

Framed Flashback

I remember that day like it was yesterday despite it being almost two years since it happened, but that's what happens when you have a photographic memory. It was probably one of the worst days of my life- and that's not an easy title to get- but it was definitely one of the worst for Ceyla. The day really had no chance of being good, though, and only ended up getting worse.

It started with a text from Ceyla early that morning letting me know that she wasn't going to be at the hotel that day. Since her grandmother's disappearance and our meeting six months ago we had been working together to fix the hotel that Sam, Ceyla's grandma, had purchased under our names. It was close to being finished now- pretty quickly for how run down it was, but apparently superpowers sped up renovation- and now it was mostly just finishing touches so that we could open it to the public soon. It wasn't surprising that she wasn't going to show today, it was Sam's birthday, the first one that she wouldn't be there for.

At first I didn't think much of it, we were both 16 at the time, perfectly capable of taking care of ourselves by our societies standards. I had no real connection to Ceyla, I've known her for barely six months and we only met because of Sam. It wasn't my place to tell her to stop mourning her grandma and it certainly wasn't my place to comfort her. Of course, Sam did tell me to look after her and I tell myself that's why I found myself ignoring my job at the hotel to visit her.

I made sure that everything was running smoothly and left Sketch, one of the first guys I found to be a part of the Misfits- the "gang" that I started, but it's really just workers for the hotel- in charge. It was on the way to her house that I felt something off.

The city was buzzing with gossip and their thoughts were practically screaming, giving me a headache. Something had happened. Twitch, arguably the most known Superhero, was attacked in broad daylight and killed. He had his daughter with him and she was in critical condition when they found her. An attack was launched on Superhero Headquarters and was now on lockdown. None of these things are actually all that shocking, when you live on an island made up of ninety percent superpowered people, destruction happens all the time. The thing that has everyone so shocked is that it happened to Twitch. He's the grandson of the man who helped to create this island for the Supers and gained us our freedom, he's the sole heir of the family fortune, he's part of the only family whose secret identity is public knowledge. Twitch is Ceyla's father.

I don't even hesitate, I sprint for HQ. I don't care that there's a crowd gathered around the doors or that it's nearly impossible to get inside. I push my way to the front and barely give a thought before diving into the mind of the Super guarding the door.

"I need inside." I tell him, my voice sounding calm from the years I've spent hiding any emotion.

The Super looks me over and frowns, "Sir..." His face goes blank and he opens the door. "Of course."

"Hey! What are you doing here? How'd you get in?" A voice calls out. A nurse comes out from one of the side rooms, her sleeves red with blood.

"I need to see Ceyla..." I try to think of a good reason for rushing over here, one that doesn't involve me forming emotional connections- weaknesses- but I can't. I finally settled on, "She's my partner."

I don't know if it's something on my face or in my voice, there's too many people close to quickly delve into her thoughts to find out, but her face softens. "You promise not to cause trouble?" At my nod, she sighs and waves me to her. "Come on."

We walked into the side room she appeared from, leaving the opulent marble entrance behind. The room we enter is far less impressive with simple tiled floors, white painted walls with hospital equipment along all four of the walls and in the center of the room is a hospital bed and on top of that is Ceyla.

Her costume has been replaced with a hospital gown and her mask has been removed. Almost. Bits of it have been left on her face where they couldn't remove it from where it seared to her burns. Her once smooth freckled skin has become raw, red and bleeding along her right cheek and barely missed her eye. My breath catches at how much pain she would be in if she were actually awake.

"What happened?" My voice isn't the usual mild interest that I pride myself on it being. It comes out thick and afraid and I don't even care.

"We're not sure. She was out with her father on his usual rounds when a fire Super attacked. We don't think she was the original target but she got involved. The Super killed her father and ended up knocking her out. She's lost a lot of blood, but no lasting damage as long as we can get her some blood. The only problem is that we don't have any blood in store."

"Use mine." I'm not sure who's more surprised by my answer, me or her.

She nods. "Do you have any blood problems? Diseases? Low blood pressure?"

"Not that I know of."

"Okay, it's not like Ceyla has another option."

I sit down in one of the chairs by the bed and glance at Ceyla again. Her strawberry blonde hair has escaped her braid. She would hate that. My fingers long to reach out and brush her hair back, to make her better, but I don't have her power. I can't heal people with a brush of the fingers. I can only control people's thoughts and even that doesn't work on her. I have no idea what she's thinking. It's horrible. That wonderful, stupid necklace is still around her neck. The necklace that Sam gave her that keeps Mind Manipulators out of her head.

If I force myself to focus I can hear the nurse's thoughts which are actually very calm and make absolutely no sense.

