

## Chapter 1 – A Truth Be Told by Alyssa Milani

The door hissed open and the three large creatures entered, dropping her on the ground. Their grotesque and decaying bodies, too frail to hold themselves, floated above the ground, unnaturally hunched and aged. A man jumped to his feet and began making his way over to the woman when one of the large creatures lifted its long unusually shaped arm; its decaying fingers pointed at the man, causing him to stop. Pieces of dirt and grime hovered just above its grey-green putrid-sickly skin. Its large and empty eyes bored into her. The world around her seemed to blur in and out of focus as her wheezing echoed the silent room. She remained on all fours holding her ribcage. The creatures enormous bodies with too many angles slowly floated backward and the door hissed shut. The man stood frozen as she sat with her back to the grey wall, attempting to catch her breath. Her eyes watered and shifted around the area, trying to adjust to the brightness. An odd smell, sour and metallic, filled her nostrils. Dried blood smeared along her face and neck, cracking at her collarbone. She inhaled deeply and forced herself to stand. Her torn sweater, covered in muck, revealed bruises on her stomach, her black pants stained with mud, and her beautiful face hidden under scratches and tears. She continued to study the sterilized room and her eyes stopped on the man, giving him a once over; his broad shoulders and tall build loomed in front of her, and concern colored his pale face.

“Who are you?” she asked, her voice hoarse. She pressed her body against the wall trying to disappear within it.

“It’s Charlie,” his eyebrows rose. His British accent ran through the quiet room.

She looked around in hopes of finding an escape. The glass door to her right seemed like the only sure exit. The grey paneled ceilings were welded shut and there were no windows in sight. A built-in dresser resided to her left, and a small table in front of her had piles of books on it. A large bed to the back of the room was neatly made, and an opening beside it which led to, what she assumed, was the washroom. She looked to the ceiling, searching for an air vent to crawl through, but there was nothing. Nothing but the walls around her and the man in front of her.

She felt her heart race as everything started closing in on her and a lump formed in her throat. She took a few deep breaths, and squeezed her eyes shut, imagining herself to be in a terrible dream and aching to wake up. Charlie cleared his throat and sat at the edge of the bed, waiting for her to make the first move. She felt frightened of the man as he scratched the back of his neck, but there was something about his stare that tamed her worries; a feeling of comfortability swept through her.

She looked to the ceiling again, and to the opening at the back of the room then started pacing anxiously from the glass door to the opening, biting her thumb; a painful limp in her walk as she tried to think of a way to escape the cube they were in. She focused on how she got there in the first place, flashes of light shot through her mind: rips, and tears of colors, with unearthly screams, but nothing concrete. Charlie tapped his fingers on his knee and watched her as she was

silently thinking. She reached the glass door again and stopped; her teary eyes looking back at her, and she turned away. Charlie kept his gaze on her and she pushed her lips together, leaning on the glass door, analyzing him. She nodded slightly as her eyes moved around the area once more.

“Why can’t I remember anything?” she broke the silence, trying not to cry.

“Your memory will come back in a day or two,” Charlie said, his husky voice, tattoos, and strong build intrigued her; an aura about him brought a sense of relaxation the more she soaked him in.

“How long you been here?” she sniffed.

“Two weeks give or take,” he shrugged a shoulder and stood slowly, making his way over to the table.

“Jesus,” she said quietly. She pinched the bridge of her nose as a ringing vibrated her head. Dizziness came over her and she reached out for a chair to grab onto. Charlie moved toward her, putting his hand out to help her. She stepped back, her back pressed to the glass wall, and hand on the chair. “No, I’m fine.”

“Just trying to help,” he put his hands up.

She exhaled sharply and looked up at him, her vision blurred and vibrated. Blinking a few times, she turned to the glass wall at her back, forcing her eyes to see beyond the eternal darkness. Her head pounded, breaking her attempted concentration and she turned to Charlie again.

“Why does it have to be so bright in here?” she sighed and sniffed as the ringing subsided; her eyes still trying to set themselves in the brightness. Charlie cleared his throat, the corner of his mouth quirked up.

“There are clothes in the dresser if you want to change,” he nodded in the direction of the dresser.

