

PART TWO

The Long Play Of Evil

Act One

"After"

"An easier way of life. A more convenient way of living. Make your life stress free. Get AGIC chipped today and enjoy a world that knows you."

"I could've sworn one of these damn stations were going to broadcast his press conference." Donnell nagged and sighing in frustration as he aggressively tapped the touched screen and switching to another channel yet again.

Lauren continued to ignore him. She had not spoken a word since leaving the Union Station parking lot, and was so far into her own thoughts that, if it wasn't for the emergency brake system kicking in at that very moment, and stopping the car abruptly, which immediately caused Donnell to jerk forward, and bump his head on the dashboard she would've hit the car stopped at the red light in front of them.

"You know, if you wanted me to stop switching channels you could've just asked." Donnell groaned as he massaged his forehead.

"Huh?" Lauren muttered as she continued to stare blankly at the road ahead of her, and obvious to Donnell, not bothered at all by the sudden stop. "Oh, yeah. I'm good." She replied in an unconvincing tone.

Although Donnell had not given a second thought to the events of earlier, it was clear that, for Lauren, they were still heavily weighing on her mind, and so, Donnell felt compelled to make his best efforts to relieve her of that stress in whatever way he could.

"I think you should call him." He nonchalantly suggested. "I'm sure he's calmed down by now and you can explain the situation. I'm sure he'll understand."

Lauren scoffed at Donnell's advice and let the steering wheel retract into the dashboard before the light turned green and the car pulled off.

"You really think it's that easy?" She retorted as if she were offended by his insincere suggestion. "And what situation? I didn't know we had a situation." She darted.

"Damn bro! My bad!" Donnell immediately shot back and caught off guard by her disdainful response. "If I knew my advice was gonna lead to you biting my head off, I would've kept it to myself."

Lauren then kissed her teeth but kept her words to herself. She knew Donnell wasn't to blame for her feelings of guilt and she began to feel remorseful for snapping at him.

Donnell, not sure how she was going to respond to his snide remark, kept silent as well, but was prepared for a possible barrage of insults.

"You are ten minutes away from your destination." A soft feminine voice spoke out from the car's speakers.

Lauren then took a deep breath, she closed her eyes, and calmly exhaled.

"I heard someone mention in the breakroom earlier they were cancelling the live broadcast." Lauren remarked, this time in a calm voice, and diverting the conversation to a less intense subject.

"And you just lemme search for it like a fool? Did I do something wrong that I missed, 'cause it feels like I'm getting the cold shoulder from you and I have no idea why?" Donnell question and trying his best to not sound offensive.

"No, and I'm sorry." She answered. "I was thinking about earlier. Well, I am still thinking about earlier, but I'm good now."

Donnell didn't believe for a moment that she was over the trying encounter between her and Marquis, but to keep things lighthearted he accepted her answer.

"I gotchu." He replied. "I am low key hot nobody's airing the press conference though." He then remarked. "I'm actually excited about the new combat unit. The specs on it that's been leaked all over the gram, if they're true, this thing is going to be a beast. I'm actually hoping I get to work alongside one."

"We haven't even gotten to the precinct yet and you jumping the gun." Lauren pointed out.

"I mean, I've already aced the written. Why shouldn't I? This is just the psych eval. I'm not no Samuel Little or Charles Manson." He laughed.

"How do I know?" Lauren rebutted jokingly. "I don't know you like that. This is the first time we've had communication outside of work." She reminded him with a smirk on her face.

"Well, if I was either of the two, then giving me a ride would've been a poor decision on your part." He laughed again.

Lauren then giggled as well.

"I actually admire your drive. I know how much being a police officer means to you. You *have* mentioned that on numerous occasions in one way or another. It's always inspiring to see someone go for what they believe in with full force." Lauren praised.

Donnell couldn't help but blush. Fortunately, the hue of red was so faint in his cheeks that his appreciation for Lauren's admiration of him went unnoticed, which worked in his favor, and kept his intimate feelings for her obscure.

