

## Chapter 8

I open my eyes to a bright white room.

"Iris? Iris! You're awake! Are you okay? I'm so so sorry. I'm so sorry. Are you okay? Sorry, I'll shut up now, you probably have a headache, haha." I hear a voice to my left. Lyvah?

"She's awake? Lemme see! Iris? You awake? Heya Iris! I forgive ya' for hittin' me. Are ya' alright?" Samantha?

"Ughh... What happens—" Flashbacks of what happened who knows how long ago cut me off. "Oh." I frown.

"Are you okay?" Lyvah again.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Sorry." I sit up. Looking around the room, I see I'm at the nurses. Lyvah sits beside my bed, and Samantha sits right next to him.

"Do ya' need anything?" Samantha asks.

"Water would be nice." I half ask.

"Here you go." Lyvah hands me a glass of water from the table beside the bed.

"Thanks." I take a sip of the water. My throat is still sore from yelling. "You been out ten hours now." Samantha says looking at me sympathetically.

"Ten? Okay." I say.

Ten? I guess that's not too bad since it was over night...

"Where's Milos?" I ask, trying to get up to stand.

"I'm not sure." Samantha shrugs.

"Maybe you should rest some more?" Lyvah pushes on my shoulders lightly.

"No, I'm fine. I rested for ten hours." I brush him off, walking past him and to the door. I walk out and start marching through the hallway.

"Iris, wait..." Lyvah pauses. "He got transferred back to Urix..."

"What?" I whip around. He just looks at the ground.

"Listen, Iris, I like you, okay? I want you to be okay. So if you need anything I'm here, but don't go marching off to kill Milos. I don't want you to get even more hurt." He grabs my hand.

"You... Like me?" I back up, his hand still gripping mine.

"Yeah... Sorry, I know it's stupid..." He mutters, his face going bright red. I pull my hand away, and turn around to walk away. I pause before spinning back around and speed walking towards him.

Grabbing the sides of his face, I kiss him.

"Ooooooo." Samantha shouts the corner. I stop kissing Lyvah. He stands there in shock.

"Uh- Um- w-well," He clears his throat. "Will you go out with me?"

"Sure." I smile.

"Come on! Guard rotation! Let's go." I hear a woman turning the corner. Lyvah looks away, embarrassed.

Mine and Lyvah's posts are right next to each other today. We are right outside Dante's office. Me and Lyvah spend most of the time talking to each other, getting to know each other more. I tell him about the lab, and about what happened with our father. I was telling him about my mother when Dante walks out of his office.

"I'm going to the garden again." Dante says walking by us. We follow him out to the garden and I show Lyvah the Bluebell Bells. He puts one in my hair and I smile. After we go inside, Dante invites me into his office to talk.

"I'm sorry about your sister. I wasn't aware of what they were going to do to her. I would have stopped it if I had known." He looks at me sympathetically. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I don't know." I mutter, looking down at the floor. He embraces me in a hug. I just stand there shocked, then I wrap my arms around him. I hold back tears as he rubs my back and apologizes again. Once the hug is over, I am on the verge of falling apart.

"Are you okay?" Lyvah asks.

"Yeah, I'm fine." I say firmly.

"I'll be right back, I have to use the bathroom." I turn and walk away.

The second I get back into the building I start running. I run all the way to my room and slam the door behind me. I run to my bed and my façade falls apart. Tears roll down my face. I shove my face into my pillow and scream as loud as I can. Once I can't scream any longer, I stand up, anger taking over. I punch the wall as hard as I can. Then I do it again. Then again. I keep punching the wall until my knuckles bleed and bruise.

"Iris?" I hear a voice. I stop punching the wall and wipe away my tears and clear my throat. Opening the door, I see Lyvah.

"Are you okay? I heard a bang." He asks me.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I just dropped my brush." I lie, my voice comes out smooth and steady. My face isn't red anymore, all traces of my breakdown gone.

"Okay..." He says hesitantly.

"I think I'm going to go to bed early. Can you get someone else to cover my post? Say I'm sick?" I ask him. He nods and walks away.

The next day, I go to Dante, he takes me out to the garden and we talk a little bit. I tell him about the lab and what happened with my mom and dad. Dante frowns at me sadly. He tells me a bit about his past, and how his father was killed in the war, and his mother overdosed. We talk about the military and how it's corrupt. We talk about a few other things as well. The president apologizes for Avia again and gives me another hug.

I go to have lunch with Samantha and Lyvah. Lyvah kisses me on the cheek and Samantha squeals. We start eating and the atmosphere shifts.

"It's different without Avia..." Tears prick at Samantha's eyes. "I'm sorry, I'm just missin' her. I can't imagine what it's like for you, Iris."

She's sitting beside me, and pulls me into a side-hug.

"It's okay..." I mumble.

"At least we have you. I love you, Iris, as a friend 'course." Samantha smiles sadly at me.

"You're so strong, Iris." Lyvah says to me.

"Thank you." I continue eating. Surrounded by people that love and support me. Dante, Samantha, Lyvah, I am so grateful for them.