“Do you know where we are?” she said, looking at the darkness beyond the glass door.

“Been trying to figure that out.”

“How did you get here?” she asked curiously.

“I was just walking and next thing I knew I was thrown in here,” he shifted his eyes a lot before he folded his arms, veins protruding from them.

“That’s all you remember?” her dirty white knuckles gripped the back of the chair.

“Yeah, I guess,” he nodded and shrugged.

“Are you alone in here?”

“Since day one,” he looked her up and down before looking at the table. “They come in three times a day with food. Sometimes they’ll bring books and things. They put it on the table and leave.”

“Have you tried speaking to them?” she turned to the glass door again.

“I don’t think they can speak,” he said. She felt frightened as she continued to strain her eyes to see beyond the glass door. There was nothing but darkness on the other side of it; even the brightness of the room couldn’t cast enough light for her to see what was beyond. She nibbled on her thumbnail observing the glass door in front of her. “Don’t even think about it, I’ve tried breaking it before.”

“Have they hurt you?” she asked, unaware of how blunt she was being as if interrogating him.

“Not anymore,” he shrugged.

“What did they do?” she turned her head to him, concerned.

“That’s a story for another day,” fear spread across his face and he swallowed.

“I can hear them in my head,” she sniffed.

“Talking to you?” he seemed interested.

“I don’t know, maybe,” her eyes welled and she blinked her tears away. “Has that happened to you?”

“No,” he shook his head.

“Maybe I’m just imagining things,” she said softly. He gave her a side smile and looked away. She sniffed and took in her surroundings once more. Everything felt like it was taken right out of a magazine, so perfectly placed, and so intricately detailed. Her eyes searched frantically for a flaw; on the floor, on the ceiling. Not a single scratch or awkward angle to set off the perfection. She licked her lips and stood upright, steadying herself.

“Is there a washroom here?”

“Just through there,” he pointed.

“Is it okay if I clean myself up a little?” she rubbed her leg and grinned slightly.

“Of course,” he nodded and led the way to the washroom. She followed him, limping as quickly as she could. A shooting pain spreading through her, but she ignored it and pressed on. He

stepped into the shower and lifted his head to her. “This way is hot, and this way is cold. Try not to stay too long, the water will start to hurt your skin.”

“What do you mean?” she started taking off her shirt before he had time to exit the washroom. Her bare ivory skin, encrusted with dried blood and dirt. She watched as he paused for a moment, fixated on her, and then shut his eyes, turning toward the exit.

“I don’t know, I don’t think its actual water,” he stuttered. His back was to her as she continued to undress. “Just keep it under five minutes, there’s a timer next to the sink.”

“Thanks,” she said and turned the shower on.

The water hit her skin and a warm sensation spread along her body. She reached for the timer and turned it to five minutes before submerging her face under the water again. She scrubbed as thoroughly and as quickly as possible; a tiny maelstrom of dirty water spun around the drain as she tried to clean off her legs. The timer ticked away and she lathered her hair with the shampoo that was in the shower already; it smelt like stagnant water but she looked, and felt, as though she hadn’t showered in months and she would take anything to wash away that feeling.

The soap ran down her body, cuts and bruises began to appear as the dirt and blood washed away. She rinsed thoroughly and the timer went off, nearly startling her. She wiped the water from her eyes and stopped it, then stood under the water a few moments longer, her eyes closed as she tried to remember something, *anything*, but no memories flooded in.

A muted ringing began in her head, overtaken by a powerful voice that echoed through the ringing. *See me*, it hissed. She opened her eyes and looked around, the water hitting the side of her face. She exhaled shakily as the ringing buzzed around like a swarm of bees had encircled her mind. She clutched her ears and took a few deep breaths before her face began to sting, and her whole body felt as though fire was grazing it.

Quickly, she turned off the water and looked down at her hands. Her palms were redder than usual, and a stinging sensation spread along her skin. She looked around her as the ringing became less and less of a nuisance; *see me*, a hiss vibrated then vanished in her mind. She listened intently as her eyes filled with tears and her stomach churned. She took one last deep exhale and stepped out of the shower.