“I just wish Marquis would live up to his potential.” She continued in a somber tone. “He’s so ambitious and determined. If his aim wasn’t off, I know he could do great things.”

“You should have him watch Colton Phiegore’s Ted Talk.” He insisted. “It’s nothing but motivation. I listen to it at least once a week. That’s another reason why I’m hot they not airing the press conference.”

“He wouldn’t listen. Marquis is stubborn. It took me forever to convince him to get chipped. And plus, he isn’t a Phiegore fan.” She replied.

“How can you not be a Colton Phiegore fan?” Donnell questioned and surprised at Lauren’s claim.

“Marquis believes that anyone in the one percent is a part of the illuminati, and that Colton Phiegore plans on creating a new world order with Bellfore Corporation.” She mumbled in anger.

Donnell bursted into laughter and making Lauren feel even more embarrassed for mentioning it.

“The man built Bellfore Corporation from the mud. What is there not to trust?” He asked rhetorically. “Colton Phiegore is the reason for you being able to make purchases with your chip, the reason this car recognizes our fingerprints, the reason why your home alarm system works, and everything that connects to our chips. Bellfore products and services are literally everywhere.”

“I didn’t need for you to run down a list of accolades, but okay.” Lauren uttered.

“My bad. I know I went off on a rant, but I can’t stand when we put down or hate on our own people when they’re on some positive shit. Colton Phiegore is an icon. An inspiration to all black men and women. That’s whack of Marquis man. I thought he was smarter than that.”

“I wouldn’t necessarily call him a hater.” Lauren replied in a defensive tone. “He’s just suspicious of most people. Black, white, or whatever color. And given the fact where he grew up and the things he’s had to endure as a black man I think his reasons, although sometimes out there, are justified for him being suspicious of folks.”

Donnell could see that he had struck the wrong chord with Lauren and back peddled.

“You know what, you’re right. My bad. I don’t even know him like that.” He remarked. “I’m letting my admiration for Mr Phiegore get the best of me. I apologize. It’s just that seeing a black man climb so high legitimately is inspiring. We don’t see that too often, y’know? My father tried, but in the end.....” Donnell trailed off and paused for a moment to get his emotions under control, and then continued, “I just consider him a hero.”

“I understand, but from now on let’s keep the conversation away from bringing up Marquis.” She advised. “As a matter fact,” Lauren added. “I need to delete your info from my system.”

She then proceeded to begin the process of removing his chip credentials through the built-in miniature computer system located in the arm rest.

“Why? You don’t trust me?” Donnell questioned in a joking tone.

“Nope.” Lauren said while chuckling. “I only needed you to move it for me so I didn’t get a ticket. And me taking you to your crazy check is me saying thank you. Unfortunately, this is all at the cost of an angry boyfriend.”

“No good deed goes unpunished.” Donnell quoted.

“You have arrived at your destination.” The voice from the car had spoken out from the speakers.

“That was actually pretty quick. I was sure we would’ve hit traffic around this time, but I’m fifteen minutes early.” Donnell remarked with a little excitement in his voice, but it still subtly cracked at the end.

“You nervous?” Lauren asked and genuinely concerned

“That obvious?”

“Just a little. But you’re going to be fine. Remember, they’re just asking you questions about yourself. They just wanna get to know Donnell. Like I’m starting to.” Lauren remarked in a comforting tone and with a warm smile.

“Yeah, to make sure Donnell no go crazy.” He replied jokingly and opening the door. “Thank you again for the ride.” He added. “And I hope you’re able to smooth things over with Marquis.”

“Call me as soon as you get the news.” Lauren requested as she watched Donnell exit her car.

“I will.”

Donnell then closed the door and Lauren watched as he walked off into the precinct.

Act Two

“Before”

The conference room had fallen silent awaiting Colton’s response. The press had hung on his every word since the start of the briefing, and at about an hour in, his charisma still kept them all captivated.

“If given the opportunity, and the timing is right, I see no problem with me running. Although Mayor Thorbourn and I may not agree on every issue that arises, I still respect him as our current mayor. I still think he is doing a wonderful job.” Colton responded with a sincere smile on his face.

