

A STORY OF LOVE IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS



REMEMBERING THE LIGHT

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Chapter 1 – The Beginning Of It All

It was a normal Wednesday in sunny California for Ray Larsson. Lunch was finally here for Ray and she couldn't have been more excited; calculus and hungry were words that definitely did not go together. Ray's best friend Connor sat right next to her and they ate in silence for the only thing on their minds was the sandwiches in front of them. Mingling with their peers was not fun for either of them, so after lunch they always went to the quietest place of all, the library.

"Ray, I've got to go see my parents, I'll be right back ok?" said Connor.

"What are you the fastest kid in town now? You won't be right back, your parents' classrooms are all the way on the other side of the building. And you know your Dad never makes things quick," Ray teased back.

Connor shook his head and smiled, "Fine, I'll be back. Better?"

"Much," Ray answered with a laugh.

Ray knew in her head it would be a while because Connor would most likely be reminded for the hundredth time to focus on good grades and nothing else.

"Don't be slacking off on these last two weeks, Connor. If you slack off once, you'll always slack off. Grades are all that matters, and you don't want finish high school on a bad note because then it will leak into how you start college. College is one of the important things you'll do in your whole life and it is definitely the most important thing in your life right now. Do you understand me son?" Ray could just picture Connor annoyingly sighing and replying yes to this statement for what was definitely the millionth time.

Ray would always go back and forth. She was sure Connor's parents cared about him and they probably couldn't help themselves because it was the last 2 weeks of their senior year, and Connor's parents were both teachers. But she knew Connor better than most, college was not for him and the fact that his parents couldn't see that bothered Ray at times.

But Ray loved Connor's parents, as teachers, they were the best. After being in school for her whole life Ray had known a lot of teachers and Mr. and Mrs. Hudson were one of the best. Mrs. Hudson taught English and Mr. Hudson taught chemistry. They were clear, to the point and not annoyed at every question students might ask. In fact, they encouraged asking questions. Those two classes were by far the best classes of the day for the energy in the room was a thousand times better than anywhere else.

Out of nowhere, the school had become chaos. Ray thought she was daydreaming; but no, she wasn't. She was right when she heard gun shots; many of them and screaming, lots and lots of

screaming. She immediately grabbed her phone and dialed her parents' number. Ray's parents were both cops so calling 911 was unnecessary.

"On it. Don't worry we're here," Ray's Mom yelled loud into the phone.

But before Ray could say anything one of the gunman came from behind her and gripped her throat tightly. He taped her mouth to muffle the sound of her screaming and strangled her even tighter.

Ray was beyond terrified and in shock. She couldn't feel anything; all she could think about was trying to breathe and staying calm (if that was even possible). She held on to the belief and knowing that her parents would be there soon and that everything would be ok. And then she heard Connor's voice.

"Ray!!!!" Connor screamed as he ran into the library. But the other gunman kicked him to the ground, taped his mouth and pointed the gun right at his head. Connor and Ray were on completely opposite sides of the library and suddenly Ray knew what was happening. It was checkmate and if she did get help there was no way of saying that Connor was in worse trouble behind her.

The gunman started talking, "What's wrong little girl, is it hard to breathe? Don't worry I won't kill you now, I'm waiting for your parents. Thanks for calling by the way, you're really making my life so easy."

Ray kicked and tried to loosen his grip, but he was too strong, and she was running out of air. She wondered what these men wanted with her parents, but her parents were cops, they had to have put them away and now these men wanted revenge.

Her parents came running in the room. They weren't surprised to see Ray almost being strangled to death. They must have known by the way their phone call ended. Ray held strong and prayed, for her sake and for Connor's. She couldn't lose Connor.

"Let her go or we will shoot," yelled Ray's Dad.

"You think I'm afraid of you just because you put me in prison? You know what kept me going? It was the knowing that you two were out there breathing and your daughters were the closest thing to you. This is revenge and now you'll know how it feels to have everything taken away from you."

Ray's Mom had enough, and she shot the gunman's forearm on the hand that was strangling Ray's throat. And Ray's dad immediately cuffed the man, but they were too late and too distracted. Ray knew it the second the gun went off. Connor.

Ray ripped the tape off her mouth and tried to yell but she could barely breathe. She ran to Connor in pure sorrow and shock. She'd just lost her best friend and a part of herself forever.

Chapter 2 – Same World, Different Day

Sabrina was sick to her stomach, tests were never her favorite, especially math. Sabrina always thought math would be easier in 10th grade or maybe her sixteen-year-old brain would know how to do it better after all these years but she was wrong, year after year. It always got harder.

What did make it easier was her best friend Shawn. He was a math wiz and often at lunch or after school he would help her with math. In exchange for the math help, Sabrina would help Shawn with English. Words were Sabrina's thing and numbers were definitely Shawn's thing.

"Hey, you ready Bri? I can see your nerves without even looking at you. I thought you were leaving them at home today," said Shawn with a smile.

Sabrina didn't even need to look behind her, she knew it was Shawn because for one, no one called her Bri except Shawn. Not even her parents or her sister; Sabrina enjoyed it though, she'd never had a good friend until she met Shawn, so she always figured it was something close friends did. And two, nobody could read Sabrina like Shawn, let alone tease her about it.

"Very funny Shawn. No, the nerves came with me today as I'm sure yours did too," answered Sabrina.

"Eh, I've had a good assistant English teacher. Apparently, I'm not as good at it as her," replied Shawn jokingly.

"You're a decent teacher, it seems I just need a mental coach too," said Sabrina.

Shawn stopped walking and looked Sabrina in the eye, "Bri, you're going to do great. I know you don't fail, and I never fail which means my student will never fail. Everything will go well. After today, we're off to New York for the school trip so keep that in your head. And remember one + one = two."

Sabrina couldn't help but laugh, "Thank you Shawn. Really helps a lot, especially the reminder of kindergarten math. And who said I'm your student?"

Shawn just chuckled as they walked into the last test of the week. The last hard thing before New York. Sabrina couldn't wait for New York; her parents didn't feel the same though.

Chapter 3 – A Parent’s Intuition

“How was your day? How’d the test go?” said Sabrina’s Dad right when she walked in the door.

Sabrina set her things down and flopped on the couch, “Good, I think. I’m just glad it’s over. Why are you home? Shouldn’t you be at the precinct?”

After all Sabrina’s parents were both cops and always at work it seemed. Sabrina was never used to seeing her Dad at home at 3:30 on a Friday.

“I took the afternoon off to enjoy time with you before you’re off to New York on Sunday. Your Mom couldn’t get the time off, so she’ll be home at 10. Just you and me kiddo,” answered Sabrina’s Dad.

“Why are you so worried about New York, Dad?” I’m 16, two teachers will be there, Shawn will be there, and it is just for 3 days. It really is no big deal,” said Sabrina.

“I know honey, but after what happened to your sister and that boy Connor, your Mom and I just can’t help ourselves but worry. Once you become a parent, you’ll get it.”

To Sabrina, it always felt like that incident was always put on her. Her sister left 2 weeks later after she was almost killed and started a new life in New York. And Sabrina’s parents were always worried about Ray, so they placed that worry on Sabrina. Sabrina didn’t understand all their worry about Ray because she was now 23, a grown woman and that day was ages ago. But to her parents, it was like it was yesterday.

It was like Sabrina’s Dad caught her thought, right then he said, “Oh and Sabrina, call your sister. She’ll meet you at the airport on Sunday. And she needs you just as you need her.”

“If she needed me, she’d know there’s a button on her phone that can press, Call Sabrina,” answered Sabrina who was visibly annoyed.

“Sabrina, your sister’s just busy. She loves you more than you know, and she thinks about you every day, call her ok?”

“I don’t know about that. But yes, I’ll call her,” said Sabrina.

“20 more seconds,” Ray thought as she punched all her problems away. Boxing was Ray’s best friend or her only friend really. Besides her Uncle John; he taught her all she knew about physical combat and being strong.

“Time,” yelled Uncle John.

“Ahhh, that was good,” said Ray as she regained her breath.

“Yeah you’re really using your hips now. That’s where all the power is.”

Ray smiled which was a rare feat at this point, “Since the day I knocked on your door when I was 18, 5 years ago, you’ve probably said that sentence about where the power comes from 2 million times.”

Uncle John loved Ray’s quick wit, “Well, obviously saying it all those times has finally worked.”

“Ding, Ding, Ding,” barked Ray’s phone.

“It’s Sabrina,” said Ray.

“Take it, you never call her enough anyway,” encouraged Uncle John.

Chapter 4 - Reconnection

“Hey sis, what’s up?” said Ray nervously.

“Hey, nothing really. Finished my math test today, hopefully I did well. Um, so Dad wanted me to call you and remind you I’m coming to New York Sunday night,” said Sabrina quickly.

“Yeah, I remember. When do you land?” answered Ray.

“8:30pm.”

“I’ll be there, who else is coming?” questioned Ray.

Sabrina was in shock a little. It was a long time since Ray asked about Sabrina’s class mates or her life in general. It wasn’t that Ray didn’t care, it was more like she was always too busy to spend time thinking about it. And after the shooting, Ray had changed into a completely different person. So, Sabrina was a little bit happy that her sister wanted to know something and even asked her a question.

“Um, Shawn my best friend or only friend really. And Roy who’s always into his phone, Tessa who’s, you know, the typical high school girl, Camille who’s the shyest person you’ll ever meet, Noah who’s decent but super boring, Ariel who seems to be friends with the whole school and Levi who’s just an idiot,” answered Sabrina.

“Oh ok. Love your descriptions. I remember those days like it was yesterday. So, who’s Shawn tell me about him,” asked Ray.

Wow, Ray was really trying, and Sabrina was happy about it, so she gave a little more energy, “We’ve been friends since the first day of our freshman year. We knew nobody in the school, and we had a conversation at lunch about different kinds of peanut butter or something and

here we are today. He's funny, very good at math but not so good in English, kind, and a tad cocky," said Sabrina with a smile on her face.

"Sounds like a nice kid. I'm glad you have a good friend in your life. Sabrina look, I'm sorry I haven't been there for you and I'm sorry I haven't been the big sister you've needed. No more excuses, I want to be there for you, and I will put in lots of effort to repair our relationship. I want you to know that I think of you every day and I love you more than you could know; I've just needed to adjust to this new person I've become," said Ray honestly.

"Wow, Dad was right. He told me something very similar to that. Ray, I forgive you and I know you went through a lot, but I needed you. You just left for no reason and barely called for years," answered Sabrina.

"I know and I'm sorry, I really am. I don't know how much that counts for, but I promise to be better and to be there for you now, if you'll let me. Fresh start?" asked Ray.

Sabrina took a deep breath, "Yes fresh start, only if you tell me what you've been doing for 5 years and if you let me get to know the real person you've become."

"It'd be easier if I showed you," said Ray.

"What do you mean?" questioned Sabrina.

"Well when you come to New York, why don't you stay the first night with me and Uncle John? You know I live with him, right?" asked Ray.

"Yeah I know. Ok, I think that's allowed. Can Shawn come too? He'll be lost without me." asked Sabrina.

Ray thought about it for a second. It would be better if Shawn didn't come because her secret was a precious one. And Ray didn't need to be reminded of Connor and who she was back then. But she was trying to be a better sister and Ray knew relationships were about sacrifice so she said, "Yeah he can come."

"Thank you. Alright, I have to go. See you Sunday! Love you," said Sabrina.

"Say hi to Mom and Dad for me. Love you too. Bye," answered Ray.

Sabrina sat down on her bed. Across the country Ray sat on the floor. They both took a deep breath and tried to calm their thoughts. For Sabrina, she wondered what the heck Ray was doing and who she'd become. Sabrina knew her Uncle John was ex-military, but Ray couldn't have done anything like that. Or could she? And for Ray, she was about to reveal her secret to her little sister. She hoped it'd be easier than it was to tell her parents but the knot in Ray's

stomach said otherwise. They both would find out in two days; those two days would be some long days.

Chapter 5 - Planning

“Sabrina, we’ve got to go, get your stuff,” said Sabrina’s Mom.

It was finally Sunday night and time to head off to New York. Sabrina had been anxiously waiting for this day for what felt like an eternity. She hadn’t told her parents about her phone call with Ray. Sabrina figured they already knew what Ray had become and what she was doing; she knew it was probably the reason they worried so much. Sabrina didn’t need her parents worrying anymore and she really wanted to move forward with Ray; so she kept their conversation between the two of them. Well, it was about to be between the three of them.

