



CJ leaned against a porcelain sink and stared at Blister. There were a few discolored cups on the counter, next to some dusty cereal bowls, which meant this place was either unused or abandoned. He'd never laid eyes on this girl before. Why had she helped him? Did she help him? She was younger than him, but just as brave. He was taken by her looks, by her Taraji Henson smile and short puff Afro. But looks or no looks, he'd start swinging if she came after him.

Blister saw his confusion and stepped up to bat. "Okay, this is going to seem weird, but I need to show you something. I can help you with what's going on."

"What *is* going on?" CJ asked her.

Blister hesitated, the answer on the tip of her tongue.

CJ cocked his head. "How did I end up here?"

"CJ. I need to explain something to you, but I can't. It's best you see it for yourself. Firsthand."

"See what? And where are we," asked CJ, scoping out the old kitchen. "I don't know what you have planned for me, but I need to leave. And you're gonna *let* me leave. Capisce?"

"The club burned down, CJ, and the blue orbs are dropping from the sky. What does that tell you?"

"You tell me what that means. Tell me why people here know about—" CJ crossed his arms and said, "Finish that sentence for me."

"I can't, but there's a theater close by. There's something you need to see." She went behind a baker's rack and came back with CJ's bag. "Is this yours?"

CJ gave her an eyeful, a skeptical gaze that expressed relief and fear at the same time.

"Like I said, you need to see something. Come with me, CJ."

CJ snatched his bag and spread it open. There was one Hayson inside.

”Did you take anything from this bag?”

“Nope. Not a thing. Didn’t even look inside.”

CJ took a step back, hugging his bag. “How did you get this?”

“I pulled it out of the river. Hey, *thank you* might be nice.”

“How did you know it was there?” He squeezed his eyes. “Were you with those guys? They were Landlers, weren’t they? I swear I’ll drop you right here if you’re lying to me.”

“Who? No! I went to The Slayer today. You told me to meet you there, remember? I didn’t see you so I talked with your crew. They said they hadn’t seen you either. That’s when I knew something was wrong.”

“So you looked in the *river*? What the hell? You had to of known—”

“I saw you from the bridge, CJ! I ran to the street and down the embankment. I waved my flashlight but you disappeared.”

“That was you?”

“*Yes.*”

CJ hesitated, as if she were feeding him a plate of bullshit; a routine he knew all too well. Was he being outdone at his own game? “Okay, thanks ... if that’s true. But I can’t go with you, wherever you’re going. No can do. Way too busy for a trip to the theater.”

“Come with me,” Blister said, pretty much insisting.