“But you have to admit,” A reporter blurted out. “You would be a shoe in for the win. You’re loved by everyone in the city. Bellfore Corporation is up there with the likes of Apple, Microsoft, Sony,

and that's just to name a few. I mean, I don't think there is anything in my apartment that doesn't have the Bellfore logo on it."

"Look, I appreciate the praise, but I didn't build this company to Segway into politics. I saw a way to make life a little better and ran with it. This remarkable skyscraper in the middle of the city is not a contender but an ally to the people and the buildings surrounding it. That's why I was elated to get the call that Bellfore Corporation would be the lead developers and designers of the new PA-90 combat unit. That's what we're *really* here to talk about. That's why all you lovely folks are here in this large conference room, on the thirty-second floor, that has stunning panoramic views of beautiful downtown Los Angeles if I may add. So, how about we skip the flattery, even though I do enjoy it, but let's get back to this amazing machine here." Colton replied while directing everyone's attention back to the holographic image of the PA-90 combat unit.

"How long will it be until the units are fully functional and available for deployment?" Another reporter asked.

"Well, because we over at Bellfore are taking this task that was appointed to us very seriously, we're taking time to make sure that when these units are fully completed, they operate without any issues. Keller Dynamics has done a wonderful job with the current operating model. Our aim is to expand on that and make a new unit that doesn't overshadow." Colton answered but methodically dancing around the actual question like a veteran politician.

"Will these be assisting the current PA-90 units?" A different reporter queried.

"As you know, a PA-90 can only be partnered with a human officer, and not another droid. These units, which are designed specifically for combat, will be used for the more serious needs of law enforcement. Such as military and SWAT." Colton remarked.

"And what do you say to those who think that Bellfore is a too big to fail company that has clandestine plans for world domination." A separate reporter shouted.

"I say that those individuals should write a movie script." Colton answered jokingly and making the entire room burst into laughter.

"Look, Bellfore Corp. is just another corporation that's here for the benefit of humanity. We are here to make things easier, simpler, and more efficient. Our reach around the country and the reason for our, I guess you can say, omnipresence, is due to the quality of our products that work in unison with the US governments AGIC technology. We want those who are chipped, and those who are still hesitant about being chipped, to see that Bellfore is here for you." He explained with his familiar inviting smile.

As soon as he finished his statement, Colton's assistant entered the room with her attention focused on her tablet. A young and noticeably attractive, black woman who easily caught the attention of the male reporters.

"Okay ladies and gentlemen, that concludes our press conference. Please make your way to the receptionist area and our security will escort you all to the underground parking structure where you all came in from. Thank you and we appreciate you coming." She stated in an uncompassionate tone and not bothering to look up from the screen of her tablet.

The press immediately began snapping photos and attempting to get Colton's attention as he and his bewitching assistant exited the conference room.

"How are things going in Shimane?" Colton asked of his assistant as they both made their way down the long hall and were far enough from listening ears.

"Unfortunately," She replied while scrolling through her tablet. "Excavations have been delayed due to the local cabal."

"The Izumo gang again?"

"They have killed at least three of our construction workers and have frightened the others so much so that they've ceased work. The gang is asking for more money to allow us to continue excavation of the site." She replied.

"How much have we paid them already?"

"I'm checking now." She answered as she scrolled through her tablet. "Fifty thousand sir." She confirmed.

"And they still want more. Even from the bowels of hell Mammon still attempts to hinder my plans. The jealousy is real." He said while shaking his head. "Alright." He then sighed. "Kill them all."

"Are you sure? We'd have to pay off the locals to keep quiet and we've already paid a substantial amount to keep the dig site off the radar." She explained.

"It's okay. Remember the bigger picture Nephi. Money is no concern when it comes to making sure everything stays on course." Colton reminded.

As they reached the large, frosted glass doors of Colton's office, and entered, to Nephi's surprise, but to Colton's subtle excitement, a familiar face stood at Colton's mahogany desk awaiting their arrival.