“Hi Mr. and Mrs. Larsson. Earth to Bri, hello? You look out of it,” said Shawn.

“Hey Shawn, sorry I was just lost in thought. You ready?” said Sabrina who was obviously still thinking about Ray. She hadn’t yet told Shawn that they were staying the night at her sister’s tonight, but the plan was to tell him on the plane.

Sabrina said long goodbyes to her parents and found her seat on the plane next to Shawn. Thankfully the aisle seat wasn’t taken so they had the whole row to themselves. Sabrina was happy about that because she wanted to keep Ray and Ray’s secret as private as possible.

But before she could tell Shawn anything the weirdest thing happened.

“Shawn, where are Mr. Bryce and Mrs. Patel? They should definitely be here by now, we’re about to take off,” said Sabrina worriedly because without their teachers they were just a group of teenage kids who’d be completely lost in New York; completely.

Before Shawn could answer, a man and a woman started walking down the aisle and stopped when they found all the students, “Hello everyone, we are Mr. and Mrs. Smith. We’ll be your teachers for this trip.”

Sabrina’s words were her thing, she could turn her words into a weapon. In this case, her weapon was needed, so she used it, “So, up until 10 minutes ago Mr. Bryce and Mrs. Patel were our teachers and for no reason you two were subbed in?”

Mr. and Mrs. Smith lowered down on their knees and stared right at Sabrina, “Sweetheart, let the grown-ups worry about that stuff. If you must know, Mr. Bryce and Mrs. Patel weren’t feeling good and decided it better not to come.”

Sabrina did not appreciate being talked to like a 2-year-old. But she nodded like she understood; she didn't. She was the daughter of two cops, and she knew when things were fishy. This was definitely not right. Sabrina had planned on telling her teachers she'd be staying the first night at her sister's but now with these two apparent "teachers" she stayed silent instead. She would've even texted Ray, but they were already taking off and it was too late; the timing of all of this seemed too perfect to be so simple.

Sabrina tapped Shawn on the shoulder and motioned for him to look down at her phone she was typing on.

"Read the words I'm writing here. Don't react outwardly, write down your responses on your phone. Got it?"

Shawn wrote on his phone, "Yes, the teachers switch is very weird. I've never seen them in my life."

"I'll get to the teachers part in a second. Obviously, it isn't right, and they are not teachers. But first I have something to tell you. I was going to tell you verbally and tell Mr. Bryce and Mrs. Patel but I'm not saying a word to these two. My sister Ray is trying to repair our relationship and she has a big secret to tell. She always tells me she's changed and become a different person and now she's finally ready to show me. She's picking us up from the airport and we're going to stay the night at her house the first night. Or maybe all the nights now since we have no real teachers. You with me so far?" typed Sabrina.

Shawn quickly wrote back, "I'm with you. What do you mean she's changed though?"

"I have no idea. All I know is that she's been living with my Uncle John who is ex-military and all she told me was that it'd be easier to show me who she is than if she said it. So, I don't know. But I know my parents do because they're always worried about her. Anyways, the "teachers". Don't say a word to them. When we land, I need you to follow me. We're going to sneak away. They're in front of us so if we are careful, we can take the back exit right as we land. We're going to need to stay crouched and somehow keep all the students from noticing us."

Shawn waited a sec before he typed back, "There's a restroom is in the back, right?"

Sabrina knew that would work, if they said they needed the bathroom and quickly made it to the exit that was right next to the bathroom it would work. No one paid attention to kids anyways so they should be fine. She typed back, "Great idea. Yeah, we'll front as if we need to use the bathroom. You'll go in and I'll wait outside. Don't lock the door. I'll knock when it's time and then just follow me. From there, we make it to my sister and get to her place as soon as we can. I'll text my sister as soon as we land that something is weird and that we need to go as soon as she sees us. Do you understand everything?"

Shawn typed back, "Yes. Just follow you, apparently I'm the student now."

Sabrina appreciated the humor Shawn always brought but especially now, she needed it. She typed back, "You've always been the student."

Shawn couldn't help but laugh. But that laugh faded for it hit them both that in 2 hours, they'd have to actually put this plan into action. A plan that adults would have a hard time executing, let alone sixteen-year-olds. There could be no mistakes; they had to be perfect. That was the scary part.

Chapter 6 - Executing

"Mrs. Smith, we need to use the restroom," said Sabrina trying to act as normal as possible.

"Fine," said Mrs. Smith only paying half attention while she scrolled through her phone. This was exactly what Sabrina had hoped for. Her Dad always told her carelessness was the biggest mistake of all. And then her Mom would always add that all there was to being a cop was eyes, ears and care. Sabrina tried to stay focused on that as she walked behind a nervous Shawn to the restroom Shawn was rarely nervous, but she could tell just by the way he walked and the energy coming from him that he was nervous, and Sabrina couldn't blame him. But she had to be strong for both of them; this had to work.

Shawn entered the bathroom and shut the door without locking it as Sabrina had instructed. Locking and unlocking the door would take more time and create too much noise, this was all about being sneaky and time was of the essence. Sabrina surveyed the environment, found the exit, made sure no one was paying attention and then she knocked on the door. Shawn silently and quickly opened the door, turned right and followed Sabrina's footsteps.

They were off the plane running through the tunnel that would lead to the gate at the JFK airport. "Bri, you texted your sister, right?" said Shawn in a low voice.

"Yes, she said she'd be right there and to just follow her. No talking; just get to the car. And that everything would be ok." answered Sabrina.

That run through the tunnel, in reality, was around one minute but to Shawn and Sabrina it felt like an eternity. Their hearts were pounding, adrenaline was pumping, and their minds were running with thoughts.

They made it to the end of the tunnel and Sabrina motioned for Shawn to stop. This needed to seem as normal as possible or else the flight attendants would question them. Or another option was to act like they weren't even there. Sabrina decided on option number two; to not to be seen. She waited until she saw Ray and then she made a move with Shawn close on her heels.

They turned the corner, crouched down and slowly and quietly tip toed behind the row of chairs. Once they made it to the end of the row of chairs Sabrina entered the restrooms that

were right on the corner of the gate and took a deep breath. Now to the outside world it looked like Sabrina was in the restroom and Shawn was waiting for her.

Ray watched everything; she may have been on her phone but that was only to look disinterested. She noticed all of it. She was proud of her sister for following her gut and staying calm while taking a risk. But Ray was also worried that the situation was worse than she'd thought because just then her past came back to haunt her.

Chapter 7 – Sneak Peek

Sabrina exited the restroom and started walking normally with Shawn toward her sister until she saw Mr. and Mrs. Smith talking to the flight attendants. Ray was across the room and Sabrina and Shawn weren't as good as Ray at this type of stuff, so Ray motioned for them to stop and stay by the restroom and she walked over.

"Nice to meet you Shawn, hey sis. Follow me, and then we talk in the car. You've got to trust me," said Ray in a hurry.

Sabrina and Shawn nodded but Sabrina knew Ray was hiding something. Ray knew something Sabrina didn't and that scared her. But she followed her sister, Ray seemed like she knew what she was doing.

Ray knew exactly what she was doing. She'd been in the airport before but never in this gate. What she did know was that all her training was going to come in handy right now and that Sabrina would get a sneak peek into her secret. She couldn't be too crazy though, or else she'd be noticed by the insane amount of people that surrounded them. Then it dawned on Ray, use the people to hide. Crowds were the best way to hide – as her Uncle John always said it was human camouflage.

Ray scanned the inside of the restrooms; 2 people inside so that meant they had about 10 seconds. Shawn obviously made this whole problem a lot harder but in 10 seconds a lot could be done. She motioned for Sabrina and Shawn to follow, they entered the restroom and quickly but calmly scurried to the last stall and locked the door. Ray opened her phone and started typing, "Once this restroom clears out, we're going to exit, go straight and make a left at the coffee shop. Follow me through the back door, if anyone questions, Sabrina, you handle it. Words are your thing. Normally there's a staff elevator in the back that takes you down to the parking lot. We'll take that down and grab a car. Got it?"

Sabrina grabbed the phone from Ray's hands, "Great plan but why steal the car and how do you know how to do that? You have your own car."

"I told you I changed. Just trust me," Ray typed back. Time was key here and if they didn't hurry, they were going to collide with the rest of the students. So, Ray unlocked the door and the three of them exited the restroom, walked casually to the coffee shop and sneaked through the back. Well, they almost did.

“Hey, what are you three doing back here? This is for staff only.”

Sabrina had a plan; she calmly and a tad cockily said back, “Um, Alison is giving us a tour of the shop before we start tomorrow. Is that allowed sir?”

The man obviously looked a little surprised, but he wasn’t done yet, “So, Alison are you new here already giving tours?”

“No, I was transferred here. I worked in the same store at the LaGuardia airport. I worked there for 3 years and I’m excited to be working here at JFK now,” said Ray casually and with confidence.

This seemed to convince the man, so he nodded and let them go. He went back to the front which left them alone with one other person across the room who was focused on his cooking. They quickly got in the elevator took it all the way down to the parking lot and jumped out.

This was Ray’s time to shine. She took the pocket knife out of her pocket, found the nearest car to her and twisted the lock on the driver’s seat. It opened without an alarm going off which Ray knew would happen. Sabrina and Shawn, however, were a little in shock and very nervous. Ray told them to jump in as she unlocked the car from the inside and then she took out the other knife her Uncle John gave her for emergencies like this.

“Start talking,” said Ray who was high on adrenaline.

“Before I do, how the hell did you do that? And so easily? And why do we need to steal a car?” said Sabrina who was obviously surprised that her sister started a car without a key and without setting an alarm.

“Told you it’d be easier to show you. That’s the beginning we’ll get to the rest when we get home. And my car is miles away from here and we don’t have time to go get it. Now talk,” answered Ray.

“Um, literally right before we were about to take off Mr. and Mrs. Smith walked on board and said a last-minute decision was made because Mr. Bryce and Mrs. Patel weren’t feeling well. Total lie. They said nor did anything on the plane. Never got up once. That’s all we know,” said Sabrina.

“First thing you should both know, that is not Mr. and Mrs. Smith. That’s Mr. and Mrs. Hudson; Connor’s parents. They must be here for some type of revenge,” answered Ray whose adrenaline was coming down. She hated being reminded of that day and now obviously she was going to be reminded of it a lot.

“Who are Connor’s parents? Who is Connor?” asked a curious Shawn.

Ray took a deep breath and tried to block out the event replaying itself in her head over and over again. But right as she was about to answer Sabrina stepped in for her, “That’s why you left. That’s why you’ve changed. Connor was Ray’s best friend. In her senior year there was a school shooting and she survived almost being strangled to death and Connor was shot.”

It all made sense now. Sabrina wondered how she hadn’t thought of it sooner. Ray didn’t leave for no reason, Ray left because she was lost. And she went to the busiest state to hide and lose a part of herself, the part of herself who could be strangled.

Chapter 8 – All Secrets Aside

“Welcome home,” said Ray as she opened the door into Uncle John’s apartment that she’d been living in for five years.

Sabrina’s mouth was agape. Shawn was probably in shock too, but Sabrina wasn’t paying attention to him at the moment. Her attention was on the “apartment” her sister had been living in. There was no living a room, a tiny kitchen, two small mattresses in the corner and one bathroom in the back. The apartment was taken over by computers, boxing bags, and lots and lots of guns. It looked more like a miniature lair, a secret hideout rather than an apartment.

“What the hell do you guys do? What is all of this?” asked Sabrina who was in pure shock.

“Well, Sabrina I was never in the military, I worked in a secret government agency called G.A.S (government agency system) as a soldier. I’d do anything from being a spy, to physical combat to killing. Whatever I was told to do, I did. My contract was up six years ago and then a year later your sister came here and asked to learn to be strong and to be able to know how to defend herself,” said her Uncle John as if what he just said was super normal.

“He trained me and eventually we started our own version of helping the city, helping people. I fight, Uncle John handles the computers,” said Ray but before she could finish Sabrina interrupted.

“What? So, you almost died one day and now you risk your life every single night? Why? Ray, you’re going to get yourself killed,” asked Sabrina with worry consuming her body. Now she understood why her parents were always nervous about her.

