose.

*There once was a writer named Crystal
Whose prose did seem all right
She may be smol but she's sweet
But what's really neat
SHE IS THE NIGHT.*— Calvin

Truth Slinger, Full of Sass, Pizzazz and all that Jazz. – Mike