

## **PART 2: THE STRUGGLE ON THE OTHER SIDE**

### **Chapter 5: Activation and the Mission**

Around the time the clock on the wall ticked for the 60<sup>th</sup> time, indicating a minute had passed since he set his eyes upon it, more of his surroundings came clearly into view. It was dark, with only one lamp lit in the corner of the room, casting eerie shadows on the empty floor and brown curtains along the windows. He tried to move his head to get a better view of the room he found himself in, but then his throat itched uncomfortably as though he wanted or needed to cough but couldn't. He felt as though he couldn't catch his breath, like there was a heavy weight on his chest. Ignoring the uncomfortable feeling, he pulled the blankets from his legs and turned to stand up. It was obvious that he was in the hospital, but why? Other than the strange feeling in his throat, he felt fine, not nearly as sick as he had earlier. He thought it funny that there wasn't anything attached to his arms to monitor his vitals like there usually would be in a hospital. *Maybe none of it was necessary*, he thought.

Getting to his feet, he held the back end of his hospital gown awkwardly as he stepped along the cold floor and out into the hallway.

*It must be late*, he thought when he noticed that most of the hallway lights were turned off, making it difficult to see. With a hand on the wooden railing along the wall, he felt his way slowly down the hall toward the nurses' station. He would have asked one of them what had happened, why he had been taken to the hospital, but no one was there to ask. *Strange that they'd all take a break at once*.

Continuing to walk on down the hall to find a nurse or somebody, he came to the waiting room with red cushioned chairs and a large fish tank in the middle of the room. He was relieved to find both Walter and Olivia. This room was just as dark as the hospital room and hallway had been, but the rippling light from the fish tank illuminated their dark silhouettes. He could see them standing closely together ...hugging?

Confused, Peter tried to speak but nothing more than a squeaky breath of air escaped his lips. The sound he made must have been too quiet for either of them to hear because neither of them made any indication that they had heard. He'd have to get closer.

But then when he stepped within arms reach of them, his heart nearly stopped as the light reflected off the tears falling from their eyes—both of them. What was going on? What happened? Did something else happen while he was sick and asleep at home? Maybe someone was in a car accident—Rachel! But then why would Walter be crying about it? Could it be Astrid? No, he'd probably only cry if something happened to Gene. Then what? Why did they seem as though someone had just died?

Reaching out a hand, he grabbed Olivia's shoulder. "Oliv—, -at's -oing on? -at -ppen'd?" Peter said in a broken voice.

But Olivia did not respond. She didn't even turn to look at him. She just kept crying into Walter's shoulder as the fish in the tank suddenly stopped swimming. Actually, had they been moving at all? He hadn't noticed it before but it seemed as though the fish hadn't been moving for a long time. They were simply suspended in the water, like time had stopped.

Reclaiming his hand from Olivia's shoulder, Peter turned toward Walter, this time forcefully trying to pry him away from her. If it wasn't awkward enough to see them locked together in such an emotional embrace...

However, Walter's arms were too heavy, so firmly wrapped around Olivia's fine frame that even with all of his strength, there was nothing Peter could do to part them.

*What the hell is going on?* he thought. He took a confused step backward and looked back at the fish tank. The fish inside remained motionless in the water. *Maybe they're all dead,* he thought, *the fish. But then wouldn't they be floating up at the surface?*

As he stood in front of the tank, beside his father and Olivia, he noticed how the light from the tank washed over them then reflected back onto the surface of the glass, which then gave off a mirror image of the two standing next to it. Peter's form, however, did not reflect back into his eyes. It was as though he wasn't even there.

*How can that be?* he thought, staring at the tank. Stepping closer, he placed his hand on the side of the glass and waited a moment to see if it would cause a foggy halo to form around it, but nothing happened. Then he squatted down to his feet and tried to fog up the glass by breathing warm air onto it, but again nothing happened. He looked back up at Olivia and his father, thinking something awful must have happened—to him.