“Sabrina, I do this because of that night. I lost my best friend because I was too weak to do anything, I was helpless. I couldn’t save him, and I didn’t save myself. I just stood there, without breath and praying for help. Do you know how that feels? I was too weak, too small to do anything. So, when I came here, I knew Uncle John would be able to teach me something, but it was supposed to be a temporary escape. I got really good and I couldn’t stop. Training wasn’t enough, I realized that I could do more than defend myself. I could help people, I could make sure that what happened to Connor, what almost happened to me wouldn’t happen to anyone else,” said Ray with a fire behind her eyes.

This time Shawn stepped in, “This is like a movie. What do you, like catch the bad guys, leave them for the police and run back here every night?”

Sabrina added, “Or do you kill?” At this point nothing would surprise Sabrina, so she flat out asked it. She wasn’t angry, she just felt so left out and so small; her sister was a fighter, a warrior and Sabrina was just a high school student getting through the days.

“Sabrina, really? No, we don’t kill. That would defeat the purpose of why we are even doing this. Shawn, yeah we do that pretty much every night,” said Ray who was a little upset with her sister. She understood why Sabrina could think that because her world was probably turning upside down, but Ray couldn’t help but feel a little hurt.

Shawn seemed to be loving this; it was like his childhood fantasies were actually real and never really just fiction in a movie. So, he asked, “Do you have like a code name?”

Ray couldn’t help but laugh, “Yeah, it’s Gemini. Connor was a Gemini and so am I. So, every time I go out there it reminds me what I’m doing this for, who I’m doing this for.”

“Ray, we have a problem,” said Uncle John who during this whole conversation let Ray do the explaining while he was focused on the three screens in front of him.

“What?” said Ray inching closer to the screen.

“Robbery on 3rd street,” said Uncle John super calmly.

“On it, talk me through on the way,” answered Ray but before she could go Sabrina couldn’t help herself.

“Ray, we have bigger problems than a robbery. The Hudsons remember? And them wanting revenge,” said Sabrina with a little attitude.

“Sabrina, we don’t leave anything because we have bigger issues. Anything that comes up is a big deal. It’ll be fine, you’ll get to see me in action and then we’ll handle the Hudsons,” said Ray obviously in a hurry to get going.

Chapter 9 - Teamwork

Sabrina shouldn’t have been surprised by the fact that Ray could drive a motorcycle too. Of course, vigilantes and heroes had to have a motorcycle. Sabrina and Shawn stood right next to Uncle John who was busy doing his computer thing.

“What are you doing?” said Sabrina.

“Gemini, make a left on Baker and then straight until you see the light. Turn right and you’ll see the bank. Sabrina, I’m hacking traffic cams and security cams to get a location on the robbers. I’m trying to get a thermal reading on the building to see how many bodies are inside and if there are any hostages. Gemini, where are you?”

“I’m here. Where are they? So far, it’s clear. Any hostages?” whispered Ray.

“Look for the door to your far right. They should be in there. Looks like three bodies, no hostages.”

“Three bodies! How is she going to fight three people?” screamed Sabrina. She figured she wasn’t being helpful, but she couldn’t help herself, this was so crazy to her.

“Watch,” said Uncle John with a smile on his face.

Ray put her head to the door, she heard typing, lots of fast typing. She whispered into her comms, “There’s no cash back there. They’re robbing digitally. You do your hacking thing, I’ll get them out of there.”

“Got it,” answered Uncle John.

Ray opened the door and did her thing. She kicked the first guy hard and right in the stomach, then ducked avoiding a punch from the second guy she then jumped up on him twisted her legs around his throat and flipped to the ground knocking him unconscious. One down, two to go. She needed to get the guy off the computer, she shot the first guy in the arm to keep him off her long enough. She grabbed the guy on the computer by his throat and flipped him over her head knocking him straight to the ground. He got up but was so out of it, she kicked back to the ground and quickly tied the two guys together. The guy she shot was the only one left, so she kicked him right where she had shot him and he howled in pain. Then she tied him to the other two men and ran away before the police found her.

“Did you fix the money problem? I’m done here. Guys are tied up ready for the police. On my way back,” said Ray into her comms as she rode back home on her motorcycle.

“Yup, money’s back where it should be. Good work,” said Uncle John proudly.

“You guys are quite a team,” said Sabrina a little shocked but also in awe.

“Well, you can be good at anything in three years. And we do it every night so it’s easy now. Your sister does the hard stuff, this is easy. She’s stronger than you know Sabrina; this was nothing,” said Uncle John proudly.

Chapter 10 – Truth Hurts

Ray walked in with pep in her step, “Now onto the Hudsons problem. Do you have anything yet?”

“Wait wait. You just stopped a robbery, it is midnight and we’re already on to the next thing?” said Sabrina who was obviously new to this whole thing.

“You said it yourself, the Hudsons were a big problem. We have no time to waste. Do you have anywhere else to be?” answered Ray cockily.

Sabrina didn’t like the attitude from her sister so she threw it right back at her, “Actually I’d like to see my sister who cared about how I was feeling and maybe just maybe would put herself in my shoes. Ray, you lied to me for years, years! And it wasn’t a small thing you were lying about; you say you want to repair our relationship and be there for me. Let me tell you, you’re off to a horrible start.”

Sabrina stormed off and left the apartment. It probably wasn’t the smartest idea with the Hudsons out there looking for her, but she didn’t care; she was steaming. It wasn’t just the years of lying that was bothering her, it was the lie her sister was telling now. Ray said she wanted to be there for her and that she was sorry for not being there in the past but how was Sabrina supposed to believe things would change? Ray was already popping off at her and she was literally risking her life every single night. How could Sabrina believe that Ray cared about her and thought about her apparently every single day if Ray was actually busy almost dying every night?

Ray was, well she didn’t know how she felt actually. She forgot how good Sabrina was with words; they cut like a knife. Ray knew she’d messed up with Sabrina and she felt bad, she really did. But how was she supposed to have told Sabrina what she was doing when Ray herself didn’t quite know what she was doing? Ray did know that she should’ve been the best sister possible even when she was becoming Gemini. It wasn’t fair to Sabrina to just leave her and not be there for her in important years in her life. That was what stung the most for Ray and she couldn’t have imagined how it made Sabrina feel.

Ray was about to walk out and talk to Sabrina, but Shawn stopped her, “Ray, let me handle this.”

“What? No,” Ray pushed passed him, but he was persistent and grabbed her arm.

“Ray, listen to me. I’ve been in her life, I know her. That sounds rude but I think you get my point. Look, I think what you are doing is very cool and brave; I know Bri feels the same. But that doesn’t take away from the fact that you weren’t the best sister to her. I know you were going through a lot but if I had a little sister like Bri I would’ve been there no matter what. That is what is hurting her right now, she’ll get over it, but she needs time. It may not be my place to say all this, but you can blame Bri for that.”

Ray was admittedly annoyed. She didn't like being talked to like that by a sixteen-year-old boy who didn't know her or all that she went through. But what she did like was someone who stuck up for sister and she wasn't going to make things worse and attack her friend too. Even though the words stung and were echoing in her head, she just shook her head and let him go.

Chapter 11 – Facing Feelings

“Get me all you know about Connor’s parents, now,” said Ray aggressively.

“You ok? I think you should take a sec. I’ll handle this, just reset,” said Uncle John who couldn’t help but be a little worried about her.

Ray lost it, she slammed her fists on the table in pure anger, “Do you think I’m ok? I don’t have time to take a sec or reset. We are being hunted down for no reason and my sister hates me.”

Uncle John cut her off, “That’s not it. There’s more.” Uncle John understood Ray. He’d been in positions like hers many times when he was an agent for G.A.S. If he learned anything, it was that he wished he would’ve had a friend or anyone really who pushed him to open up and to release his feelings before it clouded his judgement on the field. Ray was tough as nails, he knew that. But he also knew that if she didn’t face her feelings it didn’t matter what they found on Connor’s parents because you cannot beat your enemies if you can’t beat your own demons first.

Ray took a deep breath and fought back tears. Ray never cried so Uncle John gave her his hundred and ten percent focus, “You’re right. I knew when Sabrina came down, I’d be reminded of him and that day. But I simply thought we’d get to catch up and I’d tell her my secret, we’d become closer and things would be great. I was completely wrong because now she’s upset with me and she deserves to be but on top of that instead of being reminded of him I am literally overwhelmed with it. I can’t get it out of my head, the gun shot, no breath, the fear it’s all right there. Like all my training was for nothing because I’m still weak enough to let that day take me over.”

Uncle John grabbed her hand and put his other hand on her shoulder. He looked into her eyes, “Ray, look at me. You are not weak; tears are not weak. You are one of the strongest people I’ve ever met. Just tonight, you were feeling all of this and you fought off three men and stopped a robbery; there are no other twenty-three-year-old women out there who do that. That day with Connor I know you think you were weak but if you were weak you would’ve sat in grief and done nothing about it. You took a risk, came all the way to New York on your own and started a new journey to be a better person. That takes serious strength.”

The two embraced and Ray took a deep breath. Expressing emotions were not Ray’s thing at all and Uncle John knew it. So, he let go and jumped on his computers. Ray leaned over him and

described all she knew about them. Ray figured that Connor's parents most likely blamed her parents for Connor's death now that both gunman from the shooting were dead. Why did they blame her parents? It didn't make sense to Ray but to Uncle John it did.

"Grief does strange things to people. It bends their mind and plays with their emotions. The Hudsons most likely blame your parents because they were so focused on saving you that they didn't think twice about who else could be in the room. And probably that they didn't send in other cops into that room since they were the lead officers in that mission. That's my guess. Now, they're trying to hurt your parents by killing both you and Sabrina as revenge; they're taking everything away from your parents because they feel like your parents took everything away from them."

"That's ridiculous. I get that grief does strange things to people, I've experienced it. But blaming my parents is like grasping for straws," answered Ray.

"Well, I have their plan," said Uncle John.

"How bad?" answered Ray.

"There is a scheduled tour of NYU tomorrow. Look at this blueprint," said Uncle John who was now beginning to understand how much revenge these two wanted.

"Wait, why are there two kids in the library and six all the way across the hall in a different room?" questioned Ray who wasn't quite getting it.

Then it dawned on her, "No, they can't be," said Ray.

"What?" answered Uncle John who didn't understand.

"They're going to take Sabrina and Shawn to the library separate from the rest of the class. And then recreate the same scenario we were in; strangle Sabrina and point the gun at Shawn's head. As terrifying as that is, what is more terrifying is the fact that they know I'll save Sabrina or else they wouldn't have made this plan. But how?" said Ray who was still confused.

"Maybe because they've been tracking Sabrina's location via her phone," said Uncle John.

"Ok, but that doesn't make sense. Location doesn't reveal that I'd save her. And it's not like they'd just on the fly make this plan," questioned Ray.

"Oh my god. The jacket, god dammit why didn't we think of it sooner? The jacket you fight in every night that the Hudsons gave you at Connor's funeral, the zipper is not just a zipper, it's a camera."

Chapter 12 – Lean On

Sabrina needed some fresh air. She didn't think it was the smartest plan to leave the apartment because of the Hudsons but she needed a minute to be alone. She knew her sister was really trying to be a better sister to her, and Sabrina thought she could leave the past behind but obviously it was still hurting her.

Shawn made his way to Sabrina and scooted next to her on the ledge of the sidewalk while the trees swayed in the cool night or at this point early morning breeze.

"You know, I really thought I could move on from the past and I thought the hurt of Ray leaving me and basically dumping me as a sister didn't still hurt but obviously it does," said Sabrina as she stared at the floor and fought back tears.

Bri never cried so Shawn gave his one hundred and ten percent attention energy, "Don't be so hard on yourself, it'd be weird if you weren't hurting. But Bri, I think it's more than that."

"You're right. I guess I feel like I don't even know her anymore. I knew she had a big secret to tell and I get why she waited to tell me. I definitely wouldn't have been ready to hear all that even a year ago and I know she didn't really know what she was doing but for some reason I'm still hurt. And I blame myself because I should've reached out to her and attempted to mend things because obviously, she was very much alone and going through hard times. But at this point we've been out of each other's lives for years that'd it be easier to leave it that way, I guess what I'm afraid of is getting to know her and getting really close and then losing her all over again. Not like she'd dump me because I know she regrets it and I know she'd never do it again but as in dying since she is literally visiting death daily," answered Sabrina.