She strained her hair in the sink and looked at herself in the mirror. Her pale ivory skin, now bright pink, did not look as she remembered it. Her collar bone had a bruise that was beginning to appear, there were cuts and scrapes on her neck, elbows, knees, and hands as though she were dragged through a pit of nails. Her ribs were bruised, but she couldn’t tell if they were broken. Her ankle was swollen, the cause of her limp. Grabbing the towel that hung on the wall behind her; she dried her hair and secured the towel around her. She used the brush on the counter to take out any knots in her hair. Scabs formed on her elbows and arms as she watched her

reflection fight with her hair, but she took her time until the brush moved smoothly through her long chocolate waves.

She strained her hair once more, the remaining water irritating her scalp as she moved the towel through it. She bit her bottom lip and looked at her reflection before she stepped out of the washroom.

Charlie was sitting at the table with a book in hand; he paused and looked up at her. Her damp hair lay on her shoulder. Charlie stood, walked over to the dresser, and opened a drawer taking out two articles of clothing. The same articles of clothing he was wearing.

“Is that all there is?” she asked.

“Fraid so,” he said and handed her the garments.

She took them and retreated to the washroom where she dropped the towel and slipped into the grey pants and grey shirt; she looked like she were in nurse scrubs. She placed the towel back on the hook and picked up her dirty clothes, looking around the washroom for someplace to put them, but there was not even a garbage bin in sight. Folding the crusted clothes, she left them on the floor under the sink, and rinsed her hands before leaving the washroom again. She stopped next to the bed, her stomach in knots and looked up at Charlie. He was scratching the back of his neck, as though waiting for her to come out. She grinned and folded her arms, looking around the room.

“What d’you do all day?” she asked, looking at the open book on the table.

“Read,” he shrugged. “They give me these books and once I’m done, more come.”

“Specific books?”

“Classics mainly,” he shrugged a shoulder.

“Do you ever leave the room?”

“No, been stuck in here for a while,” his hazel eyes bored into her. “You never told me your name.”

“It’s, uh,” she paused, trying to focus. She pinched the bridge of her nose again. Her mind raced and she felt lost in her own thoughts. “I will once I remember it.”

The corner of his mouth quirked up in a grin and he looked up at the clock on the wall.

“It’s almost supper,” he said, closing his book. He stood and picked up the rest of the books from the table, moving them to the dresser.

“That means they’re coming back?” her voice shook.

“You don’t have to be scared,” he placed the books on the dresser and turned to her. “They just drop the food on the table and leave. I promise.”

“Yeah,” she whispered and nodded. Inhaling sharply, with a dissatisfying hiss, the door slid open.

A silent ringing began in her ears and she put her finger in it, trying to clear it up. Three creatures floated in, their grey-green skin, dried and covered in dirt. Their long frail bodies, indented with boils as the outline of their muscles were visibly clear; their rib cages protruding into their sides. They stood in a triangular formation at the entrance of the room, hovering above the ground beneath their unusual feet. The ringing grew louder in her mind and she winced from the sharp pain. Their large hollow black eyes bored into her and Charlie as their many nostrils flared. One carried two trays and placed them on the table. It floated backward, pieces of its skin lifting off of its arm and floating just above it. Her eyebrows rose as the piercing ring increased, becoming somewhat unbearable. Her eyes welled with tears and she fell to her knees, holding her ears, as the creatures floated off. The door hissed shut, but the ringing continued to grow louder. Charlie came over to her and put his hand to her back.

“Are you alright?” he asked nervously.

“They’re in my head,” she sobbed. “They’re *always* in my head.”

Charlie didn’t say anything. He crouched beside her and his hand moved up and down her back. She had no idea how he was able to handle being in that foreign place without anyone to explain to him what was happening. The fear of the unknown frightened her, and she was certainly in the unknown. Her heart thudded in her chest and she tried to calm herself down, focusing on the movement of his fingers along her spine. She sniffed and wiped her green eyes, the more she teared up, the brighter they got.

“Sorry,” she said quietly.

“It’s okay,” the corner of his mouth quirked up, then disappeared. “Whenever they’re close, I feel this stinging at the back of my neck.”

“Really?”

“Unfortunately,” he shrugged.

“I hope this is just some sick and twisted dream,” she sniffed.