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Olivia and Walter stood locked within each other's arms, neither one able to break the moment of comfort they found in each other long enough to accept reality. But then after a long while, Olivia broke away and wiped the tears from her face with the back of a hand, her eyes flashing with inner determination and strength.

"If we're going to do this, then we better get to it," she said, willing her eyes to dry. There would be time to cry once this was over.

Walter, a stray tear falling from the base of his chin, nodded. "I cannot guarantee that your powers of perception will kick in right away, but I am hopeful, given your demonstration a moment ago, that you can control it."

"Shouldn't I need some sort of drug or something to make it easier to see the other side?"

"In any other circumstance, I would be more than happy to administer a drug or two—I might even take some myself. But this ability, Olivia, comes from you. The initial Cortexiphan trials gave you the ability, but it is not the necessary key you need to unlock your perception. That, I'm afraid, is entirely your doing."

"But I don't know how to turn it on, Walter. It just happened; I had no control over it."

"And how did you feel at the time?"

The first time she could remember clearly. It was in the Federal building, in a dark and deserted computer room. She felt like a failure, it was her fault that hundreds of innocent lives would be snuffed out, ripped from this world to slam full-force into the other. She had seen the horrors such a collision would cause, and she shuttered at the thought. The only thing that made her feel safe, the only thing that could dissolve her fear was not a thing at all—it was Peter.

How powerfully he was able to stir up her emotions! She remembered the warmth that spread throughout her whole body at his gentle caress. He made her feel so many different emotions all at once, it made her head spin just thinking about it. She was *desperate* to activate her ability to save those people, *afraid* of failing and allowing innocents to be sacrificed in this coming war, *curious* at the warm butterflies that fluttered about in her stomach, *guilty* for feeling the pull toward Peter even though she had just been in a serious relationship with John not even a year and a half ago, *anxious* to know exactly what Peter was thinking as he bent down low. She could feel his breath on her skin—and the *fear*. The fear of failure, fear of death, fear of betrayal, fear of a new possibility. It all meshed together like the "garbage" ice cream she used to eat as a kid and loved even though it was just leftover scraps of a bunch of different ice cream.

Allowing the wave of memory wash her thoughts away, she found her answer. "I felt anxious and excited, all at once."

Walter nodded as though he knew the answer even before she spoke the words. "Of course, these two feelings stem from a single emotion. We just differentiate the two depending on whether or not it is a positive or negative feeling. How do you feel now?"

Olivia wrinkled her nose as if it would help her get in tune with her most inner feelings. "I'm anxious to get this to work, to help Peter, but I'm afraid I can't do this; I don't know how."

"You mustn't be afraid. Aren't you excited to see what the other side is like?"

She shook her head. "No, I don't care what it's like. I just want to get this done."

Walter's tongue clicked inside his mouth. "You have to go deeper, think harder. There has to be a positive side to this situation. Can't you see it?"

"No, Walter!" she yelled at him, frustrated. "How can any of this be a good thing?" All she could think about was seeing herself in that hospital room, knowing that she must die for Peter to live, if she could get that far.

Walter smiled patiently, gesturing them to sit and rest a moment. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to push you. Maybe if we slow down and allow your sight to open on its own..."

His voice seemed to trail off as Olivia's attention focused on a strange sensation on her right shoulder. It was a tingly feeling, like when your arm or foot has fallen asleep and the blood flow to that appendage has just been released. It was a warm feeling, not frightening in any way, although she could not explain what it was. She felt herself wondering what it could be and wanting to know more. It peaked her interest in such a way, she could feel her blood pump excitedly.

Whatever it was, whatever caused her to feel the way she did, anxious to save Peter and excited for a future with him in it, she didn't care because as she turned to look into the fish tank, she saw the colorful tropical fish meld and shift into the graceful form of striped angelfish.

"I can see it, Walter," she said. "Now what do I do?"

"Now you find the cure," she heard Walter say far away. When she turned her head away from the tank, she saw that Walter was no longer sitting next to her. She was there alone, sitting in a velvety, blue chair.