Shawn turned to his left to face her, "You know, when you sat next to me at lunch that very first day of our freshman year, I had no intentions of making friends. I just wanted to power through school and make it through the days as fast as I could. I thought it would be easier to do that if I wasn't distracted by friends and being hurt by friends. So, I shut down; I wasn't myself, I was just getting through it. And when you said hi to me that day and sat next to me at lunch, I brought up peanut butter because I figured it was so boring and the weirdest of topics that you'd distance yourself. Turns out I met the one person who thought peanut butter was interesting. What I mean is that I met the one person who understood me, out of two thousand kids you sat next to me and wanted to get to know me even though I was too afraid to be open. I'd never met anyone like that."

"Wow, looks like your English teacher really came through," answered Sabrina who was shocked that Shawn felt all those things. Somewhere inside of her, she knew their friendship was meant to be and that he felt some of those things but hearing him put it in words meant a lot to her.

"Yeah, it's about time she came through. My point is even if you're afraid to be open let Ray be the one who wants to get to know you and who is open about who she really is. Then you'll get

to a point where you trust her enough that you won't even think about not being fully one thousand percent yourself. That's my experience at least."

Sabrina smiled, "Thank you. For everything, Shawn. That goes a long way."

Shawn stood up and put his hand out to help Sabrina up, "Anytime."

Chapter 13 – The Past Becomes The Now

Sabrina and Shawn made their way back up to the apartment and Sabrina had a feeling Ray and Uncle John had found something out based on the looks on their faces, "What do you have on the Hudsons?"

"A lot actually. Number one, they've been tracking your location based off your phone. I would destroy it or leave it somewhere weird but then they'll know we're on to them. Number two, they've been tracking me with a hidden camera in the zipper of my jacket that I fight in every night. It's funny, I wear that jacket because they gave it to me at his funeral five years ago as a way to always remember Connor, yet they've been playing me all along and I was too naïve to look into it. I took care of it though, the jacket is in the parking garage, somewhere they'll figure is an accurate enough location for me to be in so they won't suspect anything. Anyways, by far our biggest problem is we have their plan. And it is not good," answered Ray.

"How bad is the plan?" replied Shawn.

Ray couldn't really get the words out and Uncle John could sense it, so he stepped in, "Imagine this for a second. The day Connor was shot, the two gunmen played a very good game of chess. One of them strangled Ray and taped her mouth so she couldn't speak on one side of the library and on the complete other side of the library the other gunman taped Connor's mouth and pointed the gun at his head. So, when Ray was saved Connor was immediately shot."

"And now they're going to recreate the same scene with Shawn and I," interjected Sabrina.

"Well, they're going to try. We have to stop them. Tomorrow there is a scheduled tour for all of you guys at NYU and they're going to separately take you two to the library," answered Uncle John.

"Why am I involved in this? They could've picked any other boy," said Shawn who wasn't quite getting it.

This time Ray spoke up, "Because you are close to Sabrina and they believe that even if they let Sabrina live a part of her will end up dying because you'll be gone. They believe that because it is exactly what happened to me. In their minds if Sabrina lives it'll be just as bad as her dying because they think she'll separate herself from Mom and Dad which will end up hurting them.

Exactly like I did. Obviously, they're going for lots of revenge so they're not going to flat out kill Mom and Dad without making them suffer first."

The room went quiet. They all felt as if they were at a loss. The fact that it was two thirty in the morning and that they were all emotionally exhausted didn't help. But they had no time to waste, they had to make a plan. One that would completely deceive two people who'd made this plan long in advance, who'd played them in every way, who wanted revenge more than they wanted their son back and who would do anything to get that revenge. All of their lives depended on it and at that moment they realized they were no longer individuals; they were a team.

Chapter 14 – Eight And A Half Hours

"So, the tour is at eleven in the morning, that's eight and half hours from now. Anyone have any ideas?" said Shawn who was trying to stay calm but underneath he was slightly freaking out.

Sabrina sensed it, "Shawn right now everything is fine, you're not going to die. Relax, we have eight and half hours like you said, and I know we're smart enough to think of a plan."

"Bri, I don't know if you've noticed but we're not exactly in a situation that we can relax about. We can't just do nothing and act all normal while we wait to escape death," answered Shawn.

"That's it, we need to act like it's a normal day. We need to fill the library. Crowds are human camouflage, if we crowd the library then then we have witnesses. And when you have witnesses it makes it hard to carry out a plan," said Ray who had that odd look on her face that made it seem like she was thinking a billion miles a minute.

"Yes, if we fill up the library with hundreds of kids, you and I can blend in on opposite sides of the building and even if they somehow get all the kids out of there we'd be there to save both Shawn and Sabrina," answered Uncle John.

"Is there any chance they'd change location last minute?" asked Ray.

"Possible, but I think at that point they'll be easy to track down and we can follow them. It says on the blueprint 12:10 so I assume that's when they'll take Shawn and Sabrina there. If we can get the students in at 12:05 and I'll hack into the thermal readings making it look like no one is there. We should be fine," answered Uncle John.

"You've never hacked thermal readings? How are you going to do that?" questioned Ray because until now she was pretty sure it was impossible to hack thermal readings.

"You're right. It'll take too much time. What I can do is make a false reading and override the system, that'll be easier," answered Uncle John.

“Great plan but what about the guns? We don’t need it to end up being a school shooting and it’ll end up being that way if they can’t kill Shawn and me. How do we get the guns out of there?” asked Sabrina.

“Can we get a location on the Hudsons right now?” asked Ray who knew their best bet of getting the guns off them would be now. If they waited until tomorrow, the guns would be on Mr. and Mrs. Hudson which would make extremely difficult for them to notice they lost their guns. Ray was hoping the guns were somewhere in their hotel room in a backpack or something, that would be the easiest way to take them.

“Hotel on 42nd street. I hacked into the hotel’s system to get the room number or numbers should I say, they were smart. One of them is in 226, another in 434. Thermal readings say there is a body in each. I bet you the guns are split up too; they most likely brought more than one each,” answered Uncle John.

“So, who’s going to come with me? And is there a way to track where the guns may specifically be?” asked Ray.

“Let’s deal with gun locations first. ATF is the only organization that traces all firearms. So, if I can hack their mainframe then I can get a location on the guns. The only problem is the ATF’s mainframe is very very hard to hack. We’re going to need time,” said Uncle John.

“We don’t have time! How long?” asked Sabrina with worry starting to completely engulf her.

“Two hours,” said Uncle John.

“Can you make that one hour?” ordered Ray who knew they definitely didn’t have two hours. But she also knew they needed a more accurate location on the guns, because if they just searched the hotel rooms without knowing what they were doing it would be easy to get caught. They also needed to know the amount of guns Mr. and Mrs. Hudson had on them because it was a very good possibility that they could snatch some guns but still miss some.

“I’ll do my best,” said Uncle John who got busy hacking.

Ray, Sabrina and Shawn stepped into the tiny kitchen to give Uncle John some space. Then Ray opened a random kitchen drawer filled with various types of ammo. She pulled out one tray that contained tons of rubber bullets. Sabrina had seen rubber bullets before since she was the daughter of two cops, but these looked different.

Ray could see her sister deep in thought eyeing the bullets, so she explained, “So, the guns. We can’t just take the guns and leave them with nothing because then they’ll know we’re on to them and they can come up with a different plan. We also can’t leave the guns without ammo because most likely they’ll check. So, the closest thing to real ammo is rubber bullets. It takes an extremely skilled shooter to tell the difference of the weight of bullets and I don’t think

these two are very skilled. If they shoot, it's going to hurt, so Uncle John and I created our own version basically. We put a black, almost foam like cover over the top of the bullets and then painted it gold so it makes look more like a real bullet. So, if you do get hit you really won't feel a thing."

"I had no idea you could basically make your own bullet," said Shawn.

"Of course we can," said Ray with a smile.

"Moving on from bullet talk, how are we going to fill the library?" asked Sabrina.

"That's the easy part. Social media, Uncle John can do that in a second. We'll make an announcement from teachers' accounts and then lock their account so you can't take down posts or upload new ones. And the fact that it's been raining hard for five days straight makes it a lot more believable. Easy, don't worry about that," answered Ray like it was a completely normal thing.

"Now the other problem, who's going to go with you to get the guns?" asked Shawn who was conflicted. He really didn't want to go, but he definitely didn't want Sabrina to go.

"We'll decide on that once he gets a location on the guns and how many. For now, you guys should sleep a little. In an hour we'll be on a tough tough mission," replied Ray.

"Yeah, except there is no chance we can fall asleep," answered Sabrina who was getting more nervous by the minute and knew Shawn felt the same.

Chapter 15 – Two Additions To The Team

"Four guns, four locations," said Uncle John with a sigh.

"Four locations! So, we're all going to have to go?" asked Sabrina who was no longer nervous, she was terrified.

"Yes. It would take way too much time if we didn't all go and it would be a lot easier for us to get caught. I hacked the hotel's security system to get a closer look. In Mr. and Mrs. Hudson's rooms there is one gun per safe. There is another gun in their car and the last gun is in room 234 in the safe," said Uncle John.

"Wait, can you zoom in on room 234?" questioned Sabrina who could see the body in the room, she just needed to see who.

Uncle John zoomed in and it only took Sabrina a second to register who it was, "That's Levi. Wow, they put a gun in a kid's safe?"

"Levi is the idiot, right?" asked Ray.

“Yup. He won’t even notice the person who goes in there,” said Sabrina.

“Ok, Sabrina you go into his room. I’ll go into the room on the same floor as you, Uncle John you go into the other room 434 and Shawn you take the car. Uncle John, we need a license plate on the car and codes for the safes. The codes I have a slight idea about. And Shawn I’m going to give you a quick lesson of how to unlock a car without making noise like I did earlier,” said Ray taking charge of the room.

“What do you mean you have an idea about the codes?” questioned Sabrina.

“This mission they’re on is about Connor so I assume one of them is his birthdate, another is the date of his death and the third I have no idea,” said Ray.

“Well, you’re right about the first two, Mr. Hudson’s room is 6197 which is Connor’s birthdate, Mrs. Hudson’s room is 6615 which is the day Connor died and Levi’s room is 1219,” said Uncle Ray who was quite honestly pretty impressed with his hacking skills.

“12:19 is the time Connor died,” said Ray quietly.

“Guys, we need to go, we’re running out of time. Sabrina don’t bring your phone. Any questions anybody?” asked Uncle John as he got up and opened another drawer full of something Sabrina couldn’t quite recognize.

“How are we going to take all the ammo out and replace it with the rubber? How do we get into the rooms? What do we do if someone wakes up? And is there any way this is a setup?” asked Sabrina who obviously had a lot on her mind.

Ray demonstrated how to remove the ammo and the reload the gun with the rubber bullets and then she answered the rest of the questions, “It’s three in the morning so no one will be at the front desk. We’ll grab some keys from housekeeping, us three will go together since we all need a key.”

Uncle John interjected, “If Levi wakes up or starts to move, you’re going to need to inject this into him. It’s a tranquilizer, you’ll get 20 minutes minimum and then he’ll wake up. And there is no possible way it is a setup, trust me.”

“And Shawn, you’ll be done before us. So, when you’re finished make your way back to where ever we have parked and wait. We can all do this, we’ll have comms. If you’re in trouble don’t panic, be smart and think. Just be quick, quiet and careful. Let’s go,” ordered Ray who was definitely the most confident of them all. She knew Sabrina, Shawn and Uncle John were forgetting their biggest advantage, the element of surprise.

Chapter 16 – It's Time

"We're here," said Uncle John as he parked their black mini-van in the lot across from the hotel valet.

They all got out of the car and Ray pulled Shawn to the side, "This is the license plate to the car and the location of it. Level 2, 16th spot down to the left. Be calm and take your time. If anyone asks anything, it's just that your parents left something in the car and you're here to get it. You remember what I taught you with the knife?"

"Yes. I got it. Good luck," answered Shawn as he shook Ray's hand. Ray was most nervous about Shawn. She hadn't known him that long and even though he had the easiest mission of all of them it was still asking a lot of him. It made her feel better that Sabrina trusted him because Ray knew Sabrina wouldn't waste her time with people she didn't believe in. And his boldness in speaking up for Sabrina showed that he was brave and willing to take risks. She just prayed he would execute the plan without a problem.

The four of them split off. Uncle John took the lead and Ray and Sabrina followed. Shawn took a separate route to the parking garage, so it looked like they all weren't together. Even though no one was at the valet there were cameras all around them, so they needed this to look super natural.