"How did you get in here!?" Nephi immediately demanded and ready to pounce if the wrong answer were given.

"Nephi, what did I tell you?" Colton questioned in a soothing tone and gently placing his hand on her shoulder. "You two are going to have to get along. Now, Kurobara, how goes it my friend?"

"Forgive my forwardness," The blind samurai responded, leaning on his wooden staff, and allowing his long dreads to cover the sight of the tattered cloth tightly wrapped around his eye's. "but I came to understand that my blade would not have to taste blood."

"No." Colton rebutted. "I said, depending on who you encounter you won't have to kill anyone. So, I can assume that that blade of yours concealed in that exquisite walking stick has had its fill today?" Colton asked with a hopeful tone in his voice.

Kurobara hesitated to answer. He casually walked over to the leather couch positioned in the middle of the oversized office, without a misstep, and seeming to be aware of Nephi's contemptuous watchful eye's that followed his every move.

“The insatiable thirst of this bloodlust weapon, which has been the merciless executioner and protector of those men and women of ill repute for centuries, does not discriminate who it cuts down.” He answered.

“What the hell does that mean. He asked you a simple question which requires just a simple response.” Nephi scolded.

“Please, Nephi, it’s okay.” Colton remarked and making his way over to his wet bar. “Kurobara is centuries old and from a different culture. Its rude to ridicule him for the way he speaks.” He reminded her as he dropped three ice cubes into a small glass and poured himself a drink. “So, were you able to get any information about the son’s whereabouts before disposing of his companions?” He asked of Kurobara.

“Unfortunately, the information I received was less than helpful. I apologize for my failure.” Kurobara replied and bowing his head in respect.

“I told you he was useless. You should’ve just let me find Marquis. Chipped or not, technology always prevails over outdated methods.” Nephi fumed.

Colton took a deep breath before taking a sip of his alcohol and then leisurely walking over to his desk. “You know, the stress this damn sword is causing me....” Colton trailed off as he picked up a tablet identical to Nephi’s from his desk. “His father has alluded me for damn near five years now. I’ve sat without my throne for five years. Dante be damned.” He said as he plopped down on his swarthy leather executive office chair, that looked more like a throne than a chair, but was fitting for the atmosphere of the office. “Fortunately, the flaws of God’s detestable creatures; their greed, their vanity, their sloth, my personal favorite, of course, it all has allowed me to solidify myself as something similar to a king. A laughable replacement which leaves me desiring much more.” He tossed the tablet back on his desk and took another quick sip of his drink. “Kurobara, what are your desires?” He questioned.

“All I desire is what you, my liberator from my personal hell and damnation has promised me.” He humbly replied. “I do not mean to be disrespectful or seem doubtful in the fact that you can provide whatever it is I may desire, but the appetency for my beloved continues to burn even centuries after my death. She is all that I desire.” Kurobara answered.

“And you will have her as promised.” Colton replied. “Lovers separated, the earth standing between them, a nearly thousand-year-old bittersweet love story between a blind samurai and a yujo that eventually upgraded to an oiran. That’s why I chose you Kurobara. You have hope and that’s a powerful force. Something, the others down there don’t understand. You give a human hope they are willing to do anything for you. Go to the ends of the earth for you if you ask, as long as you’ve given them hope that their wants or needs will be met. In the deepest bowels of hell, Kurobara, you still hold on to the hope that you will be reunited with your beloved. Even though you mercilessly slaughtered thousands. Hope is so much more fun than despair. I mean, back in the day, shapeshifting by means of manipulation was my thing. It was easy to seduce, but now-a-days, hope is the way to go. Every individual the works for this corporation truly feels that they’ve contributed to the growth of this behemoth with the idea’s that I influenced. I’ve given hope for the future for not only these people but the world. And it fills me with such elation that soon I will get to watch how the world falls as I

swiftly and without remorse, snatch that hope away.” He said as he grinned. “Once I have the Dark Blade and the final pieces to the seven headed serpent statue are found, this world and the underworld will both be mine. With the serpent at my side and its Dark Blade in my possession, they all will respect the name Belphegor.”

