

Chapter Three

*Comorbidity*

*Diagnostic Criteria*

345.76 (F23)

*Co-occurring mental disorders are common, with the most frequent disorders being any anxiety disorders (e.g., panic attacks, social anxiety disorders [social phobia], specific phobia), occurring in approximately three-fourths of individuals; ADHD, any disruptive, impulse control, or conduct disorder (e.g., intermittent explosive disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder), and any substance use disorder occur in over half of individuals with bipolar I disorder.*

You once called me a runaway. Do you remember that? The first time we met, that night on the dock. You were right. I do runaway. I turn and run in the other direction when a situation gets too difficult. When things get too scary or out of my control.

I ran at the first sight of danger when we were in trouble, and then I lost you. I wanted to run when things started to get serious between us, and you almost left me. I ran when the quarantines began instead of staying to fight with my brother, David, and I never saw him again. I wish I could be more like you, like David. People who stay and fight. People who are brave and in control of their fear. But I'm not like you. I suppose I don't know how to be like you.

I left home almost five years ago, and I haven't been back since. I can barely remember David anymore. I can just make him out sitting on the back porch sipping a beer and listening to the radio. He had that stupid thing on all time. I can just hear the static that rose up over the voices, making it almost impossible to hear what they were saying.

But David would lean in close, feeling it was his duty to keep apprised of the developments surrounding our situation. What was going to happen to us if the government did decide to initiate a nationwide quarantine? Every now and then he would slam his beer down on the porch railing, sending foam puffing over the sides of the can and down around his hand. I tried to calm him, fearing for more than just the can of beer. Sometimes the railing would creak and crunch under the weight of his fist.

“I’m sure nothing will come of it,” I said, keeping my voice as calm as possible, hoping some of my composure would wear off on him.

He would just shake his head and ramble off a few swear words before telling me about another news story he’d heard that had to do with impossible feats accomplished by a single person. But always, they were horrible and resulted in a body count so huge I was surprised the quarantine hadn’t started months earlier.

I’m sure you remember them, RJ. They were all over the news. Every day it was another breaking news story about a kid shooting up an entire grocery store without ever stepping out from behind the cash register. Or do you remember the one where a 747 plane was still on the runway and every single passenger had fallen into a catatonic state except for a young woman the authorities found wailing in the lavatory crying for forgiveness. The stories got more outrageous and more impossible.

It was Dr. Aldo, an old school Freudian, who started to make the connections. I wasn’t surprised at all when he came on the radio and made his claim. Every story included something about the person’s medical history; how they had been diagnosed with a mental illness, how their fragile state-of-mind had led them to do what they did. But Dr. Aldo had pieced the entire puzzle together. He figured it all out before anyone else did.

David insisted I sit and listen to the interview with him. He said it was important that I understand what was going on, that I learn how it all pertained to me. But, you know already that David was the one who was exhibiting his ability, not me. I heard voices, screams. I was insane, no doubt about it. I had looked it up in the DSM. But that was it, there was nothing special about me. David was the one who could punch a hole through the wall when he got angry or crush a rock into dust when patience was no longer one of his virtues. I couldn't do anything like that.

But I sat down and I listened.

Dr. Aldo explained that the brain was complex; way beyond our ability to fully study and understand. But he and a few of his colleagues had discovered that at this point in human history our brains were evolving, they were evolving faster than anyone had anticipated. Not everyone's, just a certain few. And what we all had thought was an illness, an imbalance in the brain, was actually the brain changing, morphing, and adapting. The brain was evolving to deal with harsher conditions, increasing populations, and a race for survival of the fittest. With a planet where resources were beginning to be depleted, and space was becoming limited, the brain was adapting to survive. But maybe a bit too quickly.

The extreme reactions some had, like unusual behavior or psychosis was the body trying to adjust, trying to deal with the brain evolving at such an increased rate. Putting it in even simpler terms, our brains were maturing quickly, but our bodies couldn't keep up.

The interviewer asked a final question; one David had been waiting for. "Are they dangerous?"

Dr. Aldo cleared his throat. He sounded nervous. "Yes, I suppose they can be. It's like putting fireworks inside a house. They're beautiful outside, but when you put them inside, they can cause anything from a fire to complete destruction. I suppose we need to be careful."

That was it for David. He knew what he had to do, and then I guess so did I. We went our separate ways. David fought the quarantine, I ran from it.

The reason I'm telling you all of this now, RJ, is because it's important. It's necessary for you to understand the past, the quarantines, and what started them for all of us. It's important for you and for everyone to understand what happened to us, to me. We always did avoid talking about the real reason we couldn't stay at the cabin on the lake. We ignored the real reason we had to move towns every few days, but it's time I talk about it, really explain what was going on out in the world. We can't stay ignorant any longer.