Sabrina, Ray and Uncle John entered the hotel. As predicted, there was nobody working at the front desk. But they needed a key to get into the elevator and into the rooms. The original plan was to steal a few cards from housekeeping, but they hadn't realized they would need a key to get into the elevator. Uncle John and Sabrina sat in the lobby that was just passed the front desk and close to the elevators. Uncle John got on his IPAD and turned all the security cameras off in the front desk area. Then Ray crept behind one of the desks, grabbed three cards and turned on the computer screen.

"I need a password for the computer," whispered Ray into her comms.

Uncle John hacked into the computer's frequency and unlocked it for her. The computer system was fairly easy, and she calmly but quickly got to the program of scanning new keys for the specific rooms they needed. When she was done, she put the cards in her pocket and Uncle John turned the security cameras back on once she was in the clear.

They jumped in the elevator and Uncle John handed out the tranquilizers and rubber/foam bullets. Ray handed out the specific keys to each person, "Sabrina, just stay calm and don't panic. If you're in trouble I'm a few doors down. Whenever you finish, get in the elevator and then talk to us. Go back to the van and wait, Shawn should be there. You got this."

"This is your stop guys. I'll see you in ten minutes," said Uncle John with a reassuring smile.

Ray and Sabrina got off. Thirty seconds later Uncle John did too at his stop a few floors above them. Sabrina went to her left, Ray to her right. Uncle John walked straight ahead and went right a few doors. They placed the keys on the doors, waited for the green light and quietly walked in the door. They slowly let go of it but left a stopper on the door so exiting would be easy.

All the rooms were laid out the same; bathroom on the first right, inside the bathroom was the closet with the safe and then the main area of the room took the rest of the space. There was one wall separating the bathroom/closet area from the main area, which was just enough to give them some privacy. Sabrina, Ray and Uncle John opened the bathroom doors quietly and located the safes keeping their ears open. The safe was programmed to make a sound when it was unlocked, so Ray and Sabrina waited according to plan and let Uncle John open them the other way; hacking.

“Clear,” whispered Uncle John into his comms.

All three guns were there. Ray, Sabrina and Uncle John grabbed the guns and unloaded the ammo. So far, there was no noise from anyone. They put the ammo in their pockets and slowly and quietly loaded the rubber/foam bullets.

Then Ray heard the crinkle of the sheets. She knew whoever was in that bed had woken up. Ray was the only person the Hudsons would recognize so she took extra caution. In that moment she was so glad she did. Ray had disguised herself; the red wig, pounds of makeup, acrylic nails and odd choice of clothing would definitely be enough to do the trick. But Ray still didn't plan on being seen. Her plan was to wait until Mr. Hudson came to the bathroom door. There was enough of an opening under the doors to stick her hand through and inject the tranquilizer in the side of his leg. Ray could tell it was Mr. Hudson by the sound of the footsteps nearing her.

“All done,” Sabrina whispered into her comms. She didn't hear from anyone, but her mission went smoothly and according to plan with no hiccups. She was finally able to breath but the fact that no one was responding definitely worried her. Sabrina did as her sister told her, she got off the elevator and calmly started making her way to the van.

Uncle John reloaded the gun with the rubber/foam bullets and locked the safe. There was no noise from Mrs. Hudson. He got up to leave the bathroom, but the corner of his eye caught the something sticking out of the hotel robe. He pulled out a small crinkled piece of paper and put it in his pocket. Uncle John quietly exited the hotel room without making a peep and made his way to the elevator.

It was time. Ray put one hand over her mouth to block the noise of her breathing and stuck one hand quietly under the door. She wasted no time in stabbing Mr. Hudson with the tranquilizer. He fell immediately to the ground only seeing the end of her long red nails. Ray had ten minutes. She loaded the rest of the ammo and locked the safe in thirty seconds.

Since she had time, she searched the hotel room quickly. Ray opened the bathroom doors, stepped over Mr. Hudson's body and made it to the nightstand drawers. They had nothing but the standard bible a hotel room always provided. Then she saw the folded, crinkled, and blue paper underneath the pillow. She grabbed it and exited the room calmly.

"All done, got a little caught up but I have something," Ray whispered into her comms.

"I'm out of the hotel. Making my way to the van. I have something too," responded Uncle John into his comms.

"I'm at the van and we have a problem. Shawn's not here," whispered Sabrina whose stomach turned.

Chapter 17 – His Moment

Shawn kept his eyes and ears open. It was a longer walk than Shawn expected to get to the specific parking spot. The second Shawn made his way to the parking garage behind the hotel his comms went offline. That made him a little nervous, but he stayed calm, quiet, and unseen like Ray had said. Shawn wasn't stupid, he knew Ray didn't quite trust, believe or like him that much yet. He could tell in her eyes that she was unsure about him and Shawn didn't blame her. They'd only recently met, and he stood up to her about Sabrina which he was sure was very unusual and uncomfortable for her. But this was Shawn's chance to gain her trust and belief, especially now that he was without comms.

Shawn located the car and started walking up. Then he stopped and started walking back behind a different car. Security cameras, on the car; of course, the Hudsons weren't just going to leave their car easily accessible. Shawn took a deep breath and started thinking. There were two cameras on the car, one on the top of the car and one on the trunk. Most likely, the cameras had already seen him walking up to the car, but Shawn prayed that Sabrina's Uncle could make that disappear.

Shawn pulled the hood of his coat over his head, put on his gloves to hide his hands and started walking with his back towards the Hudsons car. He would look so weird to anyone who caught him, so he walked quickly, his heart was pounding, and his adrenaline was pumping. He got to the trunk of the car, Shawn's arms were long enough that he could reach both security cameras at once. So, he quickly pulled both cameras off the car, prayed no alarm would go off and then he put the cameras in his pocket. Something in his gut told him not to turn them off so Shawn didn't. He stayed silent and quickly got out his knife and started working on opening the car.

Shawn could feel the handle loosen and he smiled in excitement. Shawn had just done a super hero thing he had always hoped one day he could do! But he pushed his excitement down and searched for the gun. The mission was never over until it was over, if there was anything Shawn had learned from all those superhero movies he'd watched, it was that. He found the gun in the glovebox and started unloading and reloading the ammo. He took his time for any mistake at this point would be deadly.

When Shawn was done, he put the gun right back in the glovebox like he'd found it and then he got out of the car and relocked it just like Ray had taught him. Then he realized he had to do something with the security cameras. Shawn figured he'd put them back where he found them and keep his back turned to them the whole time. Deception was the whole point of this mission, so Shawn figured this was the best solution, to act like nothing had happened. Then he walked quickly but calmly out of the parking garage. Once he was back outside, he started running to where the van was parked.

Ray rolled her eyes. She knew Shawn wouldn't complete the mission smoothly, but she acted chill when she found her sister by the van, "It's ok, he's fine. Give him three minutes and then we'll go. We don't want to blow our cover now."

"Ray! You of all people should know that we need to go now! Three minutes is like an hour in this vigilante thing, we could save him if we go now but we could lose him if we wait. We have to go," Sabrina yelled at her sister as she marched off.

Ray grabbed Sabrina's arm tightly and angrily yelled back, "Sabrina, don't you dare treat me like I wouldn't go save your friend. And don't you ever treat me like I haven't learned a thing from that day. You've been on one mission, I've been on hundreds. I'm the expert here."

"You're not the expert when it comes to relationships. I am, you left your sister, left your parents who only worry about you, you have no relationships now and you haven't had any in years. Not to mention you don't even know who you are," screamed Sabrina in anger. Sabrina knew as soon as she finished that she overstepped but Sabrina couldn't lose Shawn, she wouldn't let it happen no matter what Ray said.

Ray let go of Sabrina's arm and turned her back. She was about to break down and lose it completely when Uncle John came running towards Ray and said, "There's Shawn. He's ok."

Chapter 18 – It Gets Worse

Sabrina hugged Shawn, "I was so worried about you. What happened? Are you ok?"

Shawn let go, "Yeah I'm fine, got caught up with security cameras which I need to talk to your Uncle about."

Shawn walked up to Ray and her Uncle, "John, or Mr. John, sorry I don't know what to call you because Uncle just seems weird."

Uncle John couldn't help but smile, "John is fine. What happened?"

"Everything went fine, I just had to deal with security cameras and my comms went offline the second I was in the parking garage," answered Shawn.

“What did you do with the cameras?” asked Uncle John.

“I put them right back where I found them. One on the trunk and one on the roof of the car. I figured deception was the point of the mission, but I need you to erase the footage. I kept my back to the cameras the whole time and they were in my pocket while I was dealing with the gun, but if the Hudsons saw the footage they’d know something was wrong,” replied Shawn.

“On it. Let’s go, get in the car. We all need to get out of here,” said Uncle John taking charge of the group.

Ray sat all the way in the back. She did not want to look at her sister or Shawn. What Sabrina said to her hurt, really bad. But it hurt because Ray knew all of it was true. Ray couldn’t change the past, she had to move forward even if she didn’t know who she was. For now, she was emotionally exhausted and decided it best to take a little time to herself and to talk to Sabrina later.

The four of them entered the apartment. Uncle John seemed to be the leader of the group, so he broke the silence, “Feelings aside, we need to discuss how the mission went. Any hiccups, was it just smooth sailing or did you find anything else?”

“I was almost caught. Mr. Hudson didn’t see me though, I injected the tranquilizer in him right as he was about to open the bathroom door. By the way, nice move with the propanol,” said Ray facing Uncle John.

“Yeah, I thought it would be a good idea to ensure whoever we needed to inject would definitely not remember a thing,” answered Uncle John proudly.

“But I found this piece of paper. I haven’t opened it yet,” said Ray holding up the crinkled paper.

“I did too, except mine is smaller and white,” said Uncle John.

“Open it!” yelled Sabrina. She had no more patience, she wanted to know exactly what those papers said.

Shawn put his hand on Sabrina trying to get her to calm down. He could tell something was wrong with her. Shawn really thought his pep talk would’ve lasted longer; all jokes aside, he was worried.

“Oh my god,” whispered Ray.

“What is it?” said Sabrina worriedly.

“They’ve rigged the room, the room they intend to leave the rest of your classmates in, with bombs. All three bombs are linked, it says here if one gets deactivated the rest of them blow,” said Ray who immediately got sick to her stomach. Ray understood wanting revenge for Connor’s death, she didn’t understand the way they wanted revenge, but she got it. However, bombing a room full of innocent kids made no sense. It seemed the Hudsons had really turned to the dark and that made Ray really sad. She’d hoped there was a part of the old Hudsons left, the teachers she used to love, but it seemed all the light had been drained out of them.

“And this paper is a picture of the blueprint Ray has and it says “clicker 12:19”,” whispered Uncle John.

Ray left the apartment; she just needed a minute alone. She couldn’t believe the Hudsons intended to kill her sister and Shawn and to bomb a room of innocent kids at the exact time Connor died. And Ray would be lying if she said that what Sabrina had told her earlier wasn’t still bothering her. Ray hadn’t tapped into her emotions in a while, she always pushed them down and tried to forget about them. But now, they were all pouring out of her and it was so overwhelming.

Chapter 19 – Into Ray’s Heart

“I’ll talk to her, it’s my fault she’s upset anyway,” said Sabrina as she headed to the door.

Uncle John yelled, “Sabrina, wait. Give her a second alone.”

Sabrina trusted him and figured he was probably right. Uncle John knew Ray better than Sabrina did, so she walked back towards the computers.

“What’s the plan now? Can’t we just take the clicker and the bomb situation will be solved?” asked Shawn.

“Not exactly, the bombs are probably on a timer too, so the only option is to deactivate all three of them at the same time. That means we need three people,” answered Uncle John.

“How are we going to do that?” asked Sabrina who knew they didn’t just save three spare people who could deactivate bombs.

“I have a friend from G.A.S who owes me and well,” Uncle John didn’t finish his sentence. He promised Ray when Sabrina came down not to talk about it. He also knew it was why Ray was hurting right now, Sabrina had told Ray all the relationships she failed at, but Sabrina missed another one.

“Well what?” pressed Sabrina. At this point, Sabrina wasn’t surprised there was another lie her sister hid from her.

