

ECHOES

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CHAPTER ONE

"Patrick Kendall was killed last night."

"I know," I said. "I heard."

"So, you're aware that another inmate beat him to death?"

"Yes."

"How did that make you feel?"

"Apathetic," I said, picking at one of the loose threads hanging from the hem of my jeans.

"That's it? Apathetic? You feel nothing at all knowing the person who tried to kill you is dead?" Doctor Caldwell asked, tapping the end of her pen against the legal pad in her lap. She looked every bit the part of the concerned psychologist, right down to the black pantsuit, the glasses, and bottle blonde hair still going silver in a neat little bun at the top of her head.

"He did kill me," I said.

"And you don't feel anything?" she asked. "Relief? Comfort?"

"No."

"That's not healthy, Kara."

“Well, forgive me if I’m not exactly concerned with Patrick fucking Kendall’s not timely enough demise,” I snapped. “Like I said, he did kill me.”

“Did he?” she asked. “You’re still here.”

“Yeah. Lucky me. Still here.”

“What you went through, that was a traumatic event, Kara.”

“You don’t say?”

“It’s something you should talk about.”

“What do you want me to say, exactly?”

“Well, you went through a significant trauma.”

“A significant trauma?” I asked. “A serial killer stabbed me in the chest. He carved me up. I was dead for two and a half minutes. I don’t think significant trauma are the exact words I’d use.”

“What words would you use?” she asked.

I narrowed my eyes, hoping that I could transmit my irritation through the few feet of space that separated us. It took her a minute, but she got the hint.

“As I was saying. The man who perpetrated that trauma is dead now. I find it hard to believe you feel nothing. Whatever those feelings are you need to voice them.”

“Do I?”

“If you want to get better, yes. Yes, you do.”

I didn’t answer. Instead, I was content to let the silence hang between us, to see who broke first.

“How is the new prescription working?”

I shrugged and looked around at the office, doing anything I could at this point to avoid eye contact. I hated the idea of baring my soul, of laying my vulnerabilities out in the open. Even with the office set up in some piss poor attempt to encourage sharing, what with all the subdued lighting and the wood tones, the big comfy couch and the little box of Kleenexes on the table between us, it didn’t comfort me. It didn’t make me want to share. It made me

claustrophobic.

“Are you having any side effects?” she asked.

“Not really,” I said.

Doctor Caldwell nodded once, making another note. “How are you sleeping?”

“I’m not.” I admitted. “Well, not really.”

“More nightmares?”

“Always,” I said.

Every time I closed my eyes I saw Patrick Kendall’s face, smelled his cologne mixed with sweat and blood. I could see the knife, all but feel the wound he carved into my chest. I saw him stab me. I saw the police burst in, followed by the paramedics, their uniforms too clean, too perfect for a room drenched in blood and fear. I saw them save me after almost two and a half minutes. I saw all of it. I felt all of it. Every single time my eyes closed, it was there in high definition clarity.

Doctor Caldwell nodded and jotted something else down.

“We’re almost out of time, Kara, and I feel like I need to say it again. I don’t feel like we’re making much progress, here.”

I shrugged, again. It was easier than talking. Talking let people in. I didn’t want to let people in.

“Kara, you’re never going to get past this if you don’t talk about it. We’ve been meeting like this for over sixteen months, and each time it’s the same story. I ask questions and you either don’t answer, or you deflect. One of the two,” she said, twirling her pen between her fingers. “Now, I’m perfectly content to keep taking your money, but don’t you think it’s time you started getting something for what you’re paying me?”

“I am. Sedatives.”

“There are much cheaper ways to get drugs,” Doctor Caldwell said, removing her glasses and putting them on a small table beside her chair.

“Maybe so,” I said. “This way involves less jail time.”

Doctor Caldwell sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose.

“I’ll see you next week,” she said, exasperated.

“Yeah,” I muttered, standing up and throwing my backpack over my shoulder. “Next week.”

Outside, the weather was typical Seattle. Rainy, and with night settling in, a little on the cool side. It was comforting. I started walking, pushing the therapy session out of my head. Life was easier that way. You put your head down, you put one foot in front of the other, and you soldier on and try to ignore the pain, the stares, the little whispered comments behind your back.

I was three or four blocks into my walk when I heard the faint scrape of a shoe against the pavement behind me, followed by the sound of rustling fabric. I hadn’t seen anyone else and, in the silence, the sounds were louder than they should have been given the steady whisper of the rain.

For the past fourteen months, every sound had become powerful enough to trigger some primal, flight or fight part of my brain and set my nerves on edge.

I stopped on the sidewalk, perfectly still, in the rain, and let my eyes wander over the street. There were no cars, no other people that I could see. Just me and my paranoia.

I took a deep breath, trying to slow my thudding heart.

I heard it again. Closer this time, maybe ten feet away, hidden in the shadows of an alleyway between a Chinese takeout place and a laundromat.

I wanted to run. I wanted to run all the way home, lock all six of the deadbolts on my door, and hide under my bed for the next few weeks. I wanted to be safe, to not feel the adrenaline and fear and anxiety.

Every time I got scared, it happened.

I wanted it to stop.

It didn’t.

Within seconds, I was nearly hyperventilating, each breath forming into little white clouds. The temperature around me started to drop, low enough that I could see thin sheets of ice form over the windows of nearby cars and storefronts.

I turned to run, to leave whatever this was behind me.

A girl stood in front of me.

No, not a girl.

A dead girl.

A ghost.

She seemed lost or confused, her eyes empty and vacant. Her clothes looked like they were popular around the time Siouxsie and the Banshees were at their height, and she had the makeup and hair to match. She looked to be around my age, maybe a year or two older. Her mouth moved, little silent twitches without sound.

Her death had been horrifically violent. Every inch of her exposed skin was marked with cuts and slashes, most of which were still bleeding. They covered her arms, her shoulders, everywhere but her face. She had a much larger wound over her heart, partially hidden by her tank top.

We stood like that, on the sidewalk, for what could've been seconds, or hours, maybe days. I stared at her. She stared at whatever it was she saw. I couldn't tell how long we were like that.

My eyes went back to the wound on her chest, the one that I knew had killed her. I knew that wound intimately. It matched the scar on my chest.

Somewhere, in the distance, a car alarm started to wail.

The rain started falling harder.

And I started running.