Kurobara then slightly turned his head towards the door.

“Someone is approaching.” He remarked.

Not even a few seconds had passed when they heard an echoing knock at the glass doors.

“Yes?!” Colton shouted.

The door gradually opened and a woman in a long white lab coat cautiously entered.

“Hello, Mr. Phiegore.” She greeted in a soft tone as she laid her eyes on Nephi first, who was standing to her right. “I was—” She stopped abruptly. The sight of Kurobara immediately caused her to pause and stare in awe at the sight of him.

“Don’t mind Kurobara. He’s not harmless but he is a good companion of mine.” Colton explained with a smile. “So, you are?”

“She’s Aleesha Stanford, the lead engineer for the PA-90 combat unit.” Nephi answered.

“Okay, that’s great. What can I do for you?” Colton then asked.

The engineer hesitated for a bit, seeming to become even more frightened as she continued to stare at Kurobara who, she could see that his eyes were covered, still looked as if he were looking right back at her.

“Time is of the essence.” Nephi darted in an impatient tone.

“I’m sorry. I just....” Ms. Stanford paused, attempted to calm her nerves, and she then continued, “The combat unit demo models that we’re sending to the police department and to the army base....” She paused yet again as if she were afraid to continue any further.

“What about them? They should be fine. I remember doing a final check with your team.” Colton stated.

“Yes, they’re fully functional and that’s the problem. I set the programming for demonstration only. There are still processes that need tweaking. If we send those two units out as fully functional it could be disastrous, sir.” The engineer explained.

There was an awkward silence immediately after her claim, which had started to make Mrs. Stanford uneasy, and causing her to fidget. Just as the tension had begun to suffocate the room, there was a loud ding from Nephi’s tablet, and when she investigated the reason for the alert, her face lit up,

“We found him!” She shouted.

“Excuse me? Found who?” Ms. Stanford asked in complete confusion.

“Really? How?” Colton asked and ignoring the engineer.

“He finally got chipped.” Nephi explained while scrolling through the tablet.

“Just now? What made him do it now?” Colton questioned.

“He was actually chipped,” She paused to confirm the data, “after he was released from jail almost two weeks ago. I guess it took a while for the update to hit my system.” Nephi remarked.

“Okay. That’s great news. I’ll be able to kill two birds with one stone.” Colton placed his hand over his chin and closed his eyes to contemplate for a second. “Nephi, contact the military, let them know we’re going to have to reschedule their delivery of the combat unit.”

“What about the one to the police department?” She asked.

“That one stays on schedule. As a matter of fact, I want you to reach out to our contact there and make sure that he gets that unit in the car with a standard unit. I have an idea.” He grinned.

“Excuse me sir, but what you’re suggesting is morally and ethically wrong.” Aleesha interrupted. “Not only do we not know the extent of how well a fully functional combat unit will perform but pairing it with a standard PA-90 unit is against regulations.” The engineer reminded the room.

“You are so right, and you can believe that I and my immediate team will discuss this further. I thank you for the information you’ve brought to my attention, and I will make sure that your diligence within this matter does not go without reward.” Colton said.

“I’m sorry sir, but I can’t just let this go. This could be disastrous for Bellfore Corporation and my reputation as well.” Ms. Stanford claimed.

When she said this, Nephi immediately placed her tablet down and began to approach the engineer.

“Why don’t you come with me, and we’ll head down to the logistics department and see if we can’t work something out.” Nephi said as she placed the palm of her hand just above the middle of her back as if to guide her out the office.

“No!” The engineer yelled and jerking away from Nephi. “This isn’t right. None of this is right. I don’t understand what’s going on.” She whined.

“Hold on Nephi.” Colton demanded. “I guess it wouldn’t be fair to leave you in the dark.” He said to Aleesha. “You have contributed so much to this company.” Colton paused for a moment and then continued. “Nephilim. Are you familiar with the term?”