“What we do every night, didn’t used to be just Ray and I. Ray met someone at a boxing gym when she was training one day. He was a close friend of hers. It used to be me at the computers and Ray and Zach on the field. He almost died one night and the next day he left a note on the computer and never spoke to her again. I don’t know what the note said but she’s never talked about him since. Ray promised herself after Connor to never be close to someone again because the hurt was too much to bear, and then she let Zach in and in a way, he died to her too. That’s when she gave up on relationships. Sabrina, when she told you she wanted to try again with you it was the first time since Zach she tried at a relationship. I don’t know what changed but something did, and then when you told her about all the relationships she’s failed at, I think it all came crashing down for her,” said Uncle John.

“Now, I need to go talk to her. I had no idea, god I’m so stupid sometimes. I can’t help it, words just fly out of my mouth,” said Sabrina. She already felt bad enough for what she said but now she was really sorry she had said all of that. Sabrina needed to make things right with Ray, Ray had really tried with her and Sabrina felt so stupid for only focusing on her hurt when obviously Ray had a lot of hurt too.

Chapter 20 – Sisters + Brothers

Ray sat in her favorite tree in front of the apartment building. Her mind went blank as she stared at the stars in the sky. She couldn’t believe it was still dark outside because boy did these last few hours feel like days. Ray shut her eyes and let her body relax and her mind wander.

“Hey,” whispered Sabrina. She hadn’t seen Ray in peace for a while and as much as she didn’t want to bother her, Sabrina knew they needed to talk.

Ray looked down and saw her sister smiling up at her. Ray climbed down out of the tree and motioned for her sister to follow her. Ray took Sabrina to her favorite secret spot; a small empty shed that looked like it was used for gardening tools or something since there was a hint of the smell of dirt. But it was private and even a little bit cozy, Sabrina knew that’s why Ray liked it. They sat down on opposite sides of the shed and took a deep breath; the awkwardness was palpable.

Sabrina finally broke the silence, “Look, what I said earlier about you not knowing yourself and leaving me, Mom and Dad – I’m truly sorry. I really thought leaving the past behind would be easy but for some reason it keeps coming up and those words just flew out of my mouth. I wasn’t thinking, I was worried about Shawn. I’m so sorry. Really, I mean it.”

“I should be the one apologizing, what you said earlier was a hundred percent true. I’ve been a terrible sister to you and not a very good daughter either because I didn’t know myself and I still don’t,” answered Ray.

“Let me stop your right there, don’t let what I wrongly said get in your head. That wasn’t me, what I said to you, it was the darkness in me speaking. The light would’ve told you that I blame myself for how bad our relationship turned out. I should’ve checked in on you, I should’ve cared

more and put myself in your shoes. I was selfish and I'm sorry for that. You know, we all don't really know ourselves because each of us are always changing. We become newer versions of ourselves each day and that is a beautiful thing, it'd be weird if you knew exactly who you were right now. I think you're still growing a lot and you inspire me in how you put yourself out there each night and risk your life for people. And that made me jealous, so I lashed out. For that, I'm sorry," said Sabrina who meant every single word.

"And I apologize for leaving you and not being the sister you needed. You should never blame yourself for our relationship, I should've been the one checking in on you, that's just part of being an older sister. I'm sorry for being selfish and only thinking of all that I was going through and not putting myself in your shoes," before Ray could finish Sabrina interjected.

"I know you told Uncle John not to say anything, but he did, you know, about Zach. I'm glad he said something because I had no idea, but I want to help you out. We're obviously going to need him for the bomb problem. Take it as me trying to take one step to be a better sister to you and not being selfish," said Sabrina with a smile.

"That's really kind of you. But, are you sure? Because I don't think you know who Zach really is," answered Ray. She didn't want Sabrina knowing who he was for a reason.

"What do you mean?" questioned Sabrina who figured Ray was just talking about the fact that he broke Ray's heart.

"Well, take this as me trying to take one step to be a better sister to you, by being one thousand percent honest," replied Ray.

"Ok," said Sabrina.

"Zach is two years older than me. He always talked about his little brother and how he wished he could've grown up with him. Or at least that his little brother knew he had an older brother. When his parents divorced, Zach went with his Dad to New York and his little brother, who at the time was only a few months old, stayed with his Mom in California. Since Zach left, I've been tracking him. Uncle John doesn't even know this, he's been following Shawn for a years. Sabrina, Shawn is Zach's little brother," said Ray who hadn't told anyone about this.

Sabrina was in shock. She couldn't believe it. Sabrina could barely get the words out, "Shawn has no idea. I need to tell him because we're going to have to use him and obviously Zach is here."

"Ding, Ding," barked Ray's phone.

"Who is it?" asked Sabrina.

“It’s Uncle John. Looks like you’re not going to be the one to tell Shawn he has an older brother,” said Ray with her head in her hands.

“What?” said Sabrina who was even more confused,

“Zach’s here,” said Ray. Today was already long enough and she was so emotionally exhausted but with Zach being here, it was like the day was just getting started.

Chapter 21 – Stronger Together

Ray and Sabrina ran back up to the apartment, they caught Zach right as he was about to knock on the door. They were both grateful for that because they needed to talk to Zach first before he said anything to Shawn.

“Hi Ray,” said Zach in an awkward tone like he knew they had a lot to discuss.

“Hi, we need to talk,” said Ray who was seriously dreading talking to him.

Sabrina tapped on Ray’s shoulder and whispered in her ear, “Can you handle this, or should I come with you. Either way is fine, I’d be happy to help.”

“Thanks, I got this. You need to talk to Shawn. You’re the only one he’ll listen to. Love you,” said Ray as she turned back around to Zach and motioned for him to follow her downstairs. Sabrina went the opposite way and took a deep breath. Sabrina was about to tell her best friend he had an older brother, across the hall Ray did the same thing. She was about to talk to her ex best friend and she couldn’t have looked forward to it less.

“Uncle John, can we have the room. Ray’s going outside, I don’t know where you should go but what I’m about to tell Shawn will rock his world, so I think it needs to be just him and I,” whispered Sabrina into Uncle John’s ear.

“Good luck, I’ll be in hallway,” Uncle John kissed her on the forehead and made his way to the hallway. Uncle John wasn’t stupid, computers were his thing. He knew Ray had been tracking Zach and he knew who Zach was tracking and why. A sense of pride filled him, his nieces were both about to do some really hard things and he sent them both the strength to do it.

“Shawn, I don’t even know where to start. For once in my life, I’m speechless,” said Sabrina while looking at the floor. She couldn’t quite look Shawn in the eye, Sabrina had never told someone they had a secret older brother who’d been tracking them for years. She had no idea how to do this, but Shawn meant a lot to her, so no matter how weird it might be for her, she didn’t have to think twice about it.

“That’s not the Bri I know,” answered Shawn who was starting to get nervous. Shawn and Sabrina had been friends for almost two years, and never once had he seen her speechless.

“So, you know this Zach guy. He’s more than Ray’s ex best friend. She told me who he really is just now and she told me to tell you because, well, she figured it might be easier to take them coming straight from him,” started Sabrina.

“Ok, Bri you’re really making me nervous,” answered Shawn.

“Do you know anything about your Dad?” asked Sabrina who was holding on to the teeny tiny bit of hope that maybe Shawn already knew, in her heart she knew he still had no idea.

“He went to New York when I was a few months old, never seen or heard from him since. I’ve told you this before Bri, why are you bringing it up now?” questioned Shawn.

Sabrina could see the fear in his eyes. Shawn was sitting on the mattress in the corner, Sabrina walked up to it and kneeled in front of him. She put her hand over his and took a deep breath, “Your dad wasn’t the only one who left you. You have an older brother, he’s nine years older than you and he went with your Dad. He’s been following you for the past two years, your older brother is Zach.”

Shawn’s jaw dropped, his mind got so cluttered so quick. Sabrina clenched his hand tighter, seeing all the shock engulf him. Tears came to his eyes, “How do you know this?”

“Ray’s been tracking Zach for years. She just told me, Zach was about to tell you himself, but Ray is talking to him now because they have some things to talk about. I wanted to tell you before him,” said Sabrina softly.

“Yeah, I think I would’ve laughed if he had told me,” said Shawn through tears. Shawn had always wanted a sibling and a Dad. He had both, but they left and now his brother wanted to be in his life. It was a lot to process, he couldn’t quite make up his mind about how he felt. And he figured he didn’t have time to process it because in a few hours they’d be deactivating bombs, fighting the Hudsons and saving people’s lives.

“You ok?” asked Sabrina. She didn’t really know what to say and she figured Shawn wasn’t ok.

Shawn got up and hugged Sabrina, “Thank you. That must have been hard, no I’m not ok. But I will be.”

“Anytime. You have a few minutes. Ray’s addressing her issues with him now. Take some time, I don’t know, I don’t really have advice on how to deal with finding out you have an older brother,” said Sabrina with a laugh. Shawn always made her feel better by bringing some levity in situations, so she hoped maybe she could do the same for him.

Shawn laughed, "Good, I'm glad you don't have advice for that."

Ray and Zach walked out of the apartment building in silence. It was awkward but Ray didn't care; Zach could take a little awkward after what he did to Ray.

Ray took him to the shed and leaned against the wall on the inside. Zach stayed just outside of it acting very hesitant and nervous. He really didn't know where to start but Ray did, "Two years Zach, two years! Not a word, you just left a note and ran. You acted like we were close, you acted like you cared and wanted to be really good friends, yet it was so easy for you to up and leave. And now what do you want from me? Or are you going to stand here and tell me you don't want anything from me except a clean slate and a chance to protect your brother. I can handle Shawn, god, do you know what you must be doing to that kid's head? Actually, I think you do since you seem so good at leaving people."

"Ray, I didn't want to leave. I had to leave! I couldn't die without my brother knowing who I was or that I cared about him," Zach couldn't finish.

Ray interjected, "Why now? Why come into his life now and not two years ago?"

"Cause now he's alone and in trouble," said Zach.

"Do you think I'm that weak? You're not the only hero here, I've been doing this a lot longer than you. You think I'll let Shawn die and you have to step in to be the savior? I won't let my sister lose her best friend like I did, twice. Connor would've never ever done this to me. You know, maybe I didn't lose my best friend twice because it seems I only had one," Ray yelled as she walked off but Zach grabbed her arm.

"Do you really think there is anything you could say to me to change my mind?" asked Ray in a firm tone.

"No, but in a few hours, we're going to have to work together, to trust each other. And I'm willing to do whatever it takes to regain that trust. You can yell at me for hours, I deserve it. Ray, get it all out, that's the least I can do," said Zach. He knew he mistreated her. Zach regretted it every day and Ray was always in his thoughts like she'd never left his head. He lived some of his best days with her, Zach had never had a friend like her, and he hated how much he hurt her. Zach hated himself for hurting her.

Ray stood right in front of him, looking at the ground. They were inches apart but she couldn't really face him, there was too much hurt and she really didn't want him to know how much he'd hurt her. But it was a little too late for that.

Zach handed her a piece of paper, "What's this? Another pathetic note?" said Ray.

Zach didn't answer, he let Ray read. His eyes started to water, all of the days of feeling so horrible for what he did were compiling on top of each other and coming to the surface of his mind.

Dear Ray:

I am so truly sorry. Every day that has passed I've thought of you, I've never forgotten your smile or your inner strength that inspired me more than you can know. Every day that has passed I've regretted hurting you, I feel so bad for what I did, and I will do anything and everything to make up for it.

Ray, you're one of a kind. Saying I've never met anyone like you is kind of an understatement. You're confident and cocky sometimes, but you can still be vulnerable and put yourself out there. I think that you believe the best in people and that you're very driven. Something I wish I had more of. Going with being driven, you never back down and you always think you're right. But to be fair, that last part is a little annoying sometimes. ☺

I will spend every day trying to make it up to you. I want you to know how much you mean to me, I'll never forget the days we had together and the missions we went on. I want you in my life and I will put in a ton of effort to make it that way. Please give me a chance to make it right, I know you don't trust me right now, but I really hope you can believe me. I told you I'd never lie to you and that will always be true. I promise.

Zach

Ray folded the letter back up. All her hurt was starting to evaporate, slowly, but it was going away. In reading this letter she realized she'd done a very similar thing to her sister and was asking very similar things of Sabrina. If Sabrina could forgive her for dumping her as a sister and leaving for five years, then Ray could forgive Zach. And Ray knew Zach meant every word he wrote, because she could tell he knew her.

Ray hugged Zach, she could tell he was a little shocked, but he gave in, "Team Zay 2.0?"

