

# 1

---

When I woke up in the examination room, I was handcuffed to the bed.

A loop of steel circled my right wrist, holding it fast to a guardrail. My left arm lay throbbing by my side, the skin swollen taut from where Sergeant Rhames had broken my wrist with a baseball bat.

My head swam as I lifted it off a thin pillow. The room was nearly empty, nothing but the cot I was on, a discolored sink, and a few cabinets. A rush of air kicked on from somewhere above me. I searched the ceiling and found a single dusty vent. Air-conditioning.

*I've done it, I thought. I'm here.*

I closed my eyes and thought about James, hoping my little brother's face would ease the pounding in my chest. I pictured him moving through our barracks, turning the chaos around us into folded clothes and tidy stacks. He said that cleaning calmed him and, even though I made fun of him for it, the truth was that seeing him do it calmed me too. The day before I left, I didn't make my bunk, just so I could watch as he tucked the sheets beneath the mattress and then smoothed the wrinkles flat with the palm of his hand.

My pulse stilled. I breathed. A door opened and someone shuffled into the room.

“Well, you must have *really* pissed somebody off.”

I didn’t move. Didn’t speak.

“Multiple shallow cuts as well as bruises over your chest and arms and face. Your wrist is fractured. I think I can put a cast on it, but I can’t spare any pain meds. Your friends in the Glorious Path are to thank for that.”

I opened my eyes. The doctor was short, with thinning brownish-gray hair. An awkward belly poked out of his white lab coat and hung over his camo fatigues.

“They’re not my friends,” I said.

“Ah, the dead arise. It’s a miracle. What’s your name?”

“Where am I?”

“Okay,” he said, making a note on his clipboard. “Path John Doe it is, then.”

“I’m not Path,” I said. “Not anymore.”

“Funny,” he said. “The Army of the Glorious Path isn’t exactly known for its revolving-door policy.”

My tongue darted out over my cracked lips. “Can I have some water?”

“If I can have a name.”

“Callum Roe. Cal.”

He lowered a canteen to my lips. I drank until he pulled it away from me.

“You’re in the infirmary at Camp Victory,” he said. “I’m Dr. Franks. One of our patrols found you out in the desert and brought you here.”

“I need to see your base commander.”

“Oh, sure,” Franks said with a chuckle. “I keep my sidearm in my desk — maybe you’d like to take it with you.”

I glared at him until he chucked his clipboard onto a nearby table with a sigh.

“All right,” he said. “Why do you think you need to see the commander?”

I swallowed hard. Could I really do this? Would he even listen? My pulse raced, but I made myself think of James moving through our barracks, slow and deliberate, setting everything in its place.

“Because if you don’t let me see him,” I said, “everyone in his camp is going to die.”