The next day I stay in my room for basically the whole day. I tell Lyvah and Samantha I'm sick, but the truth is, I just can't face the world right now.

It's all too much. I need Avia, I can't do this without her... What am I supposed to do?

I turn over in bed. I look at Avia's stuff still laying around. Tears fill my eyes and I shove my head into my pillow, sobbing into it. I spend the rest of the night like this.

I walk into the cafeteria and Samantha immediately greets me. "You feelin' better?" She asks.

"Yeah, my throat isn't sore anymore, and I don't feel like throwing up." I lie.

"That's good!" She smiles at me.

"Iris, I'm glad you are feeling better." Dante says, walking out of his office. I smile at him and wave. He smiles back as he continues walking. I turn around and sit at the nearest free table. Samantha doesn't sit down,

"I'm going to grab some food! I'll get you some too!" She says before walking away. I stare at the table.

Maybe I could have done something. Maybe I could have stopped it. I should have fought harder. It's all my fault. We never should have run away. We never should have joined the military in the first place.

"Iris?" Lyvah's voice pulls me out of my thoughts. "You okay?"

"Yeah, just bored I guess." I lie.

"Oh, okay." He says. An awkward silence follows.

"S-so, um, want to go to the garden during our first free time... As a, uh, date?" He asks, fiddling with his hands.

"Sure!" I smile at him.

"Awww!" Samantha says as she sets a tray in front of me. It's half-spoiled vegetables and stale bread. Lyvah goes bright red and looks away.

I know Lyvah is trying to distract me and help by not bringing it up, but he's just acting as if everything is normal... Like nothing happened... Like my sister isn't gone. Killed right in front of me...

"Iris?" Samantha waves a hand in front of my face. "Ya' sure you're okay?" She questions, taking a bite of her bread.

"Yeah, I'm just thinking about things. Sorry." I smile at her.

"Then why are you crying?" She eyes me, suspicious.

"Huh?" I reach up and feel my face. Sure enough, I was crying. One single tear was rolling down my face.

"Do you want to talk about what happened?" Lyvah asks worriedly.

"I don't know... What is there even to say...?" I look at the table.

"I'm sorry..." He mumbles.

"Don't be, it's my fault anyway, it was my idea to escape." I hold back tears.

"Hey, it's not your fault. No way." He grabs my hand. I flinch, before holding his.

"I just feel like I should have done something... Like I was too weak. I don't want to lose anyone ever again. I've lost too many people." I start to vent. Lyvah opens his mouth to reply, but a male guard cuts him off.

"Breakfast is over! To your posts!"

After our learning unit is free time. I make my way to the garden to meet Lyvah. Once I get there, I see that he's already there. I sit on the bench he's sitting on.

"Oh! Hey!" He says, not noticing me until I sit. I giggle at his shocked reaction.

"Hey." I smile.

"How was the learning unit?" He asks. "What did you guys learn about?"

Lyvah has a different schedule, he has learning unit after his break. So he likes to ask what we learned about so he's prepared.

"Just boring things. Mostly history. Then we had a surprise test about how the war started."

"Awww, man! I suck at history!" He complains. I laugh at him before giving him all the answers for the test. We talk a little bit after that. I start telling him about my past and the lab. Then about my mom,

which leads to us talking about flowers. I tell him all about all the different types of flowers. I'm telling him about my favorite flower when a guard comes out.

"Okay, break is over!" He warns us.

"Damn, well I'll see you at lunch." I say.

"Yeah, see you then." He stands up and walks to the door with me. He opens it for me and I thank him.

I'm laying in bed, ready to go to sleep. It's so quiet without Avia now.

"You doin' okay?" Samantha breaks the silence.

"Yeah, you?" I question.

"Yeah. How was your day? Do anything fun?" She turns in her bed to face me.

Just like Avia used to...

"Not really. Other than mine and Lyvah's meet up. You?"

"Some boy was tryin' to do a backflip n' broke his arm! You shoulda seen it! It was hilarious!" She laughed, recalling the events. I smiled and closed my eyes, getting tired.

"Well, I'll see you in the morning. Goodnight." I said.

"See ya', night." She replied. Sleep consumed me shortly after.

I got out of bed, Samantha was still sleeping. I walked into the bathroom and got ready for the day. A scream caught my attention. I rushed out of the bathroom and swung the door to the hallway open.

Flames ate at the walls and carpet.

"What happened?!" I yelled. No response. I ran to Samantha, but fire was already spreading through the room. Her bedding caught on fire and I tried to put it out, but it seemed nothing worked.

"SAMANTHA!" I screamed, but she wouldn't wake up. More screams sounded through the hallway, but this time, it was a familiar scream.

"Avia?" I ran to the door and out of the room, forgetting about Samantha. I covered my mouth and nose with my arm and ran through the flames. I swung open the door to the garden. All the plants were on fire, and in the middle stood Avia.

"Avia?!" I yelled over the noises of fire and the building collapsing.

"IRIS! PLEASE! IT BURNS! SAVE ME!!" Her voice came out sounding distant. I ran out of the building and towards her, but the further I ran, the further she got.

"AVIA!" I screamed.