Zach smiled ear to ear. He never thought he'd hear Ray use their team name again, "Yes indeed, Gemini."

Chapter 22 - United

Ray and Zach walked back up to the apartment, they stopped when they saw Uncle John sitting in the hallway.

"Hello Zach," said Uncle John as he put out his hand.

Zach shook it, "Hello, John. Good to see you."

Uncle John shifted his focus onto Ray, "You guys good?"

“For now, yes. What are you doing out here?” answered Ray.

“Sabrina asked to have the room, you know, the news of figuring out you have an older brother who’s been secretly tracking you can be a little, what’s the word, jarring,” said Uncle John sarcastically.

Zach turned to Ray, “What am I supposed to say to him?”

“Well, you’re getting me to forgive you and I don’t forgive easily. Shawn’s a good kid, he might be a little angry as he deserves to be, but I think he’ll be more in shock. And really, we don’t have time for a long talk, we need to make a plan. It’s almost 6:00AM,” answered Ray.

Zach shook his head in agreement, he took a deep breath and opened the door. Shawn was in the kitchen leaned over the counter and Sabrina was on the computers. Her eyes jolted towards Zach, but Shawn just stayed still. Zach walked over to him, Uncle John and Ray walked towards Sabrina.

“Let’s give them a sec. How are you? How’d your talk go?” asked Sabrina.

“I’m ok. Zach and I will be fine, I’m trying to forgive him, he’s trying to gain my trust back. How’d your talk go?” answered and asked Ray.

“Ok, I think. He was glad I told him and not Zach, he’s in shock. I’ve never seen him like this,” said Sabrina with a worried look on her face.

Zach made his way to Shawn. Shawn stood straight up and wiped the tears from his eyes.

“I don’t really know what to say,” started Zach.

“I do. I don’t blame you for leaving with Dad. That was Dad’s decision and I’m sure you couldn’t really do anything about it. But what I do blame you for is knowing about me for sixteen years, tracking me for two, and not saying anything until just now. Why?” asked Shawn. Shawn was feeling way too many things, he was happy have to have a brother, sad his brother had known about him for years and not said anything and he was angry that he had been tracked for years. Overall, a lot was going on in Shawn’s head.

“I was scared. You seemed really happy and I didn’t want to change your world. And Mom, I haven’t seen her since I was nine, I have my own hurts about that, but I didn’t want her to know I was in town,” answered Zach honestly. Admitting that he was scared was not easy, but he knew if he wanted a relationship with his brother, he at least had to start off by being a thousand percent honest.

Shawn took a deep breath and let his eyes focus on the floor. It was weird, Shawn couldn't quite look at Zach. The whole situation made Shawn uncomfortable. Zach sensed it, he put his hands on Shawn's shoulders and spoke with his heart, "Hey, I'm really sorry for all the hurt I may be causing now and for not saying anything sooner. I apologize for who I was in the past and for letting my fear get in the way of being a good brother to you. But I can't fix the past, I can only be here for you now and create a better future for us if you want it. I want to be the brother you deserve, and I will do whatever it takes to do that."

Zach felt like tired of giving apology speeches, but he also felt really good to get everything off his chest. Zach's mistakes in the past had weighed on him more than he realized, and he was more than ready to put it behind him. Zach was getting his best friend back and hopefully getting his little bro too.

Shawn looked into Zach's big, bright blue eyes, "I'm still in shock a little, so be patient with me. But, I want to leave the past behind and move forward. What do you say we give this brothers thing a try?"

Zach smiled, "I'm all for it."

Chapter 23 – New And Improved

Zach and Shawn joined the others in the main room filled with computers. The new and improved team of five were running out of time and they still had a lot to discuss.

"So, the original plan was to fill the library with people as a distraction. What's the plan now?" asked Sabrina breaking the silence. It seemed that was her superpower these last couple hours, who would've thought breaking silence was too hard for some.

"I don't think that's needed anymore. Now, we don't have enough people to save you and Shawn. The bullets are basically foam, so that's taken care of, but I still don't like the idea of you and Shawn being all alone with those two who've obviously gone a little psycho," answered Uncle John.

"We're going to need to get the six kids out of the room with the bombs somehow. Then Ray, John and I will have to deactivate the bombs at the exact same time or else they all blow. We have a few hours, maybe Ray and I teach Sabrina and Shawn some moves?" said Zach.

The room went quiet again for a few minutes. Ray was deep in thought. She really hated the idea of leaving Sabrina and Shawn all alone. She wouldn't be surprised if the Hudsons had something else up their sleeve. But, the bomb situation was more of a problem then the guns since the ammo was harmless now.

"So, they plan on taking Shawn and Sabrina at 12:10 into the library. And at 12:19 they want to bomb the other room. How far apart is the library from the rigged room that will be full of kids?" asked Ray whose mind was spinning.

“Only one room separates the library from the other classroom. Not that far. Why? What are you thinking?” asked Uncle John.

Everyone’s attention and eyes focused on Ray, “I’m thinking we can deactivate the bombs, climb through the ceiling via the air vent and still get to Sabrina and Shawn in time to save them even though they don’t really need saving.”

“Technically that would work. The ceiling is crawlable, if that’s even a word. But we’d have to be fast and know exactly what type of bombs we’re working with and where they are located,” said Uncle John through the sound of his fingers clicking away on the keyboards.

“There’s no one here except you who can figure out that information. We’ll figure out the rest. You deal with the bombs,” ordered Ray. The leader role was constantly switching between Ray and Uncle John but out of everyone, they worked together the best.

Uncle John shook his head in agreement. Shawn, Sabrina, Zach and Ray stepped into the room that you could call a kitchen.

“How are we going to get the kids out of the rigged room?” asked Sabrina.

Simultaneously, Ray and Zach answered, “Uncle John, he’ll be the annoyed teacher needing his classroom back.” Ray and Zach looked at each other, they were back in sync. And it seemed like Team Zay 2.0 really was a go.

“What do Sabrina and I do?” asked Shawn who as much as he wanted to trust his brother, boy that sounded weird to him, he still didn’t like the idea of being alone and helpless.

“Act like you suspect nothing. Just follow along with them. We’ll figure out a signal to let you guys know that we’re coming. But Shawn, there’s only one route to the library and that is through the air vent that leads to the side of the room Sabrina will be. You’re going to be on your own for a few until I get to you. Can you handle that?” explained Zach.

Shawn didn’t have to answer, “After what he did tonight in dealing with the security cameras, breaking into a car without an alarm going off and unloading and reloading ammo he can definitely handle that,” Ray smiled as she finished. She hoped that would let Shawn know that she trusted him and now believed in him.

Shawn was happy to see Ray believed in him. It made him feel really good, it made believe in himself more. It wasn’t like Ray wasn’t on his side before; but getting her to believe fully in him meant a lot more to Shawn than Ray could know. Shawn knew she didn’t trust easily, and that’s what felt so good.

“Is that everything? Are we forgetting something?” asked Sabrina. After hours of planning things, going on missions, having long talks and lots of rollercoasters of emotion it seemed crazy to Sabrina that the plan was in place and in a few hours, it’d be time to execute.

“To review, Sabrina and Shawn rejoin the group, suspect nothing, get taken by the Hudsons, John, Ray and I deactivate the bombs and then Ray and I crawl through an air vent and into the ceiling. Then we save you two,” said Zach mostly towards Ray.

“And that is a normal Monday in New York City,” replied Ray.

Chapter 24 – Team Light

“Guys, I have something,” yelled Uncle John.

“What do you have?” asked Sabrina.

“The bombs are attached to individual circuits, we turn off the circuits, we deactivate the bombs. I know the circuit boards well, we need to cut the red wire at the exact same time, if not we’ll have twenty seconds to come up with some type of plan before they explode. Here are the locations of each bomb,” said Uncle John as he pointed to the three corners of the room where each bomb was located.

“I’ll take the southwest corner, Zach you take the southeast corner and Uncle John you take the northeast corner. The south corners are closer to the air vent, it’ll save us maybe two seconds,” ordered Ray.

“Sounds like a plan. But Sabrina and I need to get back to the hotel soon, what’s our cover story?”

“I’ve got that handled,” answered Sabrina confidently.

“Of course you do,” said Shawn with a smile.

Ray and Zach moved into the kitchen. “You thinking what I’m thinking,” asked Zach.

“If you’re thinking that we need to find something to signal Shawn and Sabrina that we’re on our way to them, then yes I am thinking what you’re thinking,” answered Ray as she opened drawers looking for something to use as a signal.

“What if I just flicker the lights in the library for a second to signal Shawn and Sabrina, once you guys are in the ceiling?” yelled Uncle John across the room knowing that’s what Ray and Zach were talking about.

“Wouldn’t the Hudsons get suspicious?” answered Zach,

“No, because 30 seconds later Ray and Zach will be there. They don’t have enough time to change their plan,” answered Uncle John as he confirmed the timing.

“We all clear on the plan? Any questions?” asked Ray realizing Shawn and Sabrina needed to be getting back to the hotel.

“Clear,” said Uncle John, Zach, Sabrina and Shawn simultaneously.

“Sabrina, come here,” asked Ray as she walked over to the kitchen.

Zach motioned for Shawn to follow him to the mattresses.

“You got this. Just stay calm and act like everything is normal. If there’s any hiccups just press the button I put in your pocket, it looks like a real button so you’ll have some cover if they find it. I know we’re kind of new at this sister thing, but you’ve already made me so proud. Don’t be nervous, this mission is to just protect people from getting hurt. You’re going to be fine, just believe in yourself like I do,” said Ray to Sabrina with a reassuring smile.

“You got this. Just stay calm and act like everything is normal. If there’s any hiccups just press the button I put in your pocket, it looks like a real button, so you’ll have some cover if they find it. I know we’re kind of new at this brother thing, but you’ve already made me so proud. Don’t be nervous, this mission is to just protect people from getting hurt. You’re going to be fine, just believe in yourself like I do,” said Zach to Shawn with a reassuring smile.

“Thanks sis, for everything really. Love you,” said Sabrina as she hugged Ray and then walked towards the front door.

“Thanks bro, for everything really. Love you,” said Shawn as he hugged Zach and then towards the front door.

Sabrina looked at Shawn, Shawn looked at Sabrina, “You ready for this?”

“More ready than I’ll ever be,” answered Sabrina.

The two of them turned around and Shawn enthusiastically said, “See you guys in a few hours!”

“Let’s do it Team Light!” replied Uncle John with a smile on his face.

“Why Team Light?” asked Sabrina.

Ray smiled as she answered, “Because each of us is a unique light that when put together, we diminish all darkness.

Chapter 25 – Acting

Shawn and Sabrina took the subway back to the hotel. Ray had offered to drive them back but with Sabrina's phone being tracked they decided it was better to take the subway and not risk Ray being seen.

Once Sabrina and Shawn got off the subway, they stopped at a coffee shop near the hotel to discuss their cover plan.

"What's the plan? You know, I really hate being the student but in this case you're definitely the teacher," said Shawn.

"I'm always the teacher," said Sabrina with a laugh, even she couldn't hold it together. Shawn laughed too; it was nice to act like everything was normal.

"So, we stayed at my sister's house for the night. We didn't intend to stay the night, but she hurt her leg really badly and couldn't walk so we had to stay and help her. She didn't go to the hospital because she couldn't afford it," whispered Sabrina.

"What about the camera in Ray's jacket. Wouldn't they know you are flat out lying?" questioned Shawn.

"No, because Ray put the jacket in the parking garage after the robbery mission. So, hopefully they'll think she hurt herself during that mission," answered Sabrina who was very impressed with her plan-making abilities.

"I'll let you do the talking, seems like you've thought of everything," said Shawn.

"That's your lesson for today, cover all your bases. Ms. Larsson, out," said Sabrina sarcastically as she got up and headed towards the door.

Shawn followed her out of the coffee shop, "You're lucky you have a phenomenal 'humor' teacher."

They both laughed; it seemed like acting like it was a normal Monday on a school trip made this whole mission a lot easier.

Shawn and Sabrina entered the hotel lobby to find the Hudsons and all the students waiting in the lobby. Sabrina didn't quite expect this but it didn't distract or worry her, she was laser focused.

"Where were you guys? What happened?" asked Mr. Hudson in an angry tone.