“Sir!” Nephi shouted, surprised by what Colton asked.

“It’s okay Nephi.” He replied and then directing his attention back to the engineer. “So, do you know the term?” He asked again.

“What’re you talking about? I don’t understand.” Aleesha responded in a fearful tone.

“It’s okay, no need to feel bad. Not too many do know. The offspring of Angels and mortal women. Beautiful, strong, and a blessing to the earth. Unfortunately, those traits weren’t good enough and all were condemned to drown. Not all of course.” He said while nodding to Nephi. “You could imagine though, how something like that would devastate a proud parent of any kind. How it would bring out the undying wrath of a father. And although that father has his throne, his hatred for He whom those call omnipotent still burns more furiously than the flames of his own domain.”

“Are you saying that her father is an angel?” The engineer asked and even more confused.

“Formerly. But now, lemme tell you another story.” Colton then nodded at Kurobara. “A story of a young girl forced to be an oiran due to her unfortunate circumstances. She was sold many times over, pleased many men, and kings. Then one day a warrior came along. He was considered the emperors most trusted and decorated soldier. Even with his sight being taken from him at birth he was still considered one of the deadliest samurai. The blind samurai and the oiran fell in love. And so, he spoke with the emperor and he bought her freedom. They ran away together and built a life. The young woman soon became pregnant, and her new life was blissful. But at the height of war in the country, the emperor requested the warrior’s presence, but he refused due to him starting a family. This did not sit well with the emperor and to persuade the warrior the emperor had the pregnant woman murdered. This broke the samurai and that same night he entered the palace and murdered every soldier, man, woman, and child as well as the emperor and any legacy tied to him.”

The engineer glanced over at Kurobara who was as still as a statue and still seeming as if he were staring directly into her soul.

“Now, as for me and my story,” Colton continued while rising from his chair and approaching the engineer. “Nothing really special. Punished for my indifferent actions towards a heavenly war that had nothing to do with me, and then ended up ruling instead of serving. Now I’m here.” He finished and was standing directly in front of the, now visibly trembling, engineer.

“I’m sorry but I have to inform someone about this. None of this can stand.” She stuttered.

“I completely understand.” Colton said while placing both hands on her shoulders. “You have integrity, which in any other circumstance would move things in your favor.” He claimed as his grip on her shoulders tightened.

Before Aleesha could respond to the pain, she was awe struck by an unusual sight. Ash had begun to fall all over the office like a rain of dark gray confetti. She then looked up and what she witnessed above her had caused her eyes to fill with tears. The entire ceiling of the office was now blanketed in flames.

“Welcome to your new home.” Colton congratulated as he released his grip.

Ms. Stanford immediately shut her eyes as tight as she could and began to pray out loud.

Colton and Nephi immediately both laughed at the action.

Aleesha then opened her eyes, but there was no relief from her anxiety. When she looked around, the décor, the walls, furniture, and the image of an office began to melt away like turpentine

thrown on a painting. Soon she realized she was no longer in the office. She was now deep in the bowels of a dark cave and the smell of brimstone and burning flesh began to fill her lungs. The comforting silence had faded and was replaced with loud cries of agony, maniacal laughter, and screeches from creatures she couldn't place. The only light came from the bright yellow hue of the flames that emanated from the depths of the cave. There were cliffs and jagged rocks all around and she noticed that the particular cliff the four of them were standing on seemed as if it was going to crumble under them at any moment. She looked up to see, what she assumed were a flock of ravens hovering in a circle like vultures but she wasn't too certain since they were so high up and the endless sky was so dark. Not being able to sustain her fear any longer, she broke away from Colton and attempted to run but immediately tripped and fell to the hot rocky ground.

"Please!" She cried out with tears cascading down her cheek. "Let me go home!" She pleaded.