I need the IV...

Low hemoglobin levels...

No time to properly clean the blood...

She gets right to work, tying a tourniquet on my arm and sticking me with a needle. My blood starts to fill the bag and I find myself relaxing.

"She's going to be fine."

"I know, she's resilient. And she'd fight death just to be able to stay here and be an annoyance to me."

The nurse laughs, surprised. "Sounds like we should help her get better as soon as possible, then. By the way, I'm Sarah."

"Jax."

It's not long after that when the bag fills up and Sarah unhooks me from the IV. Her thoughts float into my mind again, but I push them out. Her thoughts are too out of my realm of knowledge to entertain. She holds the bag up, examines it then twists her

fingers around the edge. Immediately the blood starts to separate. Dark red and black particles start to float up towards the top of the bag and out through the valve that holds the IV tube.

“It cleans the blood.” Sarah answers my unasked question. “But it doesn’t change the blood composition so let’s hope you have the same blood type.”

“And if I don’t?”

“Then the blood will be rejected and she’ll die, but she’ll also die if she doesn’t get blood.”

“Right...”

I stayed in the room the entire time the blood flowed into Ceyla’s veins, even when Sarah left to do who knows what. Nothing happened when the blood first flowed into her so Sarah said that the blood was accepted and that everything was fine. But, still, I watched.

I watched as her skin went from a pale white to its normal pink and her breathing steadied. And then I couldn’t help myself, I pushed a stray strand of hair out of her face. She turned her head towards me and her eyes squinted open.

“Jax?” Ceyla’s voice is thick and slurred, drunk on all the pain medication she’s been given.

“Yeah?”

“What-” The door bangs open suddenly, cutting her off.

I turn in time to see a large man in a black mask and costume looming in the doorway. His face is lit up with the flames surrounding both his hands. My blood runs

cold. I should have sensed him, I should have been able to see his thoughts, but he's just a vague flicker in my mind, easily blinding into the crowd outside. He's nearly as invisible as Ceyla. *Impossible.*

I jump up, mind racing to break his mental wall while I grab the cold metal of the knife tucked in my boot. But the guy barely gives me a passing glance before launching a steady stream of fire at me. I don't roll out of the way fast enough to avoid being burned. The fire singes the side of my face, catching on my mask. The only thought in my head is that *it hurts*. I struggle to focus, to breathe especially when I hear a scream.

All I can do is glance up as his burning hands grab her wrists and she screams. But as soon as he touches Ceyla he jerks back as if it stung. There's a thud as he falls to the ground and the slight presence of his mind disappears. Even though I don't have to, I crawl over to the body and check for a pulse. Nothing.

I force myself to stand and lean heavily on the bed. "Ceyla?" I touch her arm lightly and she jerks away. "It's okay, he's gone. You're alright."

"Liar." Ceyla says without any heat. "I killed someone." Her breathing increases and she squeezes her eyes shut. "Jax, I just killed someone."

"Ceyla," I grab her hands and squeeze, careful to avoid the IV lines and burns. "Ceyla, listen to me. It was self-defense. You or him. He was going to kill you and you fought back. It's not your fault."

Her eyes open, revealing bloodshot green eyes, and fall to where I'm holding her hands. Tentatively she squeezes back then looks back up at me in wonder. I didn't understand why she looked at me like that at the time and I wanted to see into her thoughts so much. Of course, now I know it's because the price for her powers was that

she couldn't have skin to skin contact. That's what happened to the dead guy. Her powers reacted at the touch and killed him. Only blood relatives are exempt- and apparently blood donors.

A warm feeling spreads through my veins and a golden glow surrounds her hands and I jerk back. "Don't, you'll waste your strength." Even that little bit of power has left her drained. "I'm going to get the nurse, I promise I'll be right back." I whisper.

Once Sarah made sure that Ceyla was stable she turned her attention to me.

"You're lucky, there's no nerve damage. And your scars will match hers." Sarah says, dabbing some sort of medicine on my burns. The fire missed my eye but singed a good half of my left eyebrow. It's probably not growing back.

There's a body... What should I do?

"Do you need help moving the body?" I ask. Sarah looks up sharply.

"No, I'll get it." Her breathing is shaky though, her thoughts fractured and unsteady. "You should stay with Ceyla, in case she wakes up again."

So I did. I sat by the bed until the body was moved, until the lockdown was released, until her mom finally showed up from whatever she was doing. Only when I was sure Ceyla was okay did I leave. Because I was told to protect her, not because I had formed a weakness. And I definitely wasn't immensely relieved when she showed back up at the hotel two days later.