"We're fine. My sister lives in New York and I haven't seen her in years, so she picked us up and we were supposed to just see her for a little bit and then come back here. But, she hurt her leg

really bad and she couldn't walk so we had to help her and stay the night," answered Sabrina super casually.

"Why didn't you call us?" asked Mrs. Hudson in a fake worried tone.

"Well, I saw on my phone that you and Mr. Smith were tracking my location, so I figured you knew we were fine," answered Sabrina. She wanted to send the message to Hudsons that she was onto them and that she wasn't some oblivious kid who didn't know what was going on, she knew exactly what was going on, even more than the Hudsons did.

"Oh honey, that's just for your safety. We were so worried about you two. We're glad you're ok and safe. Will your sister be ok, shouldn't she be at the hospital?" said Mrs. Hudson in that annoying, baby talk tone Sabrina hated oh so much.

"I'm sure you were really worried. She'll be fine, she couldn't afford the hospital," said Sabrina with a little attitude. She was really close to popping off, but she kept her cool, at least for now.

"I'm sorry to hear that. Ok, well everyone, we need to get going to NYU. Wait out front, the cars are coming," said Mrs. Hudson.

Shawn, Sabrina and all the kids waited outside. The Hudsons followed. Shawn and Sabrina fit in with the other kids and acted super normal. Shawn whispered into Sabrina's ear, "Good job."

Sabrina smiled and mouthed, "Thank you."

Chapter 26 – Light vs. Darkness

The hours passed by like minutes for Sabrina and Shawn, they were ready. The nerves had started to evaporate, and the adrenaline was starting to fill them up. Ray and Zach were just the opposite, maybe it was the fact that they had siblings to save and bombs to deactivate, but the hours felt like days to them.

And then it was time. Ray, Zach and Uncle John hopped in the van and made their way to NYU. Shawn and Sabrina kept their eyes on the clock, they were now in the room filled with bombs. It was funny to them how to 6 other kids in that room were blind to what was really going on, it was like Shawn and Sabrina had glasses on that could see the truth of what was happening.

As they waited in the room to be taken to the library, Shawn started looking in the corners of the room. He figured if she could give the others a head start on the bombs' exact locations, then they could save some time. Sabrina caught what he was doing and didn't interrupt him, he casually took some photos of the corners where the bombs were located and sent them to Ray. Shawn would've sent the pictures to Zach, but Shawn thought Ray was more of the leader and even though he'd just gained her belief he still wanted to prove to Ray that he was on it. Shawn couldn't lie, as scary as some of this stuff was, he thoroughly enjoyed this superhero stuff.

Ray heard her phone go off. She immediately got worried, but then she saw the pictures, "Shawn got us exact locations of the bombs. Boy has he changed in the last couple hours."

"I feel like secretly exiting an airplane, breaking into a car without sounding an alarm, reloading ammo and finding out you have an older brother can really change you," said Zach who sounded just like Shawn in that moment.

The clock struck 12:10, "Sabrina, Shawn come with us. We have something to show you in the library," said Mrs. Hudson.

Shawn and Sabrina looked at each other and let their eyes do the talking. Something like, "This is it; everything is going to be ok."

As soon as they entered the library with Mr. and Mrs. Hudson, Uncle John came from the classroom behind the room with bombs. He played the part perfectly, "Kids, get out of here. It's my classroom. Who said you could be in here? Go to that room," said Uncle John as he pointed to room across the hall.

The kids quickly shuffled out of the room and then Ray and Zach joined Uncle John. They got to their corners, pulled out the little knife in their pockets and located the red wire.

"Everyone have their wire?" said Ray.

"Yes," answered Zach and Uncle John simultaneously.

"Ok, on three we cut it. One, two three," said Ray as her stomach dropped.

Silence filled the room; they waited a few seconds, nothing happened. They'd done it! Everyone took a breath and smiled. The mission wasn't done yet, but the hardest part was complete. It was now 12:12 and Zach and Ray needed to get to Sabrina and Shawn. They pulled open the air vent and climbed in. Ray lead and Zach followed her. Ray had reviewed the blueprints of the building many times and saw them in her head. They crawled silently in the musty, old ceiling. All they could hear were the thumping of their hearts as their adrenaline started to kick in.

Ray came to a stop. Ray and Zach were right over Sabrina and Mrs. Hudson. They could hear every word and for now, Mrs. Hudson hadn't done anything.

"Sabrina, come here. This is what I wanted to show you, it's called Revenge For The Ages. It is a wonderful book," said Mrs. Hudson.

At that moment, both Ray and Sabrina knew it was time. Sabrina walked over to her and Mrs. Hudson pulled her hands from behind her back and taped Sabrina's mouth.

“Bri!!!” yelled Shawn on purpose to act like he was surprised that everything was happening. Mr. Hudson knocked him to the ground, taped his mouth and pointed the gun at his head. Mrs. Hudson strangled Sabrina but she wasn’t even scared. She knew there was nothing Mrs. Hudson could do to hurt her.

Ray and Zach jumped out of the ceiling like real superheroes. At least, that’s what Sabrina thought. She noticed the clock at 12:16 and realized that the Hudsons were about to be in for the surprise of their lives.

Ray and Zach stood in front of Mrs. Hudson, “Mrs. Hudson, don’t do this. What happened to Connor is not Sabrina’s fault and it is definitely not my parents’ fault. I know you’re hurting, and we all miss Connor. I think of him every single day and as bad as it hurts, I do something good with the hurt. This, what you’re doing, is not good. I know this isn’t you and you have still have time to make the right choice. What would Connor want?” said Ray.

“Connor would want his death avenged. And that is what I’m here to do,” said Mrs. Hudson coldly.

“You mean, that is what both of you are here to do,” answered Ray as she motioned for Zach to go get Shawn.

The gun went off, but Shawn didn’t feel a thing. Zach came from behind Shawn and jumped onto Mr. Hudson’s head, wrapped his legs around Mr. Hudson’s throat and flipped him upside down. Landing on top of Mr. Hudson, Zach handcuffed his hands behind him. Then Shawn and Zach went back towards Sabrina and Ray.

While Zach was busy, Ray took care of Mrs. Hudson. She went straight for her feet and shoved her into the books. Sabrina stepped to the side and took the tape off her mouth. Mrs. Hudson tried to find her footing, but Ray kicked her in the knee and Mrs. Hudson growled in pain. Ray handcuffed her hands behind her back and hugged Sabrina.

The clock struck 12:19 and Mrs. Hudson noticed, “You guys missed one thing.”

They all stayed silent for a few seconds and then Sabrina answered wryly, “Oh, you mean that? We’re a little smarter than you realize.”

Chapter 27 – Sticking Together

Team Light ran back in the van and let the police do the rest of the work. Uncle John, Ray and Zach’s identities were still secrets, and they didn’t need to risk exposure by sticking around. But they were overjoyed, normally completing a mission was just like another day’s work but today was different. The five of them had come together as a team and worked together to be the light; siblings reunited, friends became closer and nieces impressed.

The team was so high on adrenaline, "I don't think I can ever go back to the normal of life of high school after this," said Shawn.

"Totally agree," added Sabrina.

"Well, I might have an idea for that," said Ray with a smile on her face. She was excited to surprise her sister or to really just be close with her again. Ray didn't realize how much she was missing out on and to have Sabrina back in her life really meant the world to Ray. She wasn't going to lose her to California again.

"What?" asked Sabrina curiously.

"Wait and see," Ray smiled as she looked at Zach. Zach was in on the surprise too, he clearly was never going to lose Shawn or Ray again. He was excited that Ray felt the same too, it was weird to Zach that in less than 12 hours he could feel so close to his best friend again and so close to his little brother who hadn't been his brother in years.

Uncle John smiled from ear to ear as he drove not back to the apartment but to their new lair. Ray had told him she wanted for this team to stay together permanently and to keep her sister in her life, Uncle John couldn't have been more in agreeance.

"Um, where are we going? This isn't the way to the apartment." asked Shawn curiously.

"Gee Shawn, you're really on the ball now," said Ray with a laugh. She really was impressed with his growth in the past couple hours.

Ray's heart started beating faster, her smile started to widen and her whole being started to illuminate with such excitement. They'd made it.

"What is this?" asked Sabrina and Shawn simultaneously.

"So, when you guys were busy at the tour, we did some work. Zach and I agreed that we didn't want to be separated from our siblings again and Uncle John whole heartedly agreed so he called in a favor. He had someone that owed him from G.A.S. and that someone got us this empty warehouse that G.A.S. no longer uses. It's our new lair," said Ray happily.

"Oh my god! Are you serious?" said Shawn.

"Yes, we're dead serious," said Zach smiling.

Sabrina was in shock, it wasn't often she was speechless but, in this instance, she totally was, "How did Mom and Dad approve of this?"

“They love us, they want our relationship to grow and they know it won’t happen in different states. I have to homeschool you though and they won’t let you on the field. You’re lucky you have a cool sister though who’s kind of known for breaking rules,” answered Ray.

“Oh yes, she’s pretty great,” replied Sabrina as she hugged Ray. It felt so good to be close to her again. And with all explanations aside, the team walked into the warehouse. For now, it was empty but soon it would be home.

“What now?” said Shawn breaking the silence.

“We catch bad guys together,” said Zach who again, sounded just like Shawn.

“God you guys really are related. You sound the same sometimes,” said Sabrina with a laugh. “Right now in this moment I’m going to go and talk to the Hudsons before they get transferred to prison,” said Ray.

“Why? They’re gone, you won’t ever have to see them again.” asked Sabrina who didn’t quite understand.

“She needs closure. Do you want some company?” said Zach answering for Ray.

“No, I need to go alone. But thank you. You guys can get a head start on making this warehouse a true lair,” suggested Ray as she zoomed off in her motorcycle that was parked inside the warehouse.

Uncle John and Zach headed to the van to get the remaining things from the apartment that they’d need at the warehouse. Sabrina laid down on the dirty floor, she didn’t know why but she just felt it was right. She’d been up for way too long, so she figured it was her exhausted and over adrenalized brain making a weird decision.

Shawn laid down next to her, “You ready for this new life?”

“Yeah, I think so. It’s a lot to take in. You know 24 hours ago I was a normal 16-year-old girl and now my whole life has changed. It’s exciting though, I mean we’re going to be saving people with our siblings. That’s pretty cool,” answered Sabrina honestly.

“Yeah it really is,” said Shawn with a sigh. It felt like a long time since he breathed, or maybe that was just the adrenaline wearing off.

“And I’m glad you’ll be doing it with me. Who would’ve thought we’d make it this far?” said Sabrina.

“I definitely didn’t. I’m glad too, I’d be kind of lost without you,” said Shawn with full honesty.

“Oh, I know. And you think you’re the teacher,” said Sabrina with a laugh. That joke had lasted a lot longer than she’d thought.

“You do have a point there,” agreed Shawn.

Chapter 28 – Remember The Light

Ray made her way to the precinct and asked to speak with Mr. and Mrs. Hudson. She took a deep breath and kept her mind calm. Ray didn’t know why she felt she had to talk to them but something inside of her told her that she needed to. It was almost like she was saying goodbye to the last part of Connor and she wanted it to go better than it did in the library.

“This way ma’am,” said an officer. The police were hesitant to let Ray speak with them, but Ray had become good at convincing people in the last couple hours.

The Hudsons didn’t budge when she walked in, but Ray kept her calm and reminded herself that she was doing this for Connor. She sat down and Mrs. Hudson questioned, “Why are you here?”

“I’m here for Connor,” answered Ray.

“Don’t you dare bring him into this,” warned Mr. Hudson.

“Actually, you brought him into this when you decided to get revenge on my parents by recreating the same situation Connor and I were in for my sister and Shawn,” replied Ray with a little attitude.

Mr. and Mrs. Hudson couldn’t argue with that, so they shifted their attention to the ground. Ray took a deep breath, “Look I didn’t come here to argue. I came here to tell you that I truly forgive you, for my sake and for Connor’s. I know that grief does strange things to people and that you are both hurting. Connor will always live in my head and my heart, there’s not a moment that goes by where I don’t think of him. But a little advice, you can’t remember Connor in the darkness, or you will always be at war with yourselves. You have to remember Connor in the light and remember him for the bright light that he really is,” Ray got up to exit the room. Mr. and Mrs. Hudson didn’t answer her and Ray didn’t expect or need them too.

Ray unlocked the door, but before she could go, she looked them in the eye one more time and said, “Remember the light.”