“Wouldn’t we be so lucky,” he grinned. Her heart slowed to a rhythmic beat and she felt less anxious.

“You were right about the water,” she cleared her throat.

“You’ll get used to it after a while,” he grinned and she looked up at him, her eyes moving to the steaming food on the table.

“Is the food any good?” she asked.

“It’s food,” he stood and put his hand out to help her up. She rose to her feet and hopped on one leg while her ankle adjusted to her weight.

He walked over to the table and pushed out a chair for her before he sat down. She grabbed the chair and softly sat in it looking at the tray. Something that looked like chicken breast with carrots, green beans, and potatoes sat in front of her, steam rising from it. She swallowed her saliva as she observed the food. Charlie had helped himself and munched away on a carrot he picked up with his fingers. She looked around the tray in search of utensils.

“Where’s the—”

“They don’t give any,” he said with his mouth full.

Her hands shook as she reached for the carrot on the plate; she made a fist, relaxing her shaking hands, and picked it up quickly. She observed the orange vegetable and slowly took a bite out of it, unsure whether or not she should. Although it was a carrot, it did not taste like a usual carrot. It tasted fresh as though it were still growing the more she chewed. The sweet juices flowed through her mouth, its delightful soft crunch moved between her teeth. Her taste buds were off the charts as she continued to feast. The chicken was juicy, its moisture danced on her tongue. The green beans were piled neatly on the plate, steam rising from their deep green skin. The potatoes were cut into wedges and the sweet smell of butter swam through and engulfed her as she picked up a piece and took a lavish bite from it. The soft starchiness coating the roof of her mouth, and she took another bite of the potato, the butter flavor exploding her taste buds. The steam continued to rise off the food like it was grown to keep its temperature.

“I don’t think I’ve had anything like this before,” she said flabbergasted.

“What? Chicken and potatoes?”

“Their tastes,” she took a bite from the green bean in her hand. “It’s completely mind-blowing.”

Charlie grinned and continued eating. The lump in her throat subsided slightly, but her nerves continued to swim through her damaged body. As frightened as she was, with absolutely no memory of anything in her life, she began to feel somewhat relaxed.

She took the last bit of chicken and popped it into her mouth as Charlie rose, taking both trays off the table. He placed them on the dresser and cleared his throat. She leaned back in her chair and finished chewing her food.

“Come here,” Charlie spoke. She stood and followed him to the glass door. Their reflections glared back at them; she patiently waited for something to happen, when the lights in the room turned off. She looked behind her; darkness surrounded them like fog, thick enough to touch. Solely the dim light from the washroom poured in. “Look.”

She turned to look out the glass door; on the other side, amber orbs glowed in the darkness surrounded by shimmering colors of purples, pinks, whites, and silvers. She had never seen anything so beautiful in all her life. The glowing orbs spread out as far as her eyes could see; they varied in sizes as her eyes moved from one to the next. She wondered what they were and stepped closer, her breathing casting a fog on the glass.

“What is it?” she frowned.

“I’m not sure,” Charlie said quietly.

“It’s absolutely beautiful,” she was astounded, she felt like she was in some trance as the amber orbs brightened and darkened before her eyes.

“They shut the lights after dinner and turn them back on when they bring breakfast,” he said, not amused at their surroundings.

“Is there any way we can turn them back on?” she said.

“I’ve tried, but I couldn’t find access to the lights.”

She wanted to move away from the door, but she couldn’t. Her body felt transfixed and drawn to the beauty before it. She inhaled slowly and stepped back as Charlie made his way to the bed and sat down.

“You should get some sleep,” he continued.

“Yeah,” she started. “But I’m not really tired.”

“Your memory will come pouring in soon enough,” he fixed his pillow and laid back into the bed. “You’ll need all the strength you can get.”

She didn’t know what to say or what to think. Her eyes were still adjusting to the darkness; Charlie was but a mere shadow in the distance melting away into the dark of the night. She stepped toward the bed, limping her way around it, and made herself comfortable on the other side. Charlie turned and his breathing slowed. She tucked her feet under the covers and gazed up at the ceiling as her eyes mustered up copies of the speckled colors and projected them. Within moments, her eyes felt heavy and the darkness around her turned even darker.