Colton just stared blankly at the helpless engineer as Nephi looked on with contempt. Kurobara bowed his head and like his comrades, allowed the screams and screeches to answer her pleas. She then rose to her feet and quickly turned to attempt her escape again when, what felt like sharp knives suddenly dug into her shoulders, and she was, without warning, swiftly lifted off the ground by a black winged demon. She screamed and jerked her body wildly trying to escape its grip, but the more she struggled the deeper the talons of the demon sank into her shoulder.

Colton watched with a proud expression on his face until the engineer was long out of sight. He then turned to Kurobara who still had his head bowed and said:

"Bring Marquis to me my friend."

Act Three

"Now"

Marquis stopped to catch his breath. He scanned the area as he tried to get control of his breathing and realized he was in the loading dock area of a warehouse. All around him were trailers detached from their trucks and not an employee nor security guard were in sight. He could still hear the echoing of the clanging steel from the fight, which forced him to cut his rest short, pick himself up, and begin to run yet again and without any particular destination just as long as it was far away from the action.

There had seemed to be no end to the loading dock area, and so, Marquis decided to hide himself behind one of the trailers to catch his breath some more. He was then startled by a loud crash that shook the ground and then an immediate silence after. The peace lasted just long enough for Marquis to calm himself and come out of his hiding place. As he began to peek from around the trailer he heard,

"Young Thompson!"

Marquis immediately ducked back into his hiding spot.

“I can hear your heartbeat! The speed of its rhythm reveals your fear!” Kurobara shouted.

Upon hearing him say this, Marquis made another attempt to slow his heart rate, but to no avail.

“I am not here to harm you!” Kurobara claimed. “As I stated earlier, my employer has business with you! I am aware the Dark Blade is not in your possession! Everything that is happening to you is all a result of your father’s choice’s!”

Marquis, mustering whatever courage he had left, exited his hiding spot, and came out into the open to face the blind samurai.

“Thank you.” Kurobara said in a sincere tone and bowing.

“What does my pops have to do with any of this? Does he owe your boss money or something, ‘cause I don’t know what a dark blade is, and unless whatever y’all looking for is laying with him in his coffin, I don’t know what I can tell you. I never met the nigga.” Marquis explained.

Kurobara kept silent for a moment as if he were contemplating on the information Marquis had just revealed to him.

“If that is true young Thompson, then I fear for your fate.” He replied.

At that very moment both were drawn to the sound and sight of Nihari landing feet first on top of one of the trailers. She then immediately leaped to the next, then the next, then landing on the last trailer closest to them, and leaping into the air from it, reaching behind her with both hands, then grabbing the handle of a sword, which Marquis was shocked to see form out of thin air, and watch as she descended on Kurobara with so much force and momentum that, when he guarded himself from the attack with his staff, the impact sent a powerful shockwave, which created a circular depression in the hard concrete, and sending Marquis violently flying into the side of a trailer.

“Your strength is great, young warrior, but I can tell from your strikes that your resolve is weak.” Kurobara stated while he casually held off Nihari’s attack.

Marquis had to take a moment before he stood up and gathered himself. The sight of the two warriors standing inside the crater, which looked as if it were formed by a slew of construction workers with jackhammers, almost made Marquis lose his sanity, but when he saw Nihari struggling to force the sharp steel of her sword through the slender wood of Kurobara’s walking stick he was compelled, by means beyond his understanding, to pick up a piece of concrete just large enough to grip in his hand, and heave it with as much strength as he could, and with as much accuracy as he could at the blindfolded fighter. Unfortunately, the action revealed the pain in Marquis’s shoulder, and the force of his throw was greatly reduced, and so, the rock only reached Nihari’s foot.

“What’re you still doing here?!” She yelled after feeling the rock hit her foot.

Although she kept her focus on her opponent, Marquis knew the question was directed at him, and he began to feel helpless yet again. Before he could think of an answer that he felt didn’t reveal

his helplessness, the wailing of police sirens in the distance caught his attention, and he began to feel relief wash over him. He couldn't think of a time the sound of approaching police cars made him feel like everything was going to be okay.

"Shit!" Nihari growled.

"Yep! That's why I'm still here!" Marquis shouted proudly.

Kurobara, who had his ear to the sky, sighed in disappointment.

"I shall not let this defeat weaken my spirit." He said as he effortlessly pushed Nihari backwards, causing her to stumble, but quickly catching her footing and getting back into a battle stance.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Nihari demanded.

Kurobara then bowed.

"Until next time young Thompson." He remarked and then bursting into a puff of black and gray smoke, allowing the wind to carry the remnants away, and leaving Marquis with a gaping expression.

"Let's go." Nihari demanded as she turned to Marquis who was holding his injured shoulder.

He watched in confusion as her sword reduced into fine particles and then vanish.

"I ain't goin' no damn where witchu." He replied.

"Yes, you are, or I'm going to chop you at the knees, cauterize the wounds, and drag you along. It's your choice." She threatened. "We're going to go see your father."

"I don't visit grave sites. Especially at night." Marquis said and grimacing from the pain in his shoulder.

"You really don't listen do you?" She said while walking towards the entrance of the warehouse. "He isn't dead. He's the whole reason for all of this shit."

Act Four

"Then"

The house was in obvious poor condition. The only one on the block that looked as if the grass of the front lawn hadn't been cut for weeks, was badly in need of a paint job, and the 2029 Camary in the driveway that was sitting on four flat tires and hadn't been washed in months gave off the vibe that the owners of the home could care less about the outside appearance.

“Bruh, did you bring me to a trap house?” Marquis questioned as he and Nihari exited his car.

Just as he asked, an overweight Latino man came out the front door in a faded green t-shirt and retro Lakers basketball shorts. He then leaned on the Camary and began to take hits from his vape pen.

“Shut up.” Nihari demanded and then proceeded to head towards the driveway of the nearly dilapidated house.

Marquis, hesitant at first, followed behind her.

“Who ugly ass house is this?” Marquis asked.

“It’s a halfway house. I’m sure you know what that is convict.” She replied in a harsh tone.

“Nigga, I ain’t no convict. And you act like I’ve lived in one of these places before. You don’t know me.” Marquis darted back. “This better not be no bullshit.”

“Hol’ up!” The overweight man shouted and stopping the two just at the end of the driveway.

“I’m looking for Ezra Thompson.” Nihari stated.

“Who the fuck is you? His probation officer or something?” He asked and taking a hit of his vape.

“Just tell me where he is. I don’t have time for games.” She demanded.

The overweight man looked her up and down as he blew clouds of smoke in their direction, then over to Marquis, and without saying a word, turned, headed back into the house, and slammed the door behind him.

“Fuck!” Nihari yelled. “Wait here, I’m not sure how many are in there so, just stay right there.” She said to Marquis and started towards the door.

“Wait?!” Marquis immediately shouted and stopping Nihari in her tracks. “I know you not about to go in there and start just slicing people up, are you? Matter of fact, how the hell are you able to make a sword materialize out of nothing?” Marquis questioned.

“That’s none of your business. Just do what I said and stay out here.” She bellowed.

The door to the house then slammed shut again, grabbing both of their attention. This time, walking towards them was an older black man. He stopped just a few feet away from them and glared at both.

Marquis had never met his father, hadn’t even seen pictures of him, and his tombstone, although Marquis only visited once, certainly didn’t have the name Ezra Thompson engraved in it. But there was something familiar about the man as Marquis sized him up. Marquis guessed him to be in his mid-forties, and although he was in a dingy white t-shirt and baggy faded blue jeans, he was still well groomed enough to look out of place living in a halfway house.

The man then fixed his glare on Nihari.

“You gotta be kiddin’ me.” He groaned and shaking his head.

“Where the matriarch of the Angels Of Death have failed, I’ve succeeded. Aren’t you gonna say hi to your son?” Nihari asked in a smug tone.

Ezra then looked back at Marquis, who was so angered by what Nihari said that he was visibly trembling and nearly hyperventilating, had sighed in disdain as if the sight of Marquis disgusted him, turned and walked back in the house, and